

## Fetishism and Bad Faith: A Freudian Rebuttal to Sartre

Christopher M. Gemerchak  
Katholieke Universiteit Leuven

*Jean-Paul Sartre, in Being and Nothingness, develops the concept of “bad faith” in order to account for the paradoxical fact that knowledge can be ignorant of itself, and thus that a self-conscious subject can deceive itself while being aware of its own deception. Sartre claims that Freudian psychoanalysis would account for self-deception by positing an unconsciousness that guides consciousness without consciousness being aware of it. Therefore, Freudian psychoanalysis is an insufficient model with which to address bad faith. I disagree. There is a specific psychic mechanism in Freud that answers Sartre’s criteria for bad faith, and it is called “disavowal” (Verleugnung). Disavowal is the mechanism responsible for fetishism. And thus, fetishism is the Freudian account of bad faith.*

At the end of a long day of healing, two shamans meet in a café for a drink. Upon greeting one another, the proper response would be for them to burst out laughing, as they are both well aware of the incongruity between what they do, what this leads people to think they are, and what they know themselves to be. They are men of “bad faith.” In this case, what they do is deceive people by playing on their beliefs and expectations; what they are is anything but the bearers of intrinsic healing powers, although they act the part quite effectively. But suppose that shaman 1, rubbing his temples, says to shaman 2, “I’ve got a crushing headache.” Shaman 2, dipping his slender fingers into his leather pouch, a faint smile in his eyes, replies, “I’ve got just the thing,” and pulls out a sachet of yellow powder that he proceeds to empty into the first shaman’s drink. “That’ll do ya.” Immediately, almost imperceptibly, the headache starts to fade. Shaman 1 is relieved, and not unimpressed: “What *is* that stuff?” With these words, he has, in effect, been caught in his own trap. He knows, and knows quite consciously in fact, that the other shaman’s powder is an ineffectual concoction not unlike the one that he himself uses to treat haemorrhoids or to calm the grieving mother who has lost her son, but in his current state of vulnerability at the hands of the headache, a trauma of sorts, he has negated his knowledge. He is in bad faith.

One may object: this situation does not pertain to bad faith, but is rather a matter of dissemblance, and as such is akin to the lie of a cynical consciousness, as it involves a duality between the deceiver and the deceived.

The liar (shaman 2) knows full well the truth of the situation, and knows that he is lying when he dispenses the powder as a cure for headaches, but the person to whom the lying is done (shaman 1) cannot access the consciousness of the liar, and so may be led astray as to the truth. Bad faith, on the other hand, is a matter for a single, unitary consciousness capable of lying to itself, of “hiding a displeasing truth or presenting as truth a pleasing untruth,”<sup>1</sup> despite knowing the truth. That is to say, knowing consciousness, acting in full awareness that its actions are deceptive, nevertheless comes to believe in its own deception. It is as if the unitary consciousness has somehow split itself in two with respect to what it knows. And this is the core of Sartre’s problem of bad faith: how can one know something, while at the same time not know it, and then proceed to have one’s actions guided on the basis of this knowing non-knowledge? “How can we conceive of a knowledge which is ignorant of itself?” (Sartre, 93). In short, what lies at the basis of the art of self-deception?

One influential model for approaching self-deception, deception carried out by a singular subject on itself, is, of course, the Freudian model. Sartre wastes no time in addressing Freud’s approach, only to discard it just as quickly. I will start by identifying the relevant principles in Sartre’s system which will lead him to his confrontation with Freud. I will then present Sartre’s reading of Freud and his reasons for rejecting it. Briefly summarized, the primary sticking-point for Sartre with respect to Freud concerns the dynamic of repression as carried out by the “censor”: if some content which threatens to traumatize the conscious ego is censored from consciousness as a means of protection, then there must be consciousness of that which is censored, consciousness of the repressed, and hence, no unconscious. Sartre claims that conscious knowledge of the repressed is nowhere to be found in Freud, but this is simply incorrect. Freud—and this is my next issue—explicitly addresses the phenomenon in question, and does so with the notion of “negation” (*Verneinung*).

Now, while this simple oversight on the part of Sartre may be true, it is not particularly interesting. More interesting is a further, much more profound oversight, one which will point to the fact that Freud indeed developed a model that accurately answers to Sartre’s notion of bad faith, and did so within the criteria stipulated by Sartre. It is called “disavowal” (*Verleugnung*). But disavowal, in fact, is the psychic anomaly that underpins Freud’s mature conception of fetishism, an anomaly which henceforth served as a model for analysing structures as diverse as Marxist commodity fetishism, the Lacanian

*objet a*, and primitive belief. The concept of disavowal, serving as Freud's rebuttal to Sartre, may not only offer further insight into the genesis of bad faith, but may as well serve as a way to see Sartre's universal possibility of bad faith as an extension of the most ancient artful deceptions of subjectivity as it seeks to dodge reality, and ultimately itself, in fetishism.

### 1. *The Conditions of Bad Faith*

Sartre believes "bad faith" to be an attitude "essential to human reality" (Sartre, 87). Formally defined, it is an attitude in which "consciousness instead of directing its negation outward turns it toward itself" (Sartre, 87). Stated in this manner, bad faith cannot fail to be "essential" provided one accepts the fundamental principle that conscious being does not fall together with its being (In-itself), that *Dasein* (the For-itself) is the being for whom its being is an issue, that reflects on itself in the present as it moves toward its future. It is an essential possibility as long there is no natural, social, or teleological determination to existence, although it would be comforting to believe so.<sup>2</sup> The only determination to existence is consciousness itself. But what is consciousness? Let us first back up before moving forward.

In Sartre's terms, there is nothingness within being, an internal negation that opens up a space within the plenitude of being, allowing it to appear. This nothingness is consciousness. Now, the principle from which he starts is that "all consciousness, as Husserl has shown, is consciousness *of something*" (Sartre, 11). Consciousness is knowledge of its object, the condition of which is that consciousness knows itself to be knowledge of its object, and this object is ultimately consciousness itself. Failing this condition, consciousness would be consciousness of its object without knowing it. "In other words, it would be a consciousness ignorant of itself, an unconscious, which is absurd," (Sartre, 11). A duality of consciousness is immediately ruled out. Rather than a dual consciousness, there is instead immediate, "non-reflective," or "non-thetic" consciousness, and reflective consciousness which reveals to consciousness its own immediate activity. Reflective consciousness is not added on to non-reflective consciousness; it is not consciousness *of* consciousness, but is rather "one with the consciousness of which it is conscious" (Sartre, 14). Consciousness is the consciousness of immediate being, and this consciousness is the being of consciousness. The circle is closed. Consciousness is absolute in its total transparency.

