

**Title: Psychoanalysis and “The Art of Doubt”; between and beyond Beck and Kristeva.**

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In his several analyses of what he terms the world risk society, Ulrich Beck argues that the new technological, economic and political constellation that has arisen in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries carries inside itself both risks of catastrophe and, also, newly released imperatives, indeed necessities, that contain, potentially, a bright upside (Beck 1999). This potential upside involves the psychic and cultural shift to what Beck has termed “the art of doubt”; a way of being, relating and acting in the world that has become the essential corrective to the mega-hazards of the global risk society (Beck 1997). Globally, we are at a cross-roads and unless the art of doubt is instituted as the proper mode of subjectivity and inter-subjectivity our world will self-generate its own mutually assured destruction.

Given this prognosis, Beck does well to find hope amongst such dread prospects. As Beck (1997: 163) puts it, there is “a glowing spark inside people's self-images” that may free them from the mentalities and practices that have generated and accompanied the world risk society and its wealth of mega-hazards. However, this hope is more than a worthy ambition. For Beck, its realization is an absolute necessity if mutually assured destruction is to be avoided. According to Beck, we are all playing the ultimate high-stakes game in which only a new “ethics of a post-industrial and radically modern identity and social contract” can save us from self-destruction (1997: 162). Achieving this new cosmopolitan ethic and its accompanying “radically modern identity and social contract” involves the shift to an “art of doubt” that is itself reflexive. However, far more than cognitive reflexivity is involved here and in

this discussion I will attempt to draw out those further aspects through noticing and elaborating certain common aspects that link Beck's "art of doubt" with psychoanalysis and, in particular, Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytic account of cosmopolitanism.

In one of his most interesting essays, "The Art of Doubt", Beck (1997) argues in favour of what he terms "reflexive doubt" in opposition to "linear doubt". Linear doubt involves a corrosive process as it is forever pressing towards certainty – a certainty that can never be attained. Consequently various pathologies of linear doubt arise as the infinite regress of following "every doubt with another doubt, endlessly" leads to despair, defeat or dogmatism. Linear doubt is trapped in a futile search for "certain, unambiguous knowledge". By contrast, reflexive doubt is able to *doubt* doubt itself. Instead of the drive to dispel doubt by achieving certainty, doubt is "accepted as an element of life like air and water" (1997:166). Beck (166) extends this characterization of reflexive doubt as follows:

Doubt turned against doubt calls a halt to doubt. It also allows its apparent opposites: faith, trust, morality, knowledge, and so on, but without that strange pretension to obligatoriness that swallows up and condemns any further doubt, subsuming and destroying the personal in the general.

The term "personal" is important here as it raises questions about the personal characteristics of the reflexive doubter; about his or her emotional life as well as their cognitive capacities and, also about their way of being with others and of relating to power and authority. What kind of person with what mode of psychic organization is the artful doubter?

Psychoanalytic theory offers a powerful means of further developing Beck's account of reflexive doubt and there are indications in his essay that a psychoanalytic perspective is implicit in his own argument. Indeed, that perspective is occasionally voiced, as in the following formulations that extend the characterization of reflexive doubt beyond its cognitive capacities and onto its broader psychic features that include emotions, drives and psychic organization itself. As Beck (162) puts it:

No, the destruction of the old grand illusions is not a loss, but rather a necessity in order to discover the breadth of smallness, the joys of relativism, ambiguity, multiple egos, affirmed drives (which had previously bowed down to the rule of a superego).

Clearly, Beck's cosmopolitan subject is envisaged here in largely psychoanalytic terms. Implicitly, Beck takes seriously Freud's argument that "the ego is not master in its own house" (Freud 1953: 143) and then extends that claim by proposing a psychic organization that deals with this lack of mastery through affirmation and sublimation, rather than repression. This is a subject for whom the power, authority and violence of the superego has been defeated, for whom psychic heterogeneity at the level of the ego is a source of pleasure rather than anxiety and for whom the drives may be "affirmed", presumably through either gratification or sublimation.

We can begin to deepen Beck's account by observing that Beck's reflexive doubter is akin to Julia Kristeva's cosmopolitan subject, just as the linear doubter who is trapped in a futile search for certainty is akin to Kristeva's account of subjects who are "strangers to themselves" (or "strangers to ourselves"). Kristeva (1991: 191) states this difference nicely when she comments:

To worry or to smile, such is the choice when we are assailed by the strange;

our decision depends on how familiar we are with our own ghosts.

