

'Kant with Sade': On the Relationship between the Moral Law and *jouissance* in the Ethics of Psychoanalysis

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In this article we explore the relationship between moral law and *jouissance* in *Seminar: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (1959/60) as well as in *Kant with Sade* (1963). As we will show, this relationship is a consequence of a change of perspective brought about by these texts, in which the concept of the real is foregrounded. Moreover, this relationship is inherently connected to a change of perspective in the way Lacan understands the death drive and is compatible with the ever stronger insertion of the concept of real in his teaching.

Throughout the whole of his *Ethics* seminar (1959/60), Lacan tries to situate ethics as a dimension of our experience so as to distinguish it from particular detours implicit in analytical thought. He especially criticizes the ill formulated, hardly confessed, and frequently explicit goals connected to the notion of remaking the 'I' of the subject. He intends to show the inadequacies of such goals, since they do not correspond to our practice, to the real dimensions that the ethical problem demands of us. Moreover, in developing a particular psychoanalytic ethics, Lacan is trying to invoke the work of the analyst towards the possibility of a certain transmission of negativity specific to the critical tradition. In order to do this, he makes use of a

confrontation between Kant and Sade, intending to take us to the transgression or to invent a new form of perversion.

To transgress desire is not to disobey the law, nor to set the stage for the fantasm (which unites the desire to the law), nor is it some kind of necessity or demand. The fact that man is understood in the field of the unconscious is fundamental for the ethical problem of psychoanalysis since it mobilizes the hypothesis of a desire and of a subject that is its direct correlate. As we know, since Freud, the field of desire involves a division that makes its own integration, unity, and self-determination harder. On one hand, this represents a reconsideration of the intuitive concept of pleasure and the gradual introduction of the notion of *jouissance*, presented not merely as the satisfaction of some necessity, but as the satisfaction of a drive—namely, the death drive. For Lacan, the drive is something complex and not reducible to a disposition or instinct in its energetic and quantitative sense. Hence the heterodox project of reading the *Project for a New Scientific Psychology* as an ethical text. This is a heterodox reading, since, in this text, Freud employs physicalist notions, such as homeostasis and the conservation of energy principles, which do not seem to be ethical. Lacan, however, reads those notions as the articulation of the signifier chain by the death drive. Lacan presents Sade from a similar perspective, arguing that, if our drive is a destructive drive, it must exist beyond a tendency to return to the inanimate, such as a direct willing. Lacan therefore necessarily inserts us in the relation between the subject and the symbolic law.

When commenting on the *Ethics* seminar, scholars often refer to the topic of desire. In contrast, our objective in this article consists in exploring the relationship between the moral law and *jouissance* in this seminar (1959/60), comparing it to *Kant with Sade* (1963). This relation is necessarily tied not only to a change of perspective in the way Lacan works with the concept of real in his teachings, but also to the necessity of searching for a clinical usage, a technique which allows us to deal with the resulting *jouissance*.

Let us follow the way Lacan articulates the relationship between desire and the law. Lacan opens the seminar by enunciating the thesis that: “the moral law, the moral command, the presence of the moral agency in our activity, insofar as it is structured by the symbolic, is that through which the real is actualized—the real as such, the weight of the real” (SVII, p. 20).

We know since Freud that the moral law affirms itself against pleasure and, moreover, exists as an experience beyond the pleasure principle. Nevertheless, there is something strange in talking about the real in relation to the moral law, since the real, insofar as it is the guarantee of the Thing, is not immediately accessible. The real appears throughout Freud's thought through an opposition between the reality

principle and the pleasure principle; and, after *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, it appears as an opaque face—the death drive—the law beyond all law, which can only be established from a reality that is impossible to reach. To Freud, the reality principle is precariously exercised, which is why its commands are tyrannical and also why, as a guide to the real, feelings are deceptive (SVII, p. 30)

In order to emphasize what I am calling the paradox of the relationship to the real in Freud, I will put this on the board—the pleasure principle on the one hand and reality principle on the other (...). Speaking broadly, one can say that the unconscious is on one side and the conscious on the other. Please bear that in mind in your attempt to follow the points we are trying to bring out (Lacan, SVII, p. 31).

If, by its very nature, every thought is exerted in unconscious ways, to Freud a thought is only known to us through the function of words, in the Lacanian sense that the unconscious is structured like a language. We are here at level of the object, in which known and unknown are opposed, and the known can only be known through words.

