## Psychoanalysis, Science, and Worldviews

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**Abstract:** This paper explores one aspect of the differences between Freud and Lacan on the relationship between psychoanalysis and science. Freud thought psychoanalysis did not need a worldview of its own: it had science's. I argue that Lacan disagrees with this. Lacan also does not want psychoanalysis to become a worldview, but he in fact thinks that there is a worldview particular to science that psychoanalysis can highlight, and should avoid. I explore his indebtedness to Kovré and Gueroult's work on Descartes for his claims, in Science and Truth, that science entails a suturing of the subject and for his claim, in his eleventh seminar, that science entails an avoidance of "the abvss of castration". Insofar as philosophy today is primarily naturalist, if not scientistic, I arque in conclusion that philosophers should consider Lacan's strategy for avoiding making psychoanalysis a worldview, which I characterize in terms of developing a discourse that takes a further step forward into the subject-position and world associated with science. It is an open question, however, whether philosophy could do this, and I think this is part of what makes the philosophy/anti-philosophy debate surrounding Lacan's work so important.

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Lacan said in his eleventh seminar that psychoanalysis is not a *Weltan-schauung*.¹ (He was echoing Freud's remarks from the "New Introductory Lectures" when he said this, whose closing chapter is devoted to, and entitled, "The Question of a *Weltanschauung*". Now, Freud did not exactly deny that psychoanalysis is a *Weltanschauung* there. His view was, rather, that it did not have one of its own. In Freud's view, psychoanalysis had no other *Weltanschauung* than science's:

Psycho-analysis, in my opinion, is incapable of creating a *Weltan-schauung* of its own. It does not need one; it is a part of science and can adhere to the scientific *Weltanschauung*.<sup>2</sup>

I will argue that there is much in this passage with which Lacan actually disagrees, and exploring his remark from seminar eleven in more detail will clarify this. Considering this issue will also lead to a better appreciation of how Lacan wanted to situate psychoanalysis vis à vis science, and why he did it the way he did it. I will discuss in my conclusion how philosophy could take a lesson from Lacan's move, if philosophy too wants to

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Lacan 1978, p. 77

<sup>2</sup> Freud 1964, p. 181

My point would be easy to make if we could just substitute the word *discourse* for *Weltanschauung*. For it is certainly Lacan's view that psychoanalysis can create a discourse of its own, and he even thinks it needs to. He is nearly at this conclusion already in 1965 with the discussion in "Science and Truth" of the different status the truth as cause has in magic, religion, science...and, finally, psychoanalysis. The distinction between psychoanalysis and science is even more clear when the four discourses of the master, the university, the hysteric, and psychoanalysis are discussed in seminar seventeen (1969-1970) – provided we agree with Bruce Fink, who argues that "Lacan...identifies the discourse of science with that of hysteria." Certainly by seminar twenty, that science and psychoanalysis are distinct discourses is even more obvious, and can no longer be denied: "the analytic thing will not be mathematical. That is why the discourse of analysis differs from the scientific discourse."

Freud says psychoanalysis does not need a worldview of its own – it has science's. Lacan says psychoanalysis is not a worldview. It will be, or should be, a discourse. These are in fact two very different positions. Lacan does in fact agree with Freud about what a Weltanschauung is. But the central point on which he differs from Freud that I think has not been explored is not only about the nature of science (which I will get into only a little bit here, and is much-commented on) but on whether there is a worldview proper to science, and whether psychoanalysis aligns itself with this worldview or not. I want to say that Lacan seems to think there is one (Freud's views on this are not actually a bit complex, we'll see) and that psychoanalysis needs to avoid it – in an odd way, but one familiar to readers of Lacan: by plunging itself more deeply and thoroughly into it. Science can then even be associated with a worldview in the pejorative sense in which both he and Freud understand the term. I say this because Lacan associates science with an avoidance of "the abyss of castration" and a suturing of the subject. These are points about science that Lacan seems to think Freud did not see, and they are an important part of what leads him to develop a different path for psychoanalysis.