The problem, of course, is what consciousness actually finds when it reflects upon itself as conscious existence. For the being of consciousness is,

as just mentioned, nothingness. It is simply how it appears to itself, how it reveals itself to itself. And this is, in short, as non-being, the realization of which is, to say the least, disconcerting. Conscious being, while not being simply nothing, is nevertheless indeterminate existence. Determination must be added through the action of negation. This is how consciousness produces itself, essentially out of nothing. It exists through negation of the given, yet there is no internal necessity guiding this negation. Thus, every negation is equally viable, and equally unjustifiable. There is nothing for the subject to fall back upon in order to give shape to its existence, save for the fact that it is existing, that it is *my* existence toward which I am existing. Conscious *Dasein* is an outstanding issue, always in need of determination. The fact that one gives determination to existence by a process of continual negation implies that one never *is* at any particular moment, that one only *is* through negation of the present toward the future, where one hopes one will eventually catch up to oneself and finally *be*. Quite simply, this longing *to be*, to escape the anxious uncertainty of existing in a state of perpetual impermanence, and to escape it now rather than later, is the longing that precipitates bad faith.

Bad faith, let us say, is the attitude taken by a subject that straddles the gap between knowledge and desire. The subject is desire—pure negating-negativity, pure lack—that searches for being in the objects of desire, so as to fall together with itself. It is desire seeking to bring the dialectic of desire to a standstill. Yet, as Sartre posits, the subject knows full well that it is desire, ecstasis without respite. It therefore knows that, barring death, it can never coincide with itself. Bad faith steps in to try to resolve, or better, to deny this crisis by either attempting to avoid being the prey of its own desires, or, when necessary, to assert that it desires beyond every determination thereof. This is done either by fixating on a factual determination of itself, an alienating image which it can then use as a standpoint by which to judge that which it will accept and that which it will reject, or by affirming its transcendence of all factual determination. This is what *I am*, and so this is what I will and will not recognize as fitting into the schema I have created for myself: I am a respectable heterosexual gentleman, and so I do not desire to know how a penis feels in my mouth; I am a liberal democrat, and so I do not think the poor are lazy. This is what *I am not*: I am university educated, so I am much more than this waiter that others perceive me to be. While these examples are divergent, they converge as means of escape. It is the first of these options, the arbitrary creation of a prescriptive and

proscriptive identity, which will be our focus.

The structure operating here derives from “the double property of the human being, who is at once a *facticity* and a *transcendence*” (Sartre, 98). This allows for the fact that I am what I am not (transcendence), and I am not what I am (facticity). Now, as Sartre claims, “these two aspects of human reality are and ought to be capable of a valid coordination” (Sartre, 98). That is, one’s choices when facing the world are consistently organized such that one can recognize oneself as a good liberal democrat, and yet because this definition does not subsume and solidify one’s existence, one should be able to entertain contradictory thoughts without great disturbance to one’s beliefs about oneself. One’s liberal beliefs in no way preclude incompatible thoughts, and in fact such thoughts may assist in the refinement of one’s beliefs and commitments in the ongoing process of one’s being-in-the-world. Similarly, the recognition of the desire to sexually engage a person of the same sex need not be disastrous for my heterosexuality, though it may be potentially threatening, particularly insofar as the consciousness of the free negativity of consciousness implies recognition that there is nothing in my past or present that determines that one will not pursue this desire. Nevertheless, while the idea may be part of one’s consciousness, one’s existence transcends this idea because one has the freedom not to act upon it. This may be an evasion of sorts, but it is not necessarily bad faith.

Bad faith, rather, is “a certain art of forming contradictory concepts which unite in themselves both an idea and the negation of that idea” (Sartre, 98). Bad faith is artifice. Now, having said this, while it may be the case that the “double property of the human being” engenders a movement of “perpetual disintegration . . . so that we may slide at any moment from naturalistic present to transcendence and *vice versa*” (Sartre, 99), at one moment exercising our freedom, at another taking refuge from it, the artifice that concerns us here is the condensation of transcendence into a form of facticity that conceals the very transcendence that produced it. Thus, “the ambiguity necessary for bad faith comes from the fact that I affirm here that I *am* my transcendence in the mode of being a thing” (Sartre, 99). Bad faith, in this sense, is “arrested” transcendence, the perpetual movement of desire brought to a halt by treating one’s own ego as an object, as if it were a terminal point rather than an emptiness subject to nihilation.<sup>3</sup> It is the subject treating itself as if it were a thing, yet knowing it is not. Bad faith thus resembles the lie.

## 2. *The Problem with Freud*

Our approach to Sartre's confrontation with Freud begins with the lie. The structure of the lie is quite straightforward. "The essence of the lie implies in fact that the liar actually is in complete possession of the truth which he is hiding" (Sartre, 87), which he is hiding, that is, from another person. One does not lie if one is ignorant of the truth. The lie presupposes full awareness. In which case, "the ideal description of the liar would be a cynical consciousness, affirming truth within himself [I do not love her], denying it in his words ["I love you"], and denying that negation as such ["Of course I love you, how could you think I didn't?"] (Sartre, 87). The lie thus hides the liar's intentions from the deceived. And while it may be the case, particularly in a situation as ambiguous as love, that the liar in turn comes to persuade himself of his lie ["perhaps I really do love her after all"], nevertheless "the liar must make a project of the lie in entire clarity and that he must possess a complete comprehension of the lie and of the truth which he is altering," (Sartre, 88). Furthermore, because of the "ontological duality" (Sartre, 89) between inner consciousness and the manner in which this consciousness appears externally, for others, the deceived can never have certainty of the liar's intentions. This is not the case with bad faith. While it effectively repeats the structure of the lie, it does so despite the collapse of the dualism that made the lie possible.