In his essay on “The Art of Doubt” Beck implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, relies on a psychoanalytic account of subjectivity and the unconscious that approximates a similar argument developed by Kristeva at more length in *Strangers to Ourselves* and *Nations without Nationalism*. They both argue that a cosmopolitanism that affirms and sublimates the unconscious, rather than repressing the unconscious, is a “necessity” in a globalizing, multi-cultural world. This is a world in which human subjects are required to negotiate their own biography within an ever more complex society and economy, while processes of individualization leave them exposed to the collapse of all those certainties that, previously, were attached to tradition and/or to established social, economic and gender roles. Faced with the collapse of all such certainties, “to worry or to smile” becomes the pressing issue. That is to say, when ontological security is disrupted, do we respond creatively or defensively? To adapt a phrase of Wilfred Bion’s, can we learn from such a disruptive experience and thereby find a way to survive it both psychologically and culturally, or through defending against such insecurity do we merely displace it onto others, from where it returns to haunt us? This is what is at stake in the conflict between reflexive and linear doubt. A cosmopolitanism that affirms and sublimates the unconscious is the necessary new ethic for a global risk society – and this is reliant on the cultivation of an art of doubt that enables human subjects to dwell in ambivalence, without reaching irritably for certainties that can never be delivered. The alternative cosmopolitanism, that relies on linear doubt and the hubris of the Enlightenment, and thereby bypasses a transformation in both the individual and cultural unconscious, is always likely to founder on the shoals of particularisms of one kind or another or on a universalism that demands homogeneity. Crucially, only reflexive doubt can support and dwell

within a cultural shift that promotes ambivalence as the proper way for human subjects to relate to nature, others, and inner psychic nature. This is consistent with Kristeva's cosmopolitanism in which "solidarity is founded on the *consciousness of its unconscious* – desiring, destructive, fearful, empty, impossible" (1991: 192).

As if echoing Beck's advocacy of "ambiguity, multiple egos, affirmed drives" and a vanquished superego, Kristeva (191-192) extends her discussion of the virtues of a psychoanalytic cosmopolitanism by arguing that "Freud brings us the courage to call ourselves disintegrated in order not to integrate foreigners and even less to hunt them down". Here she draws particularly on Freud's account of the uncanny. For Freud, the sense that something is uncanny and needs to be disowned and defended against is the product of an "urge towards defence which has caused the ego to project that (internal psychic) material outward as something foreign to itself" (1990: 358). Here we see a defensive process of splitting and projection organized in terms of friend or enemy, good or bad, ideal or abject. For Beck, the art of reflexive doubt is the necessary counter to such destructive ways of being in the world because:

"thinking in categories of enemies makes sense only in absolutist black—white thinking (as with linear doubt); it is out of the question in the generally grey or flowing colour spectrum of thinking informed by (reflexive) doubt" (1997:169).  
(The terms in brackets are my additions).

Again, as with Kristeva's consciousness of the unconscious as the new cosmopolitan ethic, for Beck the art of reflexive doubt also counters self-harm, because "(i)n the disintegration of identity, self, truth and reality, the handcuffs and leg-irons with which people have imprisoned and mistreated themselves at the behest of outside powers also burst" (1997:163).

These characterisations indicate a move beyond the friend-enemy distinction and absolutist mentalities. So, how is this to be achieved? Becks' argument is more developed than Kristeva's in this regard as he is clearer about the political processes involved and clearer about the involvement of social collectivities – initially through a sub-politics that undermines the authority of the conventional political institutions. This is where reflexive modernity generates self-reflection. According to Beck (1999: 81), the process of reflexive modernization has two internally related effects. Reflexively, the very process of ongoing modernization generates mega-hazards that it is obliged to ignore, in order to extend its scope and scale. It remains trapped within the logic of linear doubt. However, as the externalities and unintended consequences of modernization cumulate in the form of both mundane insecurity regarding identities, relationships, work and family and, also, as mega-hazards, this generates self-reflection and a politics of self-criticism and self-transformation. In this way the world risk society generates new forms of subjectivity and affiliation that move beyond the friend-enemy distinction:

(W)hen self-doubts chew up the arrogance, then enemies are no longer enemies, nor are they brothers with whom one dances in festivals of solidarity; instead, they are fellow or opposing doubters. Their interests may be diametrically opposed. They will be seen as such, relativized, negotiated and arranged. The simple reason for this is that, in the age of doubt, contrasts can no longer be dogmatized into enmities that can justify a mutual killing machine or set it in motion (Beck 1997:169).

It is here that I want to begin to register my sense of the dark side that shadows

Beck's bright side of the global risk society. One way of stating my argument is to say that globalization *already* relies on the wide-spread capacity to dwell in ambivalence even as it releases processes that undermine that capacity. In other words, if reflexive modernisation potentially generates the art of (reflexive) doubt, it also generates a set of defences against insecurity and anxiety that rely on paranoid-schizoid processes and the friend-enemy distinction. The more globalisation and individualisation disrupt established identities, practices and mentalities that support ontological security, the stronger the appeal of those certainties that are produced by linear doubt and defended by paranoid-schizoid processes and friend-enemy constructions of self and other. This resurgence of friend-enemy absolutism is an emergent effect of globalisation and of psychic defences against the threats posed by individualisation. It may be characterised as the internally generated risk of Beck's transition period, due to the threats of terrorism and war that it generates and of reactionary forces (right and left oriented) that it stimulates.