To be clear, I am not saying Lacan is taking a step backwards with respect to science, or even that he is engaging in a critique of the sciences. He is also not saying that the sciences should be ignored, or somehow need to be corrected by psychoanalysis. In fact, I take him to be arguing that psychoanalysis entails another step forward into the world-view associated with science, and especially, also, the subject position that accompanies it, which he thinks science neglects (and this will be the key point, we'll see). Yet, as I have already suggested, this is a step

forward that is also some sort of step aside (and we should not and need not say 'out': the topology of such a step is obviously convoluted and, let's say, very Lacanian). It is just such a move, I think, that philosophy should take regarding science as well – again, if it wants to be serious about not developing worldviews.

First, some clarity on what is meant by a worldview. Psychoanalysis does not provide a worldview of its own, Freud wrote. It adheres to science's. But just what is science's worldview? This gets complicated. Freud himself finds it to be rather minimalistic and negative – in fact, it turns out that it might have been better to say that it is not really a worldview at all. For here is how Freud understands what a worldview is:

By *Weltanschauung*, then, I mean an intellectual construction which gives a unified solution of all the problems of our existence in virtue of a comprehensive hypothesis, a construction, therefore, in which no question is left open and in which everything in which we are interested finds a place. It is easy to see that the possession of such a *Weltanschauung* is one of the ideal wishes of mankind. When one believes in such a thing, one feels secure in life, one knows what one ought to strive after, and how one ought to organize one's emotions and interests to the best purpose.<sup>5</sup>

Religions provide a *Weltanschauung*, as do philosophies, as do political movements (Freud discusses Marxism from this perspective in his chapter). But the sciences do nothing of the sort, Freud seems to think. At the end of the chapter, his conclusion is in fact that science

scarcely deserves such a grandiloquent title [as that of a worldview – EP], for it is not all-comprehensive, it is too incomplete and makes no claim to being self-contained and to the construction of systems. Scientific thought is still very young among human beings; there are too many of the great problems which it has not yet been able to solve. A *Weltanschauung* erected upon science has, apart from its emphasis on the real external world, mainly negative traits, such as submission to the truth and rejection of illusions.<sup>6</sup>

We do get from Freud here a simple, and one could even say simplistic, answer about what the scientific worldview entails: an "emphasis on the real external world," a "rejection of illusions," and a "submission to the truth". And seemingly not much else. So, even though Freud does speak

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<sup>3</sup> Fink 1995, p. 133

<sup>4</sup> Lacan 1998, p. 117

<sup>5</sup> Freud 1964, p. 158

<sup>6</sup> Freud 1964, pp. 181-182

of it having a worldview, science's worldview is not really one, since it does not do what worldviews typically do: it is mainly negative and critical. It serves to correct the delusions worldviews construct. (To paraphrase Meister Eckhart's plea to God: if it is a worldview, it is one that asks us to rid ourselves of worldviews...)

Lacan agrees with Freud about psychoanalysis not being a *Weltan-schauung* in the pejorative sense. But he does not agree with Freud's view that the way to avoid becoming one is to ally with science. Why?

According to Jean-Claude Milner the difference between Freud and Lacan on science can be thought of in the following way: Freud was a man committed to the ideal of science, his "scientism" was "nothing other than a consent to the ideal of science." This is very clear in a text like "The Question of a Weltanschauung," in which Freud without hesitation positions psychoanalysis as a natural science, and does not even seem willing to acknowledge a distinction between the natural sciences and the social sciences. And for Freud, the more psychoanalysis is like a science the less like a worldview (the truer) it is. Lacan, however, "goes his own way on the question of the ideal of science: he does not believe in it. To be exact, he doesn't believe in it for psychoanalysis."8 Instead, for Lacan, Milner argues, "psychoanalysis will find in itself the foundations of its principles and methods."9 I would disagree with Milner here only slightly: Lacan thinks that the principles and methods of psychoanalysis will be founded not simply in psychoanalysis itself, but in the subject that the sciences have created.