The resulting paradox is a situation in which a unitary, translucent consciousness endeavours to hide its intentions from itself, to consciously deceive itself: "I must know in my capacity as deceiver the truth which is hidden from me in my capacity as the one deceived. Better yet I must know the truth very exactly *in order* to conceal it more carefully. . ." (Sartre, 89, author's emphasis). The best way to defeat one's adversary is to know him through-and-through. If one knows what is coming, one knows how to defend against it. Yet, as Sartre points out, it is difficult, if not impossible, to consistently maintain the deception. Ultimately, the lie fails owing to self-reflection; it "collapses beneath my gaze." At any moment, consciousness may effectively sneak up behind itself, behind its immersion in its own deception, and see the lie for what it is, because one is always capable of accessing the truth. There is thus a type of good faith with regard to one's own bad faith, insofar as one must know the truth to be able to lie.

Sartre admits that self-reflection is a serious conundrum. There is an oscillation between bad faith and good faith or cynicism, a sort of awakening from immersion in the illusion which effectively takes the wind out of the

sails of one's involvement in the world. To picture this dynamic, think of the *It's a Wonderful Life* scenario, in which James Stewart (George Bailey), once withdrawn from immersion in his life, can watch all of his actions and mistakes unfold in the perfectly clear light of consciousness. Now, in this case, George can, in retrospect, look at his actions and claim, in good faith, "I was a good person, I made a difference." It would, however, be a case of bad faith if George, during the course of his life, would say to himself, "I am a good person, I am making a difference," because he has then passed from action to reflection, turning his pre-reflective ego into an object of consciousness. Once he thinks that he *is* "good," he must then establish a set of restrictive guidelines for his behaviour so that he remains good. But this is, of course, a tacit admission that he *is* not good, as well as a recognition that he will have to renounce his freedom to pursue other impulses on the grounds of non-conformity to his self-image.<sup>4</sup>

When living in bad faith, however, the situation is much more acute. When living in bad faith, which "can even be the normal aspect of life for a very great number of people" (Sartre, 90), one denies the very existence of possibilities that may threaten one's faith and thus deceives oneself. But to deny them because they are threatening implies that *one takes cognizance of them, but refuses to accept them*. Herein lies the root of the problem: to the extent that one lives and acts in bad faith, one lives and acts as if one does not know that one is deceiving oneself. One lives and acts as if one did not know the reasons why one is doing what one is doing, as if the duality of deceiver and deceived has been re-established in a single consciousness. The problem is how to account for this schism, or rather, as Sartre says, how to "escape these difficulties" (Sartre, 90).

To "escape" the paradoxes of bad faith is the business of psychoanalysis. The escape occurs by recourse to the theory of the unconscious ("an absurdity," as we heard) which effectively divides the subject into an internal truth and an external lie. More precisely, it posits an inaccessible reservoir of truth and the deceptive manner in which this truth is manifest to consciousness. Since the disguised appearances of the unconscious are perceived by the conscious subject as being real, the subject is deceived as to its own truth. Now, Sartre calls the agent provoking the unconscious to present itself in disguise the "censor," which seeks to prevent the unconscious from surfacing. The censor is internal to the subject, yet effectively stands like a border guard between the conscious subject and its own truth. It has access to the truth, but prohibits it from crossing over into knowledge. To evade the

guard, the truth must condense itself into a symbolic, encoded disguise, much like a hieroglyph. But like a hieroglyph, with the proper insight and by “reattach[ing] them to the historical situation of the patient [or of the civilization, C.G.]” (Sartre, 90), the truth disguised in the symbols may ultimately be translated. In psychoanalysis, however, this is only possible with the assistance of the analyst, the Other, who guides the conscious subject back to his own truth. And this, as we will see, is quite problematic.

In short, Sartre presents the Freudian scenario as follows: “the subject deceives himself about the *meaning* of his conduct; he apprehends it in its concrete existence but not in its *truth*, simply because he cannot derive it from an original situation and from a psychic constitution which remain alien to him” (Sartre, 91). The dualism between the ego and the id establishes a double alienation: the subject is alienated from its internal psychic constitution, and consequently its concrete existence derived from this internal psyche is experienced in an alien form. No access to the former means deception regarding the latter. Yet, as I just mentioned, this deception may be alleviated with the help of the analyst, which presents an awkward solution. Indeed, Sartre’s first contention against the psychoanalytic solution rests on the implausibility that the Other could have better access to the truth than the subject himself, and correlatively that I, the ego, “hold no privileged position” with respect to the id. He is incredulous that the theory of psychoanalysis implies that access to *my* id relies on the mediation of another. For this means that to access *one’s own* id, one has to occupy the position of the *Other*, and hence one is in a position to lie to oneself.

But the result is not, in fact, lying to oneself, for the lie presupposes the conscious intention to lie, whereas the subject does not control his unconscious intentions. “Thus,” as Sartre concludes:

psychoanalysis substitutes for the notion of bad faith, the idea of a lie without a liar; it allows me to understand how it is possible for me to be lied to without lying to myself since it places me in the same relation to myself that the Other is in respect to me; it replaces the duality of the deceiver and the deceived, the essential condition of the lie, with that of the “id” and the “ego.” It introduces into my subjectivity the deepest intersubjective structure of the *mit-sein*. Can this explanation satisfy us? (Sartre, 92).



It should be obvious that Sartre is not satisfied by this explanation, because he apparently does accept the ontological divide between conscious and unconscious. But this is not really an accurate representation of Sartre's position. Rather, Sartre's next step is to show that if there is an unconscious, it does not exist as some unapproachable, silent kernel entirely split off from consciousness. For this to be the case, one would have to suppose that the work of repression creates an inert sphere of unassailable non-knowledge, but evidence reveals the contrary. There is no internal Other, and the evidence Sartre relies upon to disabuse psychoanalysis of this assumption is the fact of resistance. In brief, resistance to the surfacing of an unconscious truth implies some cognizance of that which is resisted and repressed. Thus, there can be no absolute divide between the repressed unconscious and consciousness. We will return to this issue at length in what follows, but for the moment let us pause to ask if it is in any way an accurate representation of Freud to posit absolute conscious ignorance of the repressed.