What about such knowability at the level of the subject? Lacan proposes that, at the level of pleasure, what is presented to the subject as a substance is her good. Pleasure governs subjective activity and it is the idea of the good that sustains it (SVII, p. 34). The idea of the good is that which we find in Aristotle (2000), in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, which, like every other ethics, refers to a certain order that is presented as the science of what must be done, that defines a certain character, *ethos*. Man, unlike a stone, *acquires habits*, he acquires habits by referring himself to a Sovereign Good, where a particular order would be unified in a more universal knowledge. For Lacan, the macrocosm and the microcosm are supposed at the outset of every Aristotelian meditation:

The establishment of an ἦθος is posited as differentiating a living being from an inanimate, inert being. As Aristotle points out, no matter how often you throw a stone in the air, it will never acquire the habit of its trajectory; man, on the other hand, acquires habits—that's what is meant by ἦθος. This ἦθος has to be made to conform to the the ἦθος, that is to an order that from the point of view of Aristotle's logic has to be brought together in a Sovereign Good, a point of insertion, attachment, or convergence, in which a particular order is unified with a more universal knowledge, in which ethics becomes politics, and beyond that with an imitation of the cosmic order. (SVII, p. 22)

This ethics, therefore, involves a human ideal, an ideal of conforming the subject to something in the real that is uncontested. On the other hand, Freud (1929) is thinking, since his *Civilization and Its Discontents*, about how certain "inclinations" are moving to another place. For him, both the civilizing force and the commands of

culture demand too much of the subject. "If there is indeed something that can be called his good or his happiness, there is nothing to be expected in that regard from the microcosm, nor moreover from the macrocosm" (Lacan, SVII, p. 347). That is why, throughout the history of ethics, pleasure and good are such fundamental concepts, even if they are antithetical, and that is also why Lacan will formulate his ethics in the direction of the real and not of the ideal.

Lacan defends that this aforementioned opposition between the pleasure principle and the reality principle "concerns not so much the sphere of psychology as that of ethics properly speaking" (SVII, p. 35). In the first instance, the kernel of conflict is to be found as tied to a moral order. The Freudian innovation, on the other hand, allows us to go further in that which is essential in the problem of morality and to think about how to qualify the substrate of the subjective operation.

According to Freud, the satisfaction sought by a drive is a constancy, and a constancy at the least possible level of excitation. This search only exists because of a force in the psychic apparatus that acts in a contrary direction. If two forces are necessary, then there is no possibility of a *jouissance* without an interdiction; a transgression will be necessary to ascend to *jouissance*, which is why the law is necessarily everywhere.

At this point in his teaching, Lacan presupposes that the symbolic order, the signifier, can modulate the *jouissance*, even if he knows that there is something—a remainder—that escapes. How can we think the moral act after dropping down every reference to a rational normativity guaranteed by the strategies of a transcendental determination of the free will?

In approaching the question of the relationship between the moral law and *jouissance*, Lacan starts with Freud. For him, Freud (1929), in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, proposes that what goes from the *jouissance* to the interdiction goes in the direction of a growing reinforcement of the interdiction. When one submits oneself to the moral law, as internalized through parental figures, one therefore reinforces the ever more impossible demands of the superego. However, Lacan also claims that everyone who is on the path of their *jouissance* without limits also finds inevitable obstacles. This presupposes the same root at the heart of both phenomena, namely, that we need a transgression to ascend to *jouissance*, and that is the function of the Law: "Transgression in the direction of *jouissance* only takes place if it is supported by the oppositional principle, by the forms of the Law" (SVII, p. 177).

Lacan here makes an analogy with the Christian commandment to love your neighbour, and proposes that the real problem for a morality founded on love is my neighbour's *jouissance*. If I love my neighbour, then nothing seems more fair than to

want that he enjoy his *jouissance* according to the principles of this love, that is, that he enjoy his *jouissance* “like me”—something that is, from the outset, the principle of the domination, colonization and subordination of the other. It is from this perspective, as well as intending to take this question further, that Lacan proposes to show us how to access *jouissance*. And it is also because of this paradox that Lacan moves away from Kant, and his modern version of the love of God as the love of law, in such a way as to include Sade in his research, arguing that the Marquis has solid things to say in the articulation of the ethical problem. Let us follow the way Lacan formulates this:

This Law makes my neighbour's *jouissance* the point on which, in bearing witness in this case, the meaning of my duty is balanced. Must I go toward my duty of truth insofar as it preserves the authentic place of my *jouissance*, even if it is empty? Or must I resign myself to this lie, which, by making me substitute forcefully the good for the principle of my *jouissance*, commands me to blow alternatively hot and cold? Either I refrain from betraying my neighbour so as to spare my fellow man or I shelter behind my fellow man so as to give up my *jouissance*. (SVII, p. 190)

It is from this point of view that Lacan reminds us of the central formula of Kantian ethics: “Act so that the maxim of your action may be accepted as a universal maxim” (SVII, p. 76). Moreover he pairs it with the Sadean maxim that proposes, as a rule for *jouissance*, the same horizon of universality: “I have the right to enjoy your body, (...) and I will exercise this right without any limit to the capriciousness of the exactions I may wish to satiate with your body” (Lacan, E, p. 648). The important point, for Sade, is the idea of a technique directed to an unsublimated *jouissance*. But how should we understand an unsublimated *jouissance*? Indeed, Lacan will argue that, in Kant as in Sade, the extreme of pleasure, insofar as it forces the access to *das Ding*, is unbearable.

As one of us argues elsewhere, Lacan is constantly reflecting about the dynamics of power involved in the analytical situation; from the dialectic of the slave and of the master to the criticism of the models for the formation of the analysts; from the notion of analytical act to the four discourses theory; from the theory about the end of analysis to the formulation of an ethics for psychoanalysis. That could lead us into recognizing a separation between ethics and politics—as if they excluded each other, and as if the analytical situation were a territory in which, from the outset, the exercise of power had been banished. According to this view, if things were like this, this assurance by decree would reveal a feeble and unhistorical conception of power. Hence, it is not enough to say that the psychoanalytic practice inspires a refusal of power, it is also necessary to show how this refusal is established, what are

the politics, the strategy, and the tactics of this refusal. Here is how the argument is laid out in that book:

Every form of power exercised in the treatment derives from the injunction between the position of the subject, the place that he occupies in a discourse and the space that conditions and limits him. Power works by unifying the space and making it homogeneous." And here he cites Lacan's *Ethics* seminar: "(...) a particular order is unified with a more universal knowledge, in which ethics becomes politics, and beyond that with an imitation of the cosmic order (SVII: 1959-60, p.22). (2011, p. 597)

Here we are especially interested in highlighting the technique, considering that the Sadean morality is defined as a *jouissance* technique. Is it illicit to associate the technique with the regime of the tactics of power and counter-power? If one can find throughout the *Ethics* seminar a constant criticism of technique, this criticism seems to originate both from the Heideggerean objection and from the criticism of the normative uniformization of the psychoanalytic practice. Recall that, strictly speaking, a technique can only be a technique if it is independent of the practitioner's desire. A surgical technique, for example, must, above all, avoid any interference from the surgeon's humor, from his relativities, and from his personal inclinations. Since psychoanalysis intrinsically depends on the subject's desire to be effective, it therefore cannot be dissociated from such a desire. An analyst without an analyst's desire would not be practicing psychoanalysis. As a consequence, in the case of psychoanalysis, ethics is internal to the treatment.

If we search through Freud's and Lacan's work, we will never find a set of protocol rules or actions about what we should do in psychoanalysis. However, what we do find are indications about some crucial points about what *not* to do. Lacan lists them right at the start of his *Ethics* seminar: the ideals of love fulfilled, of authenticity, and of non-dependence (SVII, pp. 8-10). We are therefore referred to a negative dimension: do not promise the cure, do not fix oneself in an ideal of happiness, avoid the *furor curandis*. "It is a smaller politics, a prudent politics, but one that does not discard a specific form of freedom that is not a delirious realization, but one that is, on the contrary, compatible with an experience of truth." (Dunker, 2011, p. 606).

Following this idea, because of the very counter-intuitive character of psychoanalytic action, there is a kind of gap in psychoanalysis when it comes to reflecting and establishing what is a praxis. There are, thus, those who defend that there is a regulating role for ethics in psychoanalysis, as the method is the

foundation; and there are those who defend that psychoanalysis itself is an ethic, since, in it, the method is at the service of an ethics in the constitutive sense. This, however, contrasts with Lacan's speculation at the end of his seminar, in which he laments that psychoanalysis has not been able to produce a new perversion. In other words, if we consider this claim as one of the unfinished horizons of the psychoanalytic ethics, we can conclude that this claim implies a new place for technique. Recall also that perversion is defined as specific incorporation of the law in so far as the Other and subject are inextricably resolved. This does not distortedly locate the law in the domain of the superego, but, rather, in an identification with the author of the law, beyond, therefore, its materialization in codes and rules.