My reason for looking closely at Beck's "Art of Doubt" discussion is that while it is consistent with his argument about reflexive modernisation leading to reflection as self-critique, in "The Art of Doubt" this argument is developed in a way that opens onto the integration of psychoanalytic theory; with significant effects. Hence, rather than being merely or mainly cognitive in its orientation to the monitoring of risks, it opens onto a richer and more complex account of human subjectivity in which desires, anxieties, psychic organisation and psychic defences are incorporated along with processes of reasoning; and also of rationalising. Anthony Elliott (2002: 300-301) provides a helpful summary of the limitations of Beck's usual cognitive orientation when he reports that Beck has been criticised by many social theorists

who, altogether, claim that “Beck’s theory cannot grasp the hermeneutical, aesthetic, psychological and culturally bounded forms of subjectivity and intersubjectivity in and through which risk is constructed and perceived”. As I have argued, Beck’s “Art of Doubt” is something of an exception in this regard. However, that very move towards psychoanalysis raises the further question as to whether Beck is fully alert to the implications of incorporating psychoanalytic theory, with its ability to address “multiple egos, affirmed drives” and vanquished superegos, as he puts it, but also (as he tends to overlook) its ability to address paranoid-schizoid defences against insecurity and anxiety. In my opinion, having appropriated psychoanalysis to better specify the bright side of reflexive modernization, Beck fails to adequately address the dark side that psychoanalysis also reveals.

### *Psyche, Culture and Society*

The incorporation of psychoanalytic theory allows us to better recognize this dark side and to better analyse the attraction of linear doubt, defended by paranoid-schizoid processes, for human subjects who have been subjected to the disruptions and disembedding effects of the risk society and whose ontological security has been profoundly challenged. While paranoid-schizoid psychic processes are a characteristic of individual psychic life, they are not the only possible mode of psychic processing. Melanie Klein (1975) identified a distinct mode that constructs self and other quite differently, by accepting complexity without resorting to splitting and projection. Klein termed this unconscious state and the processes it enables the depressive position and it is the fundamental psychic position upon which a capacity to dwell in ambivalence is based. By extension, it is the unconscious ground and support for the

art of doubt.

Like paranoid-schizoid processes, psychic processes that are founded in the depressive position are not solely located at the level of the human subject, although they are always enacted or performed by subjects. These same psychic processes, whether paranoid –schizoid or depressive, are also embedded, indeed encoded, into cultural forms and social practices (Cash 1996). They proliferate in the discourses and routines of everyday life and thereby organize both subjectivity and inter-subjectivity. In some social settings individual subjects, if they desire to be recognized as good and competent subjects, must perform their identities with very few degrees of freedom. The cultural repertoire deemed proper in such settings is severely restricted. Total institutions are clear instances of such severe cultural restriction. Societies engulfed in ethno-national conflict, such as Northern Ireland or Sri Lanka at certain periods, are further examples of social settings in which degrees of freedom, as regards the proper mentalities and proper social routines, are severely restricted. In other settings – and Australia is one example - cultural fields are more differentiated and there are more degrees of freedom available to human subjects as they negotiate their way through these cultural fields. However, even in such settings the qualitative features of the cultural repertoire that predominates within the cultural field is of great significance, as this creates the common-sense understandings that actors draw upon, or disavow, as they perform their identities.

It follows from this analysis that within the cultural field that organizes identities and the routines that support ontological security we can identify unconscious processes at play that are culturally authorized as the proper way to

think, feel and relate AND we can also identify qualitatively distinct unconscious processes, also culturally located, that are available, if only marginally, to be drawn upon in order to disrupt the established orthodoxy and potentially displace it by instituting an alternate set of “rules” for the structuration of the unconscious in culture and the re-organization of the routines that support ontological security. In the world risk society this involves a psychic and cultural conflict, that is initially sub-political, between linear doubt, defended by paranoid-schizoid processes and reflexive doubt, founded upon the depressive position. The dilemma we all confront is that as reflexive modernization becomes more disruptive and generates mega-hazards on an enhanced scale, the attractions of linear doubt and paranoid-schizoid defences become more pronounced. This is the great emergent risk of the transition phase between system reflexivity and individual and group self-reflection; the phase about which Beck comments (1999: 81, emphasis mine):

It is therefore the combination of reflex and reflections which, *as long as the catastrophe itself fails to materialize*, can set industrial modernity on the path to self-criticism and self-transformation.

My point is that a world risk society haunted by the prospect of such catastrophes is drawn towards the certainties generated by linear doubt and defended by processes of splitting and projection and their friend-enemy mentalities. There are more than learning processes in play here – defensive processes are also engaged – and psychoanalysis allows us to see these fault-lines of the risk society far better than cognitive models of reasoning, monitoring and risk evaluation.

Beck is right about the necessity of the art of doubt and what I have termed the capacity to dwell in ambivalence. The contemporary world can no longer afford the

destructiveness of the friend-enemy distinction shored up by linear doubt and by the certainties of absolutism. The dilemma is that the disruptions and threats posed by reflexive modernization promote the very subjectivities and mentalities that disallow the art of doubt. This is not inevitable, however, and the inclusion of a psychoanalytic perspective not only throws light on the dark side of the crucial transition beyond linear doubt. It also identifies the subjective and cultural processes involved. It is in this linked domain of culture and subjectivity that a sub-politics on behalf of the art of doubt can play itself out, better informed by a psychoanalytic understanding of the subjective and cultural processes involved. The trouble is that not only is this a very high stakes game, it is also very hard to win.

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