Freud in fact provides a number of opportunities to reject this reading, though for the moment I will focus on only two: one derives from his second theory of fetishism, the other approximates this theory in metapsychological principles. One early sign of the wavering status of repression is found in a short paper delivered to the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society in 1909, "On the Genesis of Fetishism,"<sup>5</sup> where he introduces the concept of "partial repression." First of all, I note that Freud has entirely changed his idea regarding the origin of fetishism as described in his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905).<sup>6</sup> Here, in brief, he assumes from Binet the explanation that fetishism is a phenomenon acquired in early childhood through a coincidental association of a circumstantial factor with a sexual excitation. This coincidence creates a lasting impression and is later, in adult life, activated by means of "reminiscence," though without any awareness of the link between the early excitation and the new object toward which the subject is unconsciously guided by the coincidence. Now, in 1909, he claims that "fetishism does not derive from a reminiscence, but . . . a repression of instinct [has] occurred."<sup>7</sup> This is no ordinary repression. Rather, it is "a type of repression which is instituted by the splitting of the [instinctual representational] complex. A portion is genuinely repressed, while the other portion is idealized . . . [and] raised to a fetish."<sup>8</sup> Two examples from a case of perversion are used to illustrate this schema.

The first details the creation of clothes fetishism. As a child, the patient regularly witnessed his mother undressing, and subsequently became

a voyeur. He was stimulated by watching women undress, the goal being to see the naked body, and the last gesture prior to the ultimate revelation, the removal of the pants, became the most significant. At issue, as Freud clarifies, is the drive (desire) to look—scopophilia. Owing to a prohibition, this desire is repressed, but what transpires next is quite strange: that which formerly *prevented* him from the naked truth, namely, clothing, is now “worship[ped].”<sup>9</sup> Freud concludes, “*He becomes a clothes fetishist out of the repression of the desire to look.*”<sup>10</sup> We should at least provisionally be able to detect a trace of bad faith in this scenario. That which hides the subject’s real desire becomes fixated as an object of consciousness, effectively stopping the freedom of desire from passing beyond the clothes to access his real aim. This is only a provisional approximation to bad faith, however, for repression and non-knowledge play a role here that does not apply to bad faith. Let us move to the second example.

The patient’s perversion has now changed from clothes fetishism to boot fetishism. In this case as well the schema involves a primitive satisfaction and its repression, but the pleasure comes from (unsavoury) smells—coprophilia. The source of this smell is here the foot.<sup>11</sup> The representational complex is the smell and the foot. This complex, adhering to one and the same object (the foot), is then split apart or subjected to partial repression: “the pleasure from odours is suppressed, while the odourless foot is idealized. In the ideal, odour is no longer an issue.”<sup>12</sup> Freud continues: “Here we find again a lost instinctual pleasure, but here the *direct object* [the foot] of its complex is separated from the instinct and rises to a fetish. This is, in essence, the novelty.”<sup>13</sup> The foot has been devalued (stripped of its significant qualities—its odour) and revalued (‘rises to a fetish’). The very attribute that made the foot valuable as a source of pleasure has been lost. The aim of the drive is subjected to repression, yet finds another path for satisfaction by transforming the aim into a reified form, the foot, which will pass along the chain of signification and be exchanged for another form, the boot.

But if the original pleasure has been lost, how then to account for the fixation of the subject on the fetish, which should in fact be recognized as a profound alienation from the subject’s real desire? Is it not plausible to posit either: (a) this desire is actually recognized, recognized as threatening to the ego, and thus the fetish serves as a form of protection against an unacceptable desire, or; (b) the fetish is fixated upon precisely in order to halt the freedom of desire, in order, that is, to provide the subject a sense of certainty and to keep the groundless nature of desire at a distance? Freud does not, at this

early stage, entertain either of these options. In this account of fetishism, there is no evidence that the repression has actually been lifted, or that the subject can recognize its fetish as an objective disguise of something of which it is actually conscious but chooses to veil in order to beg the question of desiring anything other than the fetish. The unconscious here is simply too far away from consciousness for consciousness to access it.

A further break in the repressed status of the repressed is found, however, in Freud's article from 1925, "Negation." This essay begins with the observation that if one wishes to discover the truth behind a particularly vehement denial of an idea, one should simply take the opposite of the denial as the truth. Freud's initial example is of a patient who claims, "You ask who this person in the dream can be. It's *not* my mother," to which Freud responds, "So it *is* his mother." Freud's interpretation of this rather amusing and none-too-convincing speculation, however, is significant, and it goes as follows: "Thus, the content of a repressed image or idea can make its way into consciousness, on condition that it is *negated*. Negation is a way of *taking cognizance of what is repressed*; indeed *it is already a lifting of the repression, though not of course, an acceptance of what is repressed.*"<sup>14</sup> Here we find clearly stated that the ego does in fact know the unconscious content of that which is repressed, which means that the "ideational content" of the repressed is no longer blocked from entering consciousness. Indeed, Freud claims that it is even possible to remove the negation, thereby "bringing about a full intellectual acceptance of the repressed." "But," he hastens to add, without explaining what he means, "the repressive process itself is not yet removed by this."<sup>15</sup>

He does not, therefore, take the final step that would make the activity of repression conscious of itself. Rather, a conscious judgment is made to the effect that one might say, "This is something which I would prefer to repress," because it does not conform to the ego which one has synthesized from out of the flood of available perceptions. Is this not bad faith? Not exactly, but the line separating Freud and Sartre is indeed growing thin. This line becomes narrower still when Freud, only two years after his explanation of the process of negation, re-examines a phenomenon barely distinguishable from negation, yet with a significant difference. It is the concept of disavowal.<sup>16</sup>