Even if psychoanalysis is established as a refusal of both the psychotherapeutic tradition and of the clinical tradition, this does not exempt us from thinking the negative conception of power that remains in this refusal. Lacan chooses to bind the ethics of psychoanalysis to desire, thus decisively separating it from the utilitarian, the transcendental, or the naturalistic ethic. According to him, even if not all ethics are based on conflict, all politics certainly are. Psychoanalysis is therefore characterized as an ethic that admits the constitutive character of conflict (aligning it to politics), or one for which it has derived value.

Another important observation here refers to a kind of parentheses that characterizes the way Lacan approaches the topic: while the recourse to topology strongly characterizes the seminars that came before and after the *Ethics*, this recourse is completely absent in the *Ethics* and in the corresponding texts, such as *The Direction of the Treatment and the Principles of Its Power* (1958) and *Kant with Sade* (1963); we do not find any mention to the relations between ethics and space, or between ethics and mathematics, with the exception of the anamorphic cylinder of the tragedy. We find here once again another reference to technique originating from the art of producing certain images by way of artificial devices for the purposes of a coordinated distorted image. The anamorphic cylinder of the tragedy refers to the fact that the narrative loops over itself until it produces a kind of exterior projection of its own presentation: it is the beautiful and ecstatic moment in which Antigone lets herself be killed in the name of her desire. This marks Lacan's political position, coherent with his aforementioned argument about the exercise of power, since a complete logic, one that unifies place, space, and position, is precisely what one must avoid in psychoanalysis (Dunker, 2011, p. 603). Anamorphism is precisely a technique that corrupts the relation between the position of the image and the place where it is realized, like, for instance, the spot in the lower part of Holbein's painting *The Ambassadors*, which can only be correctly appreciated as a skull if we position ourselves at a high spot on the right side. In other words, anamorphosis creates a

movement in the one who gazes, what can perhaps evoke a political dimension of ethics as a *jouissance* technique.

Let us return to *Kant with Sade* (1963). Here, Lacan not only argues that *Philosophy of the Bedroom*, which was written by Sade eight years after the publication of the *Critique of Practical Reason*, is compatible with the latter book, but also that the *Philosophy of Bedroom* exposes the truth of the *Critique of Practical Reason*. For Kant, no rule could be derived from a constant relation to pleasure. He rejects the pathological, defined as an action guided by inclinations, sensible experiences or any other bodily determination. In other words, any bodily technique, be it erotic or aesthetic, goes against Kant's pure duty (*sollen*). He recognizes morality as the unconditioned part of reason, without thereby taking into account the subjective division and the use of the pleasures, partaking thus of a tradition that excludes desire and drives from the ethical sphere. A *jouissance* technique, however, is never an automatic exercise of the body, but a certain implied use of fantasy. In Sade's work, this is divided into two characters: Eugénie, who prepares the script, establishes the rules, sets the stage, and chooses the actors, and Dolmancé, the faithful executor, whose condition is one of indifference, impartiality, and apathy, and whose rule is to never enjoy *jouissance* while doing his job. From this doubleness, Lacan extracts a structural property:

(...) the bipolarity upon which the moral law is founded is nothing but the split in the subject brought about by any and every intervention of the signifier: the split between the enunciating subject and the subject of the statement (Lacan, E, p. 650).

Kant with Sade (1963) is considered as a fundamental text in Lacan's oeuvre, not only because of its relevance for the topic of ethics, but also because most scholars defend that it represents a turning point in analytic rationality; a specific moment in which Lacan cannot operate anymore with a strict dichotomy between the imaginary and the symbolic and in which the concept of the real achieves its prominence. According to Safatle (2006), from 1961 onwards Lacan abandons his old program and begins to criticize the very intersubjectivity that was for years the ground of his meta-psychology and of his analytical practice. Even though Lacan never exposed the reasons for this impasse, Safatle argues that he had recourse to an almost theatrical procedure, making a third party take his place in order to criticize him. This third party (term) is Kant. Hence, Safatle argues that we should read *Kant with Sade* as the symptom of an impasse of the intersubjective rationality inside the clinic. Let us follow his argument.

