



# WHAT MAY I EXPECT FROM PSYCHOANALYSIS? VICENTE PALOMERA



## PRÉCIS

In this essay titled "What may I expect from psychoanalysis?," Vicente Palomera calls our attention to the psychoanalytic aphorism that the best cure one can hope for when it comes to an analysis is the replacement of extraordinary misery with ordinary happiness. In our contemporary time, where 'being happy' is an injunction – a demand as opposed to a desire – Palomera states, "I think that nobody can ask for happiness, not even implicitly, but one can ask for relief from uneasiness, discomfort, in other words a cure from the symptom." From here Palomera weaves together Freud and Lacan, and shows how psychoanalysis might offer the subject a way of reorienting themselves in relation to their jouissance by going beyond the cowardly repression of our desire.

*Neil Gorman*

*This paper was originally given during a Public Conference at the Miami Dade College during the Clinical Study Days 8 of the Lacanian Compass, January 2015, Miami, Florida.*

**Vicente Palomera** is a psychoanalyst in Barcelona, Spain, Analyst Member of the School (AME), Member of the Escuela Lacanian Psychoanalysis (ELP) and the World Association of Psychoanalysis (WAP). Former Analyst of the School (AE) (1999-2002). Teacher of the Instituto del Campo Freudiano (ICF). Author of several books and director of two collections, "Lacanian School of Psychoanalysis" and "Mind, health and society," both from the Editorial Gredos.

---

# WHAT MAY I EXPECT FROM PSYCHOANALYSIS?

## THE PROMISES OF ANALYSIS

“What may I expect from psychoanalysis?” is my title, but I propose to work along the lines suggested by the more general title “The potential of psychoanalysis.” You may not be unaware that this is one of the questions set out by the philosopher Emmanuel Kant to summarize what he called “the interests of our reason.” These questions are: What can I know? What ought I to do? What may I expect?

To reply to the question, Lacan said that what we can expect from analysis is “to make sense of the unconscious of which you are the subject.” The distinguishing feature of unconscious knowledge is that it is a knowledge that organizes the life of the subject, a knowledge for which the subject is responsible and about which he nevertheless knows nothing. Psychoanalysis is not the path toward assessing knowledge that is already present, an established knowledge, but – always – an encounter with new knowledge, unique to each subject, that concerns the singularity of his solution.

Freud has been variously paraphrased as saying that psychoanalysis could treat neurotic misery, but that it could not treat ordinary human unhappiness. The most a patient could hope for was deliverance from the neurotic misery. This comes from the concluding paragraph of Freud’s *Studies in Hysteria* “...much will be gained if we succeed in transforming your hysterical misery into common unhappiness. With a mental life that has been restored to health, you will be better armed against that unhappiness.”

This is a phrase of terrible realism and pessimism, ‘in the end, psychoanalysis only changes neurotic suffering into ordinary misery.’ Of course this phrase cannot sum up all of Freudian thought, as it was said within a particular context, but it does delimit the reach of psychoanalytic practice. I should add that in

no way is this the position of Lacan, who had more ambitions with respect to the practice of psychoanalysis.

Lacan didn’t think that psychoanalysis managed to help one escape common unhappiness, but instead that one could obtain something original and new from neurotic unhappiness, which would be impossible to reach outside of the analytic practice. In “The Direction of the Treatment”, in 1958, Lacan said something surprising, “It is a fact that we do not proclaim our incompetence to promise happiness (...) Psychoanalysis does not refuse to promise happiness.”

In 1975 in a series of conferences in the United States, he affirmed that an analysis should never go too far, “when the subject thinks he is happy in his life, it’s enough.” We could take into account that he was speaking in the United States and that perhaps he was indulging a bit with the dominant ideas of this country, although I doubt it. Lacan was never a man to be docile before his public.