### 3. *Disavowal: Freudian Bad Faith?*

To make our final approach to the confrontation between Sartre and Freud, let us focus once again on the phenomena of resistance and the censor. Describing the Freudian psychoanalytic situation, Sartre notes that when a disturbing truth is close to surfacing, the analyst encounters objective resistance on the part of the patient: “The patient shows defiance, refuses to speak, gives fantastic accounts of his dreams, sometimes even removes himself from the psychoanalytic treatment” (Sartre, 92). Or, as we have just seen, resistance may come in the form of negation: “recognition of the unconscious on the part of the ego is expressed in a negative formula. There is no stronger evidence that we have been successful in our effort to uncover the unconscious than when the patient reacts to it with the words, ‘I didn’t think that’ . . .”<sup>17</sup> Sartre’s question is the following: what part of the subject is putting up the resistance? Sartre, contrary to Freud, discounts the ego immediately. As he argues, the ego is the subject who entered the analysis in the first place, who is confused as to the meaning of its symptoms and is like the analyst in trying to decipher them, and who makes judgments regarding the plausibility of the reasons for the symptoms. If the analyst’s revelations are disconcerting to the patient, would the patient, in bad faith, both resist the analysis and yet pretend to participate? If so, then we need not posit the unconscious as the source of bad faith. That may be so, but this form of reasoning does not move us any further than Freud’s negation, and still does not answer the question of what it is in the subject that resists the emergence of the truth. The answer, according to Sartre, is the censor.

Now the censor, as stated above, stands between the truth of the unconscious complex and its manifestation. The unconscious complex, in fact, “aims at expressing itself in clear consciousness, since it plays tricks on the censor and seeks to elude it” (Sartre, 93). Sartre’s whole argument then amounts to the following: if the truth must elude the censor in order to become conscious, and the censor strives to resist or repress the revelation of the truth in order to protect the subject against it, then this can only occur because the censor *knows* precisely what it is repressing. Again, if this is the core of the argument, then we are no further than negation. Yet Sartre continues:

The censor, in order to apply its activity with discernment, must know what it is repressing . . . the censor must choose and in order to choose must be aware of so doing . . . And how are we to explain

that it can relax its surveillance, that it can even be deceived by the disguises of the instinct? But it is not sufficient that it discern the condemned drives; it must also apprehend them *as to be repressed*, which implies in it at the very least an awareness of its activity. In a word, how could the censor discern the impulses needing to be repressed without being conscious of discerning them? How can we conceive of a knowledge which is ignorant of itself? (Sartre, 93, author's emphasis).

We will grant that Sartre, although very slightly, has moved a step further than Freudian negation, primarily on the grounds that Freud insists on the impulses remaining repressed despite the possibility for an intellectual judgment regarding their acceptability to the conscious system. He thus has not overcome the problem of the ontological dualism of consciousness and the unconscious, maintaining them as the irreconcilable poles of a divided subject. Therefore, he has only evaded the problem of bad faith rather than answering for its possibility.

Sartre's next question: How do we define the self-consciousness of the censor? "It must be the consciousness (of) being conscious of the drive to be repressed. What does this mean if not that the censor is in bad faith?" (Sartre, 94). His conclusion: "Psychoanalysis has not gained anything for us" since, essentially, it fails to address the possibility of a "double activity" within a unitary psychic system, a double activity that allows it to simultaneously "maintain and locate the thing to be concealed and on the other hand to repress and disguise it" (Sartre, 94). Without finding a conscious unity of this double process in which the thing to be concealed is both maintained and disguised, there can be no way to connect these various phases. Sartre therefore concludes that Freud can only account for the process by having recourse to "magic."

"By rejecting the conscious unity of the psyche," Sartre claims, "Freud is obliged to imply everywhere a magic unity linking distinct phenomena across obstacles" (Sartre, 94-5). Thus, the unconscious is magically repressed, and consciousness cannot apprehend the symbolic meaning of conscious phenomena. The Freudian account does no more than "reify" bad faith, insofar as there is no way to bring to consciousness the self-deception that results from the unconscious control of conscious activity. Nevertheless, consciousness somehow strives to prevent its motivating principle from entering consciousness. But this is not the end of the story. The examples

Sartre turns to in order to illustrate Freud's shortcomings will lead us to a quite unexpected opportunity for a Freudian rebuttal, despite the fact that Freud does not explicitly relinquish his psychic dualism.

Sartre begins his counterproposal to Freudian-style psychoanalysis by referring to a different psychoanalytic reading which he believes is able to account for bad faith. He cites Wilhelm Stekel's *La femme frigide*<sup>18</sup>, where Stekel claims, "Every time that I have been able to carry my investigations far enough, I have established that the crux of the psychosis was conscious." Furthermore, Stekel describes cases of women who have become frigid as a result of marital infidelity. "That is," as Sartre explains, "they succeed in hiding from themselves not complexes deeply sunk in half physiological darkness, but acts of conduct which are objectively discoverable. . ." (Sartre, 95). Sartre then makes the definitive claim that we will have to refute with Freudian evidence. The cases that Stekel reports, he says, "bear witness to a pathological bad faith which the Freudian doctrine cannot account for" (Sartre, 95). In these cases, reference to the unconscious is not required, for the bad faith in question not only implies recognition of that which it is denying, it even needs the recognition "*in order to deny it*" (Sartre, 96, author's emphasis). Will we find something of this nature in Freud?

As stated at the outset, I believe there is in fact a type of pathology in the Freudian literature that speaks specifically to Sartre's requirements for bad faith, and it is fetishism. As explained in his 1927 article "Fetishism," Freud now believes that fetishism is driven by an aetiology that he expects to be the solution to every case of its kind—it denies castration. Consequently, the fetish does not derive from an ancient, 'deeply sunk' reminiscence or from a repressed instinct, but is a substitute for the "particular and quite special" maternal penis. His theory concerns the little boy who, in early childhood, narcissistically believes that women (his mother or sister in particular) have a penis like he does. This belief is one that he does not wish to relinquish, for the obvious reason that if she has lost hers, he could lose his. The fetish, in short, is "designed to preserve [his mother's penis] from extinction."<sup>19</sup> One cannot fail to be struck by how curious this formulation is, insofar as it posits that the boy attempts to preserve something that *is not there* from being lost. To clarify this anomaly, we must recognize that something else is at issue, namely, the boy's *belief* in this prized object and his narcissistic *expectation* that everyone has a penis like he does. The problem, however, occurs when his belief is confronted with the reality that his mother, in fact, does not have what he expects, causing *anxiety* at the prospect of losing his. How does the budding fetishist deal with this problem?