This is how I want to think of the distinction between Freud and Lacan on science, then: the difference is not only about whether science is an ideal for psychoanalysis, or whether psychoanalysis is a science, or what a science that would include psychoanalysis within it might be - all questions that Lacan is indeed considering in the mid-1960s, and that have been widely discussed. Milner is right that Lacan ultimately does not buy into any of this for psychoanalysis (and Lacan's journey to that position is long, arduous, and well-documented). I propose that the difference is rather about whether there is a scientific worldview, and how psychoanalysis is positioned with respect to it. Freud doesn't seem to think that there really is one: or there is, but it does not function in the way a worldview typically functions. (Because it is true.) Lacan does think science comes with a worldview, one that even functions as a worldview typically does. For Lacan psychoanalysis will not be a worldview then not, following the Freudian argument, because it is a science, or because it adopts science's worldview, but instead because it is a discourse with its own

7 Milner 2000, p. 34

8 Milner 2000, p. 35

9 *Ibid.*, p. 36

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specificity, one that approaches, or appreciates, science as a worldview. Without getting into further detail here about what it is to be a discourse, I want only to say that for Lacan an important feature of developing a discourse entails a further step into formalization and mathematization — and this is why I characterized Lacan's view of psychoanalysis earlier as a further step into, yet also aside from, the world and the subject of science. It is a radicalization of both.

But why am I saying that Lacan takes science to be a worldview? I will focus on just a few remarks he makes about science that indicate this, from seminar eleven and from *Science and Truth*.

In seminar eleven, after agreeing with Freud that psychoanalysis is not a *Weltanschauung* and that a *Weltanschauung* is essentially a delusional philosophy, Lacan shows us next how his view of the sciences is clearly different from Freud's. Recall that Lacan at the time was answering a question from Xavier Audouard regarding whether the analyst should let it be known to the analysand that he or she is being observed. Lacan denies that psychoanalysis is a worldview (how this constitutes an answer to that question, decide for yourself). And then he makes this point:

To go from perception to science is a perspective that seems to be self-evident, in so far as the subject has no better testing ground for the apprehension of being. This way is the same one that Aristotle follows, taking as his starting-point the pre-Socratics. But it is a way that analytic experience must rectify, because it avoids the abyss of castration.<sup>10</sup>

When Freud denied that psychoanalysis had a worldview of its own, he shifted into a discussion of science and what it does, and praised its critical, negative spirit – to which he wished to affiliate psychoanalysis. Lacan denies that psychoanalysis is a worldview altogether, and then goes into the conditions of science's emergence. He contests a simple, vulgar empiricist account of its origins. Koyré did this: Freud, obviously, didn't. This is our first clue as to how important Koyré is for Lacan on this topic.

But then Lacan adds a puzzling remark about castration, which is why I am saying that he portrays science as something that entails a distinct worldview. And it could be that this point is also inspired by Koyré's work. The anti-empiricism point is easy to find in Koyré. Arguing for the superiority of Descartes's method over Bacon's (announced) new science in the *Novum Organum*, Koyré wrote that

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<sup>10</sup> Lacan 1978, p. 77

Bacon's solution had an enormous success: but a purely literary one. Because this new science – active, empirical, and practical science – whose coming was announced by his books, was not one he had been able to bring about. And no one was able to bring it about after him. For the simple reason that it was impossible. Pure empiricism leads us nowhere: not even to experience. Because every experience supposes a theory that precedes it. Experience – a question posed to nature – implies the presence of a language in which the question is posed. Because it did not understand this and wanted to "follow the order of things and not the order of reasons" as Descartes said, the Baconian reform was a failure. It is because it did understand this and took the inverse direction that the Cartesian revolution, which freed reason instead of hampering it, was a success.<sup>11</sup>