If we speak of happiness, evidently we should take this notion relatively, because today nobody knows what it means. In Aristotle’s time, we could think that there was a collective discipline of happiness. Today we say, “I feel good in my skin,” or “I feel bad in my skin,” a formula without the shadow of transcendence, reduced to the consideration of the individual of our time. As such, I think that nobody can ask for happiness, not even implicitly, but one can ask for relief from uneasiness, discomfort—in other words a cure from the symptom. The original title Freud chose for one of his most known books, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, was *Das Unglück in der Kultur*, a rough translation of which would be *Unhappiness in Culture* or, better still, *Society*. A more literal translation of the German *Unglück*

into English would be misfortune, or simply, bad luck. In German, the concept of happiness is commonly conceived as good fortune, or a stroke of luck. Freud subsequently changed the German *Unglück* in the title to *Unbehagen*, a term that Strachey noted is more difficult to translate into English but suggested that the French *malaise* (a state of discomfort or uneasiness) or even *dis-ease* would have made an apt choice. When the book was translated into English, however, in 1930, Freud proposed the title *Man's Discomfort with Civilization*, to his translator. Ignoring Freud's recommendation, the translator chose *Civilization and Its Discontents* instead.

## THE DEMAND OF HAPPINESS

What is demanded of a psychoanalyst can be expressed in a simple word, *happiness*. “The subject is happy (*le sujet est hereux*),” said Lacan in *Television*. The subject, the happy subject, Lacan specifies “can owe nothing if not hap.” It’s the *hap* that features in *hap*-piness.

The etymological root of the English term happy derives from the Middle English *hap*, meaning luck. This observation can be taken in two ways. The first is consistent with the commonsense understanding of happiness as good fortune, or a stroke of luck – in other words, a chance happening. If we want to furnish it with its logical equivalent, we would call *contingency* that which happens and which wasn’t written: it wasn’t written. It happens, and the subject seizes it. But the other meaning of happenstance emphasizes the element of contingency in life and the chances we invariably take in our endeavors. Freud saw the neurotic as a person who typically plays it safe to minimize the risk of disappointment. Seen in this light, psychoanalysis offers the neurotic a second chance at happiness, by coming out of his self-imposed exile and placing his future prospects at what isn’t written.

## UNHAPPINESS

But we must differentiate universal unhappiness from the contingencies that depend on time, location, context, and people. Universal unhappiness arises from two factors. That which the religious tradition brings to the mortality of God’s creatures, and that which we bring to the effect of language on the living being.

Language is an operator that introduces the presence of a lack in what we could call the real, referring to that which is outside of the symbolic. The effect of language for all speaking beings is, first of all, the *effect of loss* of what we call *jouissance*. Freud evoked this with the paradoxical notion of an object that is always primordially lost from the start, lost although never possessed, which is to say that in every human life, from the start there is already a loss that is present. What Lacan adds to this point is identifying language as the primordial cause of this loss.

The second factor, tied to language and superimposed on it is what Lacan calls *discourse*. The notion of discourse designates the historical and cultural forms that are imposed on the unhappiness of the speaking being. It is true that the unhappiness of the medieval sinner, and its form of disgrace is different than that of the modern subject. I don’t know if we can sum up what causes this universal unhappiness of modern subjects. Perhaps it’s generated by the meaninglessness of being forced to work, to which the civilization submits each and every one of its members who are impotent to soothe the lack of *jouissance* with the products that are obtained. We also know that when this forced work is lacking due to unemployment, things get even worse.

Civilization invented its doctrines and therapeutic practices to treat, at the collective level, the unhappiness inherent to “the human condition,” as André Malraux put it. Religion is one of these practices. Also included, more generally, are all the ideologies of ‘promise’. All of the practices that we could call ‘diversion’ and that consist simply in getting people to not think, neither about their being nor their destiny. Perhaps even work belongs to this class of diversion.

We’re in a time when the therapies of universal happiness have failed a bit, and it is not a coincidence that the psychotherapies that substitute for them appear just at this moment. These don’t pretend to solve a universal unhappiness, but perhaps more modestly, the unhappiness of the individual. Psychoanalysis must be located in this context.

## AN UNKNOWN HAPPINESS

Therefore, what destiny can psychoanalysis offer to the unhappiness that Freud called neurotic?