Freud's first suggestion is precisely what Sartre would expect him to say, namely, that "the boy refused to take cognizance of the fact of his having perceived that a woman does not possess a penis."<sup>20</sup> Freud entertains the possibility that he has "scotomized" the perception, effectively erasing it. But he quickly sees that this term is not applicable here. Perhaps then, in a sort of narcissistic rebellion, the boy has repressed what he has seen and banished the perception to the unconscious. Neither does Freud agree to this suggestion. At issue, he says, is disavowal, a *simultaneous acknowledgement and denial* which Freud distinguishes from repression. Thus, shortly after having raised the possibility that the boy represses, or 'refuses to take cognizance' of reality, he dismisses it in favour of a new solution:

In the situation we are considering, on the contrary, we see that the perception has persisted, and that a very energetic action has been undertaken to maintain the disavowal. It is not true that, after the child has made his observation of the woman, he has preserved unaltered his belief that women have a phallus. He has retained that belief, but he has also given it up.<sup>21</sup>

The first movement of disavowal is avowal. There is no disavowal without prior knowledge, and so it is clear that one cannot claim the child retains his belief out of ignorance. We cannot say that *he does not know* that the woman does not have a penis, but rather, because reality does not conform to what he hopes and expects it will be, he simply prefers it otherwise. He chooses, in effect, not to know what he knows. He is in bad faith. The fetish is the crystallization of bad faith—it 'unites in itself both an idea [the mother has a phallus] and the negation of that idea [she has no phallus/she has been castrated],' (*cf.* Sartre, 98, modified). The fetish 'maintains and locates the thing to be concealed [the lack of the phallus], and on the other hand represses and disguises it [by creating a fetish],' (*cf.* Sartre, 94, modified). The boy creates the fetish as an attempt to both retain his belief in the existence of the maternal phallus and to reassure himself that she does not have one by disguising her lack.

Having said this, and by way of clarification, my proposal is that here, in the phenomenon of fetishism as emerging from disavowal, we find fulfilled Sartre's criteria for bad faith, for the subject is conscious of the reality which is disavowed, and upon reflection, may become conscious of having disavowed it, for the experience that he is disavowing is not only

*consciously* registered, it never erased. The dissociation here is *not* between the unconscious abyss and the conscious ego. Rather, as Freud will come to state quite clearly, there occurs a *splitting of the conscious ego itself*, its simultaneous maintenance of contradictory, conscious ideas.<sup>22</sup> Now, Freud does throw up a significant barrier to this reading, but when viewed in the correct light, I believe it will dispel the notion that disavowal is a matter of unconscious processes.

The problem emerges when Freud claims that a compromise between belief and disbelief occurs once the “unwelcome perception,” or knowledge of the missing phallus, confronts the boy’s “counter-wish” or desire that it is still there. This compromise, as he claims, “is only possible under the dominance of the unconscious laws of thought—the primary processes.”<sup>23</sup> I believe it may be contended that Freud, because of his adherence to his own laws, misrecognizes what he is in fact making evident. It is, in fact, only the initial belief or desire that may said to be unconscious. However, once this is played out in reality and enters the mechanism of disavowal, there is no necessity to posit that the initial desire remains unconscious. Desire and the knowledge that contradicts it exist on one and the same level.

Recall that the one alternative to Freudian psychoanalysis Sartre cites as a corrective view is the quotation from Stekel which claims that the crux of psychosis was conscious. It is interesting to see then that toward the end of Freud’s essay on fetishism, and again in his “Splitting of the Ego” essay, Freud begins to move toward just such a conclusion, though he will not go as far as Stekel regarding psychosis. Freud had initially believed that in psychosis, the ego “lets itself be induced by the id to detach itself from a piece of reality.”<sup>24</sup> That is, the ego behaves as if reality simply does not exist. “But,” Freud continues, “soon after this I had reason to regret that I had ventured so far.” The evidence that counters his original proposal comes from the analysis of two young men who had lost their fathers at an early age. He first believes that they “scotomized,” or completely blanked out reality, yet neither developed a psychosis. Upon further research, however, he discovers that he was wrong. “It turned out that the two young men had no more ‘scotomized’ their father’s death than a fetishist does the castration of women.” Rather, the desire that their fathers remain alive, and the recognition of the reality that they were dead, “existed side by side.” Perhaps we should say they were suffering from a “mild” form of psychosis, but Freud does not venture this far. He has rather shown the simultaneous maintenance and disguise of mutually exclusive possibilities.



My argument for conscious disavowal is strengthened when we turn to Freud's "Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defence." Here his test case is once again fetishism, but any question of a lack of cognizance regarding reality is definitively rejected. The case concerns a boy prone to freely satisfy himself by masturbating, but who is frightened by a threat of dire consequences should he choose to continue this activity. The boy's *ego* "must now *decide* either to recognize the real danger . . . and renounce the instinctual satisfaction, or to disavow reality and *make itself believe* that there is no reason to fear, so that it may be able to retain the satisfaction." What the child actually does, however, demonstrates the paradigmatic move of bad faith: he "takes neither course, or rather he takes both simultaneously, which comes to the same thing. He replies to the conflict with two contradictory reactions."<sup>25</sup> Namely, he recognizes the danger to his satisfaction, but refuses to accept this possibility so that he may continue his activity. He maintains his satisfaction despite the fact that "proper respect is shown to reality."

This "success" is achieved not by banishing the threat to the unconscious, but by dividing his consciousness. "The two contrary reactions to the conflict [recognizing the threat and acting as if it is not a real possibility] persist as the centre-point of a splitting of the ego. The whole process seems so strange to us," Freud continues, "because we take for granted the synthetic nature of . . . the ego. But we are clearly at fault in this."<sup>26</sup> It is the ego itself then, with full awareness of two contradictory ideas—one he would like to retain, the other he would like to convince himself does not exist—that carries out the self-deception, the "artful" solution of creating a fetish. The fetish is his attempt to reinstate ignorance, to deceive himself as to the horrible truth after the revelation of the truth. It is the attempt to reinstate his happy illusion after his disillusionment has revealed the falsity of his illusion. He tries, in short, to escape his own situation, to say that reality is not what it is and is what it is not. It is as if the boy says to himself: "I know the threat is real, but all the same, I am going to act as if I did not know it," that I am not subjected to it; "I know that women do not have a phallus, but I will preserve it nonetheless," that I believe and yet do not believe what I believe.