This is a view that is more to Lacan's liking: science does not follow a simple route from perception to theory. It takes a detour through mathematics. But why does he bring up an avoidance of castration? As far as I can tell, Kovré says nothing of the sort, not explicitly. But a further consideration of Koyré's work on Descartes does shed some intriguing light on the subject. A short book by Koyré, Entretiens sur Descartes (1944), from which I have just quoted, seems to be very important for Lacan's thinking here. It may be one of the reasons why in 1946 Lacan wrote that a "return to Descartes" is needed; I think it also provides, along with Gueroult's work on Descartes (which I will briefly discuss in a moment) the background for why Lacan in 1965 identifies the Cartesian cogito with a "certain moment of the subject that I consider to be an essential correlate of science."12 In other words, Koyré's work on Descartes may be critical for understanding not only Lacan's anti-empiricist take on the sciences, and his association of science with mathematicity, but also for his view that science is a worldview that plays the same (delusional, symptomal) role other worldviews play: specifically, it entails an avoidance of the abyss of castration.

Bernard Burgoyne has already argued for the importance of this book to Lacan, describing it even as a "manifesto for formalization, almost a manifesto for the matheme" – and we all know how important these topics are for the Lacan of this period. We find in this book not only a succinct statement of Koyré's anti-empiricist view of the sciences, echoed in what Lacan is saying in seminar eleven – the anti-empiricist passage I quoted above. But we also find Koyré arguing, in effect, that

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there is a distinct worldview attached to modern science. And it is perhaps not too far-fetched to consider what it entails, or its effects, in terms of castration:

For ancient physics, which is based on what is immediately given to the senses, on our everyday perception of the colored and sonorous world, the world of common sense in which we live, which abstract reasonings never go beyond, and which everywhere remains necessarily connected to notions of quality and force, it [Descartes's method – EP] is in the process of substituting a physics of clear *ideas*, a mathematical physics that banishes any sensible givenness from the real world, that rids it of any "form," force, and quality, and that presents a new image (or an idea?) of the Universe; of a strictly and uniquely mechanical universe. This is an image much stranger and much less believable than everything that the philosophers had ever invented. Much stranger, and less plausible – yet certainly true.

As for the Cosmos, the Hellenic Cosmos, the Cosmos of Aristotle and the Middle Ages, this Cosmos already shaken by modern science, Copernicus, Galileo, and Kepler: Descartes destroys it entirely.

I don't know if people realize what this discovery, or more precisely these discoveries (because they form a network and all together make up what has been called: the *Cartesian Revolution*) mean for humanity's consciousness at the time. And perhaps, simply, for humanity.<sup>14</sup>

Koyré is emphasizing here not only the new worldview associated with science, but what we could call its subjective effects. And just a bit later, the effects are put more clearly in terms of lack:

This World, this Cosmos, Descartes's physics destroys it completely.

What does it put in its place? Honestly, almost nothing. Nothing but space and movement. An infinite space in which there is no longer either order, hierarchical structure, or beauty. A space full of nothing, where there are but movements: movements without rhyme or reason; movements without aims and purposes. Things no longer have a proper place: all places, in fact, are perfectly valid; and all things, moreover, are equal. Everything is just matter and movement. And the earth is no longer the center of the world. There is no center, there is no "world". The Universe is not ordered by man: it is not "ordered" at all. 15

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<sup>11</sup> Koyré 1944, pp. 41-42

<sup>12</sup> Lacan 2006, p. 727

<sup>13</sup> Burgoyne 2003, p. 79

<sup>14</sup> Koyré 1944, pp. 80-81

<sup>15</sup> Koyré 1944, pp. 83-84

Were we to stop here, it would be possible to see an affinity between what Koyré is saying and Freud's view that science is not actually a worldview. An empty, inhuman world of mere things replaces the harmonious, deep, meaningful world of antiquity. Such a (modern, scientific) perspective on the world would likely not qualify as a worldview in Freud's sense, since it is hardly reassuring. It is true, it is critical, it shatters our illusions... and it is not capable of providing the psychological reassurances that Freud thinks worldviews provide.

So, again, why does Lacan associate science with an avoidance of the abyss of castration? Why doesn't he agree with Freud? Why doesn't he align himself with the ideal of science in the way Freud did?