If we think that it promises a cure for neurosis or for the symptom – and it cannot be denied that psychoanalysis has therapeutic effects – it should be observed that having a therapeutic power is not a privilege only to psychoanalysis. There are therapeutic effects in many psychotherapies, especially those that use words, because this in and of itself produces some therapeutic effect. Just visiting a therapist in itself produces a certain relief from discomfort and uneasiness.

The most important thing that a psychoanalysis produces is not, however, a therapeutic effect. And it seems a bit more complex than the simple suppression of suffering, because there is an astuteness of the subject. There is what we could call the “astuteness of the neurotic intention,” which is not in any way an astuteness of reason, but rather an astuteness of the drive.

All neurotic unhappiness is a happiness that is unknown, a happiness that is not recognized as such. As I said before, Lacan affirmed that the subject is happy, that is to say, he is condemned to be happy. It’s a surprising thesis, which should be clarified, and which was also Freud’s idea, although Freud formulated it in another way. Freud considered that something was satisfied through the symptom, as painful as that may be, and without the subject’s knowledge. For Freud there was something satisfactory in the symptom. We can understand this if we look at the Freudian conception of the symptom developed throughout his work, beginning with an early text, “The Psychoneurosis of Defense.” This title itself indicates that he conceived the symptom as the result of the repression of a drive, which, although repressed, manages to make worthy its demand for satisfaction.

The symptom appears as satisfaction of the drive, but as a satisfaction disguised in order to fool the subjective defenses toward the drive. The great idea of Freud is that a human being never renounces anything, and if he does, he manages, through detours, to compensate his renunciation.

## THE JOUISSANCE OF THE DRIVE

I want to highlight the paradoxical character of the jouissance of the drive marked by Freud and taken up again by Lacan. We confirm that there is nothing more malleable than the drive, which can take many

diverse forms, disguise itself, change its figure, it’s object, it’s ways until it finds satisfaction (See Freud’s *Introductory Lectures*, “Die Wege der Symptombildung, or “The Way of the Formation of the Symptom.”) This malleability conditions all human realization, but at the same time there is an opposite aspect in the drive where it is not its changeability, but rather its inertia that is emphasized.

This can be illustrated with any of the drives. If we take for example the oral drive, it has nothing to do with hunger or the necessity to eat in order to live. It is generated under the effect of the demand of the Other, since the Other offers food as much as the signifiers that represent it, but there is no food that can satisfy the oral drive that remains insatiable, independent of the food which is offered to it. This characteristic of insatiability indicates what Freud called the original loss which is impossible to compensate. So we could say in some sense that there is no food that will satisfy the oral drive, but at the same time that anything could satisfy it partially. We can see that in bulimia one is satisfied by swallowing and swallowing, but also in anorexia when the subject fixates on not eating. Whether one eats or not, the drive is satisfied, even by reading a menu in the restaurant, as Lacan says. All forms of voracity refer to the oral drive, even though it’s not necessarily about food or something digestible. One can eat knowledge, “eat the book” as it is said in the *Apocalypse* of Saint John, even listening to a conference – like you now – is something like going to a restaurant, swallowing words.

There seems to be an infinite slippage of the jouissance of the drive in the metonymy of discourse and in the activities that are ordered by the path of this discourse. We could generalize and say that the metonymy of the jouissance of the drive sustains all of human reality. All searches, all efforts in one’s professional field, or in the field of love, all of these are generated by the primary loss, but are sustained positively by the slippage of the jouissance of the drive through metonymy. This also means that all objects are false, fake, as much in men as in women, and in all activities – all are put in the place where a part of jouissance was lost and becomes found again in an object that is fake.

It’s true that nobody asks to be cured of their drives, even when they are horrified by them, since they

satisfy something. Perhaps somebody is led to an analysis to try to change something of the consequences of their demanding and incoercible drives. What motivates a demand for analysis is, rather, the symptom.

## SYMPTOM AND REPRESSION

The symptom is distinguished from the drive in a precise way; in part because the symptom doesn't slip. The symptom is rather a fixation that disguises, dissimulates what Freud called a repression – an attempt to reject jouissance. The repression is defense that comes not from the drive itself, but from the subject who wants to oppose jouissance, when the jouissance presents itself as something traumatic. What Freud discovered was that the first encounter with sexual jouissance – the jouissance at play between the sexes – is always in itself traumatic. The subject answers this encounter with aversion, that is, with hysteria, or captivation, that is, obsession.