#### 4. *Concluding Inconclusive Beliefs*

Some may recognize the structure of the previous sentences as referring to the notorious text by Octave Mannoni, "*Je sais bien, mais quand même,*" ("I know very well, but all the same"), which addresses the structure

of belief.<sup>27</sup> This structure, according to Mannoni, is established by Freud's accounts of disavowal in the texts we have just been examining. The primary lesson Freud teaches us here, in Mannoni's view, is "how a belief can be abandoned and retained at the same time,"<sup>28</sup> and he intends to show how this apparent contradiction is an everyday occurrence. It reveals itself every time the formula, "Je sais bien que, mais quand même," is found, and it is found wherever beliefs are confronted with a reality that denies them. This formula, if one looks for it, is to be found on numerous occasions in Sartre's account of bad faith.<sup>29</sup> Disavowal, I suggest, is at the core of the belief structure that belongs to bad faith, insofar as this is characterized by "the acceptance [*mais quand même*] of not believing what it believes [*je sais bien*]," (Sartre, 115). "Bad faith," as Sartre continues, "flees being by taking refuge in 'not-believing-what-one-believes,'" and this is precisely what Mannoni locates in Freud's account of fetishism.

Mannoni, as I have tried to justify in the previous section, rejects the commonly assumed notion that disavowal rests on Freud's dualistic topology of the conscious system and the unconscious. The "*mais quand même*," as he claims, is not an unconscious gesture. Were it to be so, then the fetish, the disavowal, would effectively be a sign of psychotic hallucination, which it specifically is not.<sup>30</sup> Rather, as Mannoni clarifies, "there would not be the *mais quand même* without the *je sais bien*. For example, the fetish only exists *because* the fetishist *sait bien* that women do not have a phallus."<sup>31</sup> Belief persists despite, or in fact because of, the fact that one has been disabused of one's belief. Thus, one does not really believe what one believes, yet consents to believe it nonetheless. Remember the two shamans with which I began this essay. The shaman with the headache knows very well that the other shaman's powder is a ruse, a deception. He has not repressed his knowledge of the sham power of the shaman and his powder, yet he desires to be relieved of the traumatic experience that is his headache. He is therefore all too willing, in implicitly full awareness, to suspend what he knows in order to receive the protection he requires—that is, he reinstates deception. In truth, he has seen through the deception only to better deceive himself. He has practiced disavowal. He is in bad faith.

Mannoni illustrates just such an example of disavowal, of double deception, in his analysis of the book *Soleil Hopi*, in which Taleysva, a chief of the North American Hopi Indians, recounts his childhood. The central story from this book concerns the transformation of the Hopi's beliefs surrounding the *Katcina*, or the masks worn by dancers during certain ceremonies. The

children are told that the masked dancers are in fact gods (the *Katcina*), and that, much as in our own society with the myth of Santa Claus, if they do not behave well, the gods will eat them. If they do behave, they will receive presents in the form of the *piki*, or balls of corn which, on this occasion only, are red. Talayesva recounts how, prior to one such ceremony, he found his mother cooking red *piki*, which greatly disturbed him, for if she is cooking the food of the gods, then his whole cosmology is false. His mother, however, saves him from this shock by telling him that this year the real *piki* will be yellow, not red. She thereby manages to save his belief by deceiving him with regard to her own deception. We must already suppose, however, that he can see through her ruse.

The primary event in the childhood of the Hopi is the rite of initiation. This initiation consists in the demystification of their childish beliefs. Prior to the age in which they are initiated, the children are made to believe that the gods (the *Katcina*) return to dance at the yearly ceremony. Of course, these “gods” are only their fathers and uncles wearing the *Katcina* masks. This is the first deception. At the rite of initiation, however, the adults raise their masks and reveal to the children that it is indeed they who are the *Katcina*, exposing the deception. Mannoni equates this ritual demystification and the shock it provokes with Freud’s account of castration, where belief (in the mother’s phallus) is suddenly contradicted by reality. And just as exposure of the truth leads to the creation of the fetish, the revelation of the adults behind the masks is the basis for the formation of a new belief, a second deception, which effectively disavows the revelation. This belief, instituted by the adults, is as follows: they tell the shocked children that the real *Katcina* used to come and dance at the ceremonies, but now they return invisibly, and inhabit “in a mysterious way” the masks that the adults wear.

There are thus, as Henry Krips specifies, two deceptions taking place.<sup>32</sup> First, the masks function as false signs of the presence of the gods, thereby concealing their absence. It is then admitted that the masks disguise the absence of the gods, but this admission functions as the basis for the second deception, in which the absence of the gods is claimed to be illusory as well. That is, the adults tell the initiates that the gods are indeed present, but they are present in an invisible manner. Both the initiates and the spectators alike collaborate in this double deception. Everyone knows that the masks are a sham, and so everyone sees through the initial deception. All the same, or indeed because they see through the first deception, the second one is introduced. Everyone pretends that they are not aware of the initial deception in

order to live with the second. Thus, “the Hopi can say in good faith . . . ‘*I know very well*’ that the Katcina are not the spirits, they are my fathers and uncles, *but all the same* the Katcina are there when my fathers and uncles dance in the masks.”<sup>33</sup> Disavowal forms the basis of their faith. Their avowal (“I know very well”) demonstrates knowledge of what they are denying, or as Krips says, it “asserts what has been repressed.”<sup>34</sup> Their disavowal (“but all the same”) denies what they have just avowed. Thus, in full knowledge of the repressed, the disavowal “reinstates repression.”<sup>35</sup>

This reinstatement of repression is the lie of bad faith. As Krips claims, “In short, the repressed nature of the knowledge that the gods are in masks does not reside in its failure to enter consciousness. On the contrary . . . it lies well to the forefront of awareness.”<sup>36</sup> Consequently, the repressed nature of the repressed does not indicate some horrible, embedded truth, but is rather the subject’s denial of its own knowledge. The self-deception involved with repression thus lies “in a subject’s failure to realize the extent to which, even when knowing it to be untrue, it [the repressed] structures the subject’s actions.”<sup>37</sup> And the fact that the repressed belief is quite openly recognized “constitutes disavowal in the full Freudian sense,”<sup>38</sup> the contradictory and ambivalent attitude of the fetishistic subject.