Kant wants to reconcile reason within the practical sphere via the grounding of an unconditioned moral law, one that is categorical and has universal aspirations, that is, one that is valid in every case and for all beings. There is no space here for the genesis of the moral law, since its objective reality is the result of a transcendental deduction. In particular, Safatle is interested in highlighting the fact that the convergence between Kant and Lacan was not just limited to the attempt of opening a universal perspective through the grounding of a transcendental field of intersubjective recognition. There was also an important methodological convergence, since both sought to affirm the dimension of the law against the primacy of the empirical objects in the determination of the will, by having recourse to a “downgrading of the sensible” (2006, p.151). Put more simply, one could say that Lacan had in mind the operation of approximating for the subject the concepts of free will and pure desire. Recall that what characterizes perversion, or at least the technical use of fantasy, is not the desire, but the will to *jouissance*.

Each of these devices indicates a radical inadequacy between the subject's desire and the satisfaction promised by the empirical objects. At the same time, they also put us face to face with two symmetrical procedures of an openness to the realization of a transcendental field of intersubjective recognition by way of the identification of desire with the law. According to Safatle, these symmetries are not coincidental, since both define the subject based on a transcendental function, and both attempt to think the consequences of this in the pragmatic dimension—though Lacan also incorporates a broad notion of praxis, which includes a mixture of ethics, erotics, and aesthetics.

Let us briefly try to spell out these convergences. We have in Kant a refusal to conflate, like in Bentham's utilitarianism, the good with the useful, in Sade we have, symmetrically, a conflation between well-being with desire. To Lacan, the ethics of psychoanalysis is neither in the service of goods, nor in the service of a utilitarian principle, nor is it also Kantian, in the sense of a pure desire, nor is it Sadean, in the sense of a *jouissance* of the difference, as the desire to obtain the pure difference. In other words, both Kant and Sade perceive in the true moral act the affirmation of a satisfaction beyond the pleasure principle and beyond the law.

Still according to Safatle, it is in this way that Kant promises a reconciliation by way of the determination of the will by the law. “Keep this formula in mind: the perfect conformity of the will to the law promises a *jouissance* beyond pleasure” (2006, p.155). Lacan is also seeking a *jouissance* beyond the pleasure principle, which is bound to the empirical objects. As we see in his *Ethics* seminar, Lacan positions *jouissance* by questioning the status of the Freudian distinction between the pleasure principle and the reality principle. However, also in the same seminar, he

situates this distinction in the ethical plane, recognizing the existence of a real that compels the subject beyond the pleasure principle. This real, designated by Lacan at the time by *das Ding*, is a concept that he considered as symmetrical to the Kantian *das Gute*.

Whereas Kant seeks to show that the law is able to keep all the pathological in equilibrium, in formulating desire as the desire of the Other, Lacan calls attention to the fact that a practice like the psychoanalytic practice, which recognizes in desire the truth of the subject, can only know what will come later, revealing what it represses. Nevertheless, one could also say also that the *jouissance* of the subject is the *jouissance* of the Other. Sade wants the freedom from desire, but he expresses such freedom as a right to *jouissance*: “Were the right to *jouissance* recognized, it would consign the domination of the pleasure principle to an obsolete era” (Lacan, E. p. 663). Even so, according to Lacan, we can notice, in Sade’s work, that he stopped at the point in which the desire is bound to the law—in his texts, the mother is still prohibited and the apology of crime can only compel him to an indirect recognition of the law. Lacan emphasizes that if everything in the chain of natural events can be considered as subject to a death drive, that is only because there is a signifier chain. If in Freud it is possible to articulate it as a drive to destruction, as it disputes what exists, it is also a will to create, to begin again.

There is still another point in *Kant with Sade* that is interesting to highlight, namely, the Sadean demand for an incomparable beauty in his victims’ appearances. Beyond the hasty postulates of sexual attraction, Lacan is interested in the caricature that one tried to show in tragedy about the role of beauty. Thinking about Sophocles’s *Antigone*, he says, once again, that beauty functions as “the ultimate barrier that forbids access to a fundamental horror” (E, p. 654). He also highlights that such a remark is only possible in the context of *Kant with Sade*, as it introduces what he calls the discordance between the two deaths—in *Antigone*, because of her condemnation, in Sade because of his attitude of refuting hell at the same time as he directs one to it. Lacan puts to question not only a field of access to that which is in relation to desire: how does one get closer to it? He simply replies: “One doesn’t get any closer on account of the very reasons that structure the domain of the good in the most traditional sense, which is linked by a whole tradition to pleasure” (SVII, p. 216). Let us see, then, how the problem of beauty arises as barrier to the imaginary series.