The only way to reduce the trauma is precisely what the subject does; the subject makes the memory of the encounter disappear. In other words, the subject makes disappear what we could call the signifier that inscribes the memory of an encounter with an insupportable jouissance. Therefore the repression that establishes the symptom in reality doesn't modify the drive. Freud says this in a very explicit manner: to repress or to lift a repression does not modify the drive, rather it modifies the memory, the inscription of the memory, making another signifier appear in the location of the unary feature of the encounter. For this reason Lacan can say that Freudian repression adheres to the substitutive structure of metaphor.

## THE SYMPTOM LIES

The simplest example that I could find, I took from Freud. It is the young hysteric who cannot enter shops. She is subject to a compulsion it is of not being able to go into shops alone. If Freud says 'compulsion' it is because not only could she not enter, but also she could not stop thinking about it. It wasn't a simple phobia, but a quasi-obsession. We take then her fear of shops as a signifier. From her associations Freud produces memories of another signifier – that of a man, not a man in general, but a man in relation to his sexual jouissance. Therefore the fear of shops conceals the fear of an encounter with sex.

It's a simple and demonstrative example that allows us to understand why Freud says that the symptom lies. It lies in the measure in which there is a substitution of the signifier. Where in reality there is a great fear of the sexual encounter with a man, the symptom indicates a fear of shops, which doesn't seem have any meaning. The symptom lies, but at the same time it makes present the truth which can be found through the paths of deciphering. Deciphering a symptom is always in order to make appear the encounter with the jouissance that this symptom memorized. In this way, before being concerned with curing the symptom, psychoanalysis is concerned with revealing its secret.

How do we locate the cure with respect to the revelation of this secret? Could we say that the young hysteric was cured when her symptom was revealed? Yes and no. Once it is deciphered that her fear of shops is a fear of the encounter with men, the fear of shops could disappear – a therapeutic effect – but not necessarily the fear of men. The young woman already knows that the secret was in her fear of men. Of course the fact that she can enter shops makes things more comfortable for her, but it will not be a great therapeutic achievement, unless she cures herself of her rejection of sex.

## CURING THE SUBJECT

We must differentiate between curing a symptom in the phenomenological sense – making the pathological phenomenon (phobia or obsession) disappear – and curing the subject, reducing the negation that he tries to oppose to jouissance. Curing what we could call in hysteria the rejection of the jouissance of the Other; the rejection of the jouissance of the man. As is well indicated in Freud's case, it's not only sexual desire that she rejects, it also evokes the mimicry, the grimace of men's jouissance that she encountered in shops.

I hope to at least have shown with this example that there is not only a secret of the symptom, in that there is jouissance implied, but also that there exists a responsibility on the part of the subject, to the extent that the position taken toward jouissance is decisive for the fabrication of the subject's symptom.

Freud's thesis, which is still valid, is that at the foundation of the symptom there is a rejection toward

the encounter with *jouissance*, in other words, the subject is responsible for his symptom. Instead of being a victim of something that befell him, and against which he could do nothing in spite of all his efforts, as he thought when he came with his complaint to the psychoanalyst, it turns out that in the course of the psychoanalytic work, he is responsible.

The problem consists in knowing if through his analysis he can make a change of position with respect to the *jouissance* that he rejects. To change the position is a formula of Lacan's, but I can show that it is also Freud's. In "Analysis Terminable and Interminable," a text from 1937, he says it in the most explicit manner. He examines three possibilities out of which psychoanalysis manages to obtain recognition of the subjective defense toward the demand of the drive: Either the subject changes position and corrects his rejection which established the symptom – and Freud points out that this is more easily obtained when dealing with a traumatic neurosis. Or, the subject is able to support the unsatisfaction of the drive without repression. Or, a new, stronger repression is produced and this time it manages not to produce another symptom.