Kovré does not finish his story with what I have just quoted, and in what follows I believe we can find part of the reason for why Lacan does link the sciences with castration avoidance and, later, in Science and Truth, a suturing of the subject. Burgoyne finds in Koyré's book, seen as a whole, a "'phallic structure' of loss and repossession." <sup>16</sup>The book starts with a section on the strength of skeptical doubts in Descartes's time, called "The Uncertain World". Think of this as something like the threat of castration, an awareness of its possibility. It moves on to describe what Descartes's method brings about in a section called "The Lost [Disparu] Cosmos" (this is the section I have quoted from). Think of this as the threat realized. But it ends with what can be described as a reclaiming of the phallus in a section that Koyré entitled "The Universe Re-found," in which the Cartesian solution to skeptical doubts is presented. This involves, famously, the grounding of knowledge in the self-evidence of the cogito, and the equal certainty of God's existence and benevolence: what Lacan refers to in *Science and Truth* as the cogito's "anchoring in being" and later its attachment to God as the guarantor of "eternal truths". 17

It has been widely remarked that when Lacan describes the "subiect of science" what he has in mind is not this more robust version of the cogito, anchored in being, but the radicalization, or minimalization, of a particular moment of its appearance. Martial Gueroult's work is often cited as a source for Lacan's reading, in which, as Russell Grigg observes, "the certainty of the 'I am' derives purely from the act of utterance," which means also that "it is a certainty that lasts no longer than the time of the utterance."18 This is why Gueroult argued that the cogito was, at least at a certain moment of the *Meditations*, not an ontological substance but an epistemological one. The cogito,

being what subsists when one abstracts from everything else, and being that without which everything else could not subsist, that which cannot be abstracted away from...is substance according to the epistemological definition of the term; that is to say, a simple nature, absolute, primo per se, concrete, and complete.

The order of reasons thus authorizes Descartes to draw, from the second meditation on, on the basis of the thinking ego affirmed as substance, all the consequences needed in order for science to work, on the condition that he sticks to the epistemological sense of the word substance, without infringing on the ontological sense, which can only be conferred upon it later by divine veracity.19

The idea that the cogito is first, and maybe foremost, an epistemological substance is intriguing. Grigg comments further that "the cogito might even be seen as the ultimate ironic victory of skepticism by reducing the subject to a repetition of the gesture of endlessly grounding its own certainty through a reiteration of, 'I am, I exist; I am, I exist'."20

That such a reduced, minimal cogito is what Lacan has in mind by the subject of science is also affirmed by Jean-Claude Milner, who finds in the cogito, and what he calls Lacan's "radical Cartesianism," a subjective parallel to the stripped-down, bare, featureless universe described by Kovré:

physics eliminates every quality from existence, therefore a theory of the subject that wishes to respond to such a physics must also strip the subject of every quality. This subject, constituted following the characteristic determinations of science, is the subject of science...The qualitative markings of the empirical individual are not appropriate to the subject, whether they are somatic or psychic, nor are the qualitative properties of a soul. The subject is neither mortal nor immortal, neither pure nor impure, neither just nor unjust, neither sinner nor saint, neither damned nor saved. Even the properties that for a long time have been believed to constitute subjectivity as such are not appropriate: this subject has neither self, nor reflexivity, nor consciousness.

Such is precisely the existent that the *cogito* causes to emerge, if at least the order of reasons is taken seriously. At the very instant when this subject is pronounced as certain it is disjoint, by hypothesis, from every quality...<sup>21</sup>

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Burgoyne 2003, p. 79 16

<sup>17</sup> Lacan 2006, p. 727, p. 735

<sup>18</sup> Grigg 2008, p. 143

Gueroult 1953, p. 54 19

<sup>20</sup> Grigg 2008, p. 143

<sup>21</sup> Milner 2000, pp. 38-39

This is precisely how Lacan thinks of the subject of science: a subject that he already in the Weltanschauung remark from seminar eleven described as a subject that is led back to its "signifying dependence."22 Lacan's revision of the cogito highlights its domination by signifiers, and its dependence on a signifying repetition: in "I am thinking: 'therefore I am,' with guotes around the second clause, it is legible that thought only grounds being by knotting itself in speech."23 A subject without qualities, one that is knotted up in signifiers, one that consists only in a "signifying dependence": this is the subject of science, which is also the subject of psychoanalysis. That it is a de-substantialized subject will turn out to be an important point in a moment.