In his *Ethics* seminar, Lacan has a long commentary on ἵμερος ἐναργής, in which he argues that the glow of beauty coincides with the realization of Antigone’s ἄτη, the moving aspect of beauty that makes us hesitate in judging, that interrupts the analysis, and that confounds us as a kind of blinding; something happens beyond it

that cannot be looked at. For him, this is an illustration of the death drive as formulated by Freud. It is this presence of death in life, faced by the tragic heroine, that confers her this intolerable glow, ἡμερος ἔναργής, this desire literally made visible, as Lacan puts it. This desire could, therefore, be taken to be the desire in act, its march commanded by a time without reversal and in which it is only possible to go forward by losing something. For Lacan, what shocks us in *Antigone's* finale is the fact that she is disgraced, as are all those who are caught in the gods' play. While one is always dealing with the relations between gods and mortals, Antigone presents herself as "αὐτόνομος", a relation between a human being and that which she happens to be the bearer, a signifying cut that confers upon her the power of being what she is in the face of anything.

In this sense, we can say that the function of beauty, as constitutive of desire, is to indicate the site of the relationship of man to his own death. This means that desire would be a scansion between one and another signifier, outside of the chain articulated by beauty between a living being and her death. On the one hand, in the objectual dimension, the ἡμερος ἔναργής would be the mirage that indicates the site of desire in the relation of the subject to her lack of being. On the other hand, the ἡμερος ἔναργής would be something that has as an effect a kind of glare that blocks us from seeing that site. This allows us to understand what Lacan is calling desire in this context. We know that the demand is beyond and short of itself and, as a demand, in articulating itself with the signifier, it demands something else, so that the satisfaction formulated extends itself in this gap. Insofar as demand is characterized this way, desire is formed as what supports this metonym, that is, as a demand beyond what it formulates. Hence, the fulfilling of one's desire is place in a perspective of absolute conditions, a perspective of a "Last Judgment".

Hence the relation established by Lacan, in this moment of his teaching, between desire and death. To fulfil one's desire is to fulfil it at the end, an invasion of death into life that makes this question dynamic. One is dealing here with one's second death. We could say that Lacan wanted to show, in a tangible way, under an aesthetic form, the function of the signifier in the subject's access in her relation to death. That is why he uses the function of beauty to indicate the relation of a man to his own death and to indicate it in a glow. In this context, beauty has nothing to do with what is conventionally called a beauty ideal. In commenting on Antigone's glow, Lacan presents to us the visible desire, beauty as a function of a temporal relation, and its apprehension in the timeliness of the transition from life to death. From this, we can try to reconstitute the ideal form of beauty. In the foreground, the human figure, presented, since Kant, as the limit of the possibilities of beauty. In Lacan, this limit is the envelope of the possible fantasies of human desire, so that he establishes

the figure of the human body, its image, in the relation of man to his second death, his visible desire. It is insofar as the question of beauty makes the ideal enter its role that one finds a passage to the limit.

We can therefore conclude that, according to this perspective, what Lacan seeks to show with Sade is that there is something beyond this chain, the *ex nihilo* over which it is founded and articulated as such. It is this field that he calls the insurmountable or the Thing, where something is projected beyond, where everything that is a location of being is questioned, where sublimation, the work of man (creation), is produced, where he puts himself to court, which is why he works over the example of courtly love. If courtly love puts the woman in the place of the beyond, this does not concern her as a woman, but as an object of desire. The being to which desire is directed is a signifier being—the inhuman character of the object of the courtly love is too evident for there to be any doubt about that.

We should therefore keep in mind this lesson that Lacan draws from Sade: when we advance in the direction of this *central emptiness*, which presents itself to us as the access to *jouissance*, the body of our neighbour is already shattered. We are in this barrier beyond which the inaccessibility of the object as the object of *jouissance* is organized, where *das Ding* is located—the inaccessible real in which one finds the field of our experience and which is the novelty of the analysis in