In other words, the subject either renounces his repressive intention, or he makes it stronger. In either case, what is at stake is a change in the subjective position.

## GOING BEYOND COWARDICE

When Lacan suggests that at the end of an analysis, the subject can perhaps identify with symptom, he refers, among other things to an acceptance of the *jouissance* implicit in the symptom. This is very close to what Freud said with respect to correcting the rejection of the *jouissance* that defines the subject. It is about knowing if neurotic cowardice can be changed or not in an analysis. Lacan calls "cowardice in the neurotic" not any kind lack of courage, but rather the distance that the subject tries to keep from the demand of the drives, and more precisely the distance that he/she tries to maintain toward the Other's *jouissance*, looking at it "*à la lorgnette*," that is to say, through binoculars like opera-glasses. Lacan showed this in the case of the Rattman, that is, to the fact that he immediately introduces this dimension of his cowardice. Only, what is not clear is where this cowardice is. The courage of the subject is precisely to play the game of desire, the desire of the Other.

When Lacan suggests that at the end of an analysis, the subject can perhaps identify with symptom, he refers, among other things to an acceptance of the *jouissance* implicit in the symptom. This is very close to what Freud said with respect to correcting the rejection of the *jouissance* that defines the subject. It is about knowing if neurotic cowardice can be changed or not in an analysis. Lacan refers the "cowardice of the neurotic" not to any kind of lack of courage, but rather the distance that the subject tries to keep from the demand of the drives, and more precisely the distance that he/she tries to maintain toward the Other's *jouissance*, looking at it "*à la lorgnette*," that is to say, through binoculars like opera-glasses. Lacan showed this in the case of the Rat Man, where he immediately introduces this dimension of the Rat Man's cowardice. Only, what is not clear is where this cowardice is. The courage of the subject is precisely to play the game of desire, the desire of the Other.

The expression "*à la lorgnette*" clearly says how the neurotic keeps himself apart, how he uses distance as a means of protection. Lacan asks whether at the end of an analysis the neurotic could dare to look a little closer at the *jouissance* that he fears. We must remember that each and every one fears something specific, and it's not the fear of dealing with a generalized fear, but the different figures of feared *jouissance*. In analysis the analysand works up his/her courage and it is a form of alleviation from sadness. Sadness, depression, is the sister of the cowardice that marks the neurotic even though sometimes he acts like a clown and is funny. If he works up the courage, he would obtain another kind of therapeutic benefit, an effect at the level of sadness.

To conclude: The analytic promise goes much farther than to bring the subject to ordinary misery. It conjures an effect on the position of the subject, on his or her desire, with the benefit of knowing something about one's unconscious. As I said, Lacan affirms that from an analysis one can know something about the unconscious that determines the subject. Correlatively, psychoanalysis can give one the possibility of a new choice in front of the nucleus that horrifies him. That was Freud's idea. To give someone a new possibility of choice is something very rare and valuable, for this evokes the possibility of – I don't know whether to say a new desire – but at least a new effect of desire. That is a great promise.

*Text edited by Maria Crisitina Aquirre, Nancy Gillespie,  
Neil Goreman and Elizabeth Rogers*

The LC EXPRESS is produced and distributed by

## LACANIAN COMPASS

Liliana Kruszel, *Editor*

Pierre-Gilles Guéguen, *Advisor*

Robert Buck, *Designer and Art Editor*

Image: *Untitled*, Forrest Bess, 1950, Oil on canvas, 7.5 x 9 x 2 inches, Collection:  
Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Photo: Nathan Keay, © MCA Chicago

---

The Lacanian Compass is an associated group of the New Lacanian School (NLS) dedicated to the development and promotion of the Lacanian Orientation of Psychoanalysis in the United States, psychoanalysis as first described by Sigmund Freud and further elaborated by Jacques Lacan and Jacques-Alain Miller.

To subscribe to Lacanian Compass, fill out the subscription form on the 'contact' page of [lacaniancompass.com](http://lacaniancompass.com)

For more information and to access the archive, visit [lacaniancompass.com](http://lacaniancompass.com)



LACANIAN COMPASS