If this subject is an "essential correlate of science" - if it is a "modification that has occurred in our subject position, in the sense that it is inaugural therein and that science continues to strengthen...ever further" - then why does Lacan see what he later calls a suturing of this subject as also essential to science's practice, to and its success?<sup>24</sup> Why does he claim in Science and Truth that science "forgets the circuitous path by which it [science] came into being," and that "it forgets a dimension of truth that psychoanalysis seriously puts to work"?<sup>25</sup>This is one of the deeper obscurities in Lacan's Science and Truth - that this subject is an "antinomic correlate" of science "since science turns out to be defined by the deadlocked endeavor to suture" it.26 Lacan later in Science and Truth writes of this as a foreclosure, and suggests that because of it science could be considered a "successful paranoia."27

Lacan makes these claims because he seems to think that science necessarily takes the ontologizing step that Descartes took, beyond the positing of the cogito as an epistemological substance only. In other words, the mistake is to go from pure logic or epistemology, to ontology. This would explain why Lacan spends so much time on anthropology and psychology in Science and Truth: two human sciences that are dealing with the subject in the wrong way, ones that have, as he puts it, relapsed into "incarnating the subject." 28 The problem is not that the sciences treat the (allegedly mental) subject as a (physical) thing, either of which would qualify as some sort of "incarnation" of the subject. Rather, the problem is that both approaches do not deal with the subject of signifiers at all,

Lacan 1978, p. 77 22 23 Lacan 2006, p. 734 24 Lacan 2006, p. 727, p. 726 25 Ibid., p. 738 26 *Ibid.*, p. 731 27 Ibid., p. 742 28 Ibid., p. 729 336

which Lacan thinks requires either a logic or a topology – and *not* an ontology. Hence his hesitation, in seminar eleven, regarding ontology altogether, and his claim that the unconscious "does not lend itself to ontology"...Lacan even calls it *pre-ontological*.<sup>29</sup> Could it be as simple as this? Science, which studies beings, in some form or another, must exclude from its domain the subject of the unconscious, the subject of psychoanalysis, which is a non-being... And when it does deal with the subject. in the human sciences, it is doing so from an erroneous point of view, in the manner of a worldview that is getting the real wrong. What does this mean for philosophy and science?

The way that Freud and Lacan think of philosophy – as providing a worldview in the pejorative sense – is not how most practicing philosophers would currently describe what they are doing. The prevailing view among philosophers is some variety of naturalism, if not scientism. Insofar as they are aligned with the sciences, philosophers do not think they are providing worldviews anymore, although there are some voices that emerge now and then saying that they should. Indeed, philosophers seem to be very Freudian on this point: philosophy is not in need of a worldview of its own, its worldview is science's, and insofar as that is the case philosophy too is engaged in the project of enlightenment, shattering illusions, etc. The question Lacan poses to us is whether it is sufficient to align with the sciences in order to avoid being, or developing, a worldview. His conclusion was that a further step into the world and the subject that both brought about the sciences, and that the sciences reinforce, was needed - a step that would be able to highlight the specific subject associated with the scientific worldview. Lacan's position is guite bold and radical. He's saying that psychoanalysis is a new thing under the sun. It is not sorcery, not a religion, and...not a science. But not a philosophy either. It is a discourse, in important respects parasitic upon the sciences, and for this reason it more successfully than any of its discursive predecessors manages to avoid being a worldview: provided it is careful about the distinctness of its position. Can philosophy avoid developing worldviews? To the extent that it is committed to sense, and being, can it ever stop doing so? Can a psychoanalytic (Lacanian) philosophy manage this? I think this is an open question, and it is one way of seeing what is so important about the philosophy/antiphilosophy debate surrounding Lacan's work.

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<sup>29</sup> Lacan 1978, p. 29

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