By examining how the mechanisms of disavowal contribute to the constitution of a fetishistic form of subjectivity, a type of subjectivity whose actions are structured by beliefs it knows to be untrue and that conspires to deceive itself because it sees through its own deceptions, I believe a justifiable case has been made for the identification of the Freudian roots of bad faith. It should now be clear that Sartre was entirely too hasty in his dismissal of the psychoanalytic answer to bad faith. With disavowal, we have found Freud’s rebuttal to Sartre’s claim that psychoanalysis has nothing to say on the matter of mutually contradictory ideas maintaining themselves simultaneously and doing so *within* a single consciousness. Nevertheless, I have left open how Freud would be able to deal with the question that Sartre had difficulty answering. Namely, to what extent is disavowal, a tendency to fetishism, and bad faith constitutive of subjectivity as such? And, if it is constitutive, how are we to envision a way out?

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> J.-P. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*, translated with introduction by Hazel E. Barnes, (New York: Washington Square Press, 1966), 89. Further reference to this publication will be indicated in the text by Sartre, followed by the page number.

<sup>2</sup> Out of concern for brevity, I am obliged to forgo analysis of the third of Sartre's temporal "ekstases," namely, *mit-sein*, which includes the relation to the Other, bodily being-in-the-world, and the external determination of the For-itself by another consciousness, which exacerbates the lack of coincidence between the subject and its being.

<sup>3</sup> Again, I note that I am limiting the issue by not specifically addressing the "duplicity" of bad faith as it is manifest in being-for-others. Nevertheless, "we find again the same structure. We have to deal with human reality as a being which is what it is not and which is not what it is" (Sartre, 100).

<sup>4</sup> An additional problem to bad faith is actually having faith in bad faith. With respect to the example I have been discussing, namely, being "good," the problem lies in the fact that while one may act in manner that one thinks is "good," there is no way to occupy the ideal position which would allow one to see all the repercussions of one's actions, and therefore no way to know what the "good" would be. One may have faith in the bad faith that one is "good," but this faith cannot rely on any persuasive evidence as to one's goodness.

<sup>5</sup> Sigmund Freud, "On the Genesis of Fetishism," in "Freud and Fetishism: Previously Unpublished Minutes of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society," ed. and trans. Louis Rose, *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, LVII, 1988, p. 147-166. This text received little attention prior to Henry Rey-Flaud's exhaustive study published in 1994, *Comment Freud inventa le fétichisme . . . et réinventait la psychanalyse* (Paris: Éditions Payot et Rivages, 1994).

<sup>6</sup> S. Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. VII, ed. and trans. by James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1978), cf. 153-8. This text went through a series of revisions from the time of its publication until 1920, so what I am presenting is an extreme reduction. All subsequent references to *The Standard Edition* will be indicated by *S.E.*, followed by the volume number and the page number.

<sup>7</sup> Freud, "On the Genesis of Fetishism," 155.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 155. A similar explanation is provided in a footnote to the *Three Essays* added in 1915: speaking of cases of foot-fetishism, Freud claims that "the scopophilic instinct, seeking to reach its object (originally the genitals) from underneath, was brought to a halt in its pathway by prohibition and repression. For this reason it became attached to a fetish in the form of a foot or shoe..." *S.E. VII*, 155.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, author's emphasis.

<sup>11</sup> Out of concern for brevity, I am obliged to forgo the explanation of how olfactory pleasure derives from the primitive anal object, excrement.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, author's emphasis.

<sup>14</sup> S. Freud, *S.E. XIX*, 235-6, emphasis added.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

<sup>16</sup> Freud first used the term disavowal in 1923 in "The Infantile Genital Organization," in "The Economic Problem of Masochism" and "The Loss of Reality in Neurosis and Psychosis" (1924), as well as in "The Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes" (1925). It is only in the "Fetishism" article, however, that it's most significant repercussion surfaces.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

<sup>18</sup> Originally published in 1926. The English translation of this book is entitled *Frigidity in Woman in Relation to Her Love Life*, 1943.

<sup>19</sup> S. Freud, *S.E. XXI*, 152.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>22</sup> I am referring of course to Freud's article from 1938, "Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defence," *S.E. XXIII*, in which no mention is made whatsoever of either repression or the unconscious.

<sup>23</sup> S. Freud, *S.E. XXI*, 154.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>25</sup> S. Freud, *S.E. XXIII*, 275.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 276.

<sup>27</sup> O. Mannoni, in *Les Temps Modernes*, 212, Jan. 1964, 1262-1286. This article is reprinted in *Clefs pour l'Imaginaire ou l'autre scene* (Paris: Seuil, 1969). I will refer to the original article.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 1264.

<sup>29</sup> For instance: "Take the example of a woman who has consented to go out with a particular man for the first time. *She knows very well* the intentions which the man who is speaking to her cherishes regarding her . . . *But* she does not want to realize the urgency" (Sartre, 96, emphasis added). See as well p. 102, p. 110.

<sup>30</sup> *Cf.*, S. Freud, *S.E. XXIII*, 277; O. Mannoni, 1266.

<sup>31</sup> O. Mannoni, 1265, emphasis added. One may recall Sartre's earlier statement, "Better yet I must know the truth very exactly *in order* to conceal it more carefully. . ." (Sartre, 89, author's emphasis).

<sup>32</sup> H. Krips, *Fetish: An Erotics of Culture* (Ithaca : Cornell University Press, 1999), 58.

<sup>33</sup> O. Mannoni, 1269.

<sup>34</sup> H. Krips, 60.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> H. Krips, 61. This statement is actually a paraphrase of Lacan from *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 51.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 62. With this Krips is referring to Žižek from *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 69.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

*Author's note:* Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Christopher M. Gemerchak, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Institute of Philosophy, Kardinaal Mercierplein, 2, 3000 Leuven, Belgium. E-mail: chris.gemerchak@hiw.kuleuven.ac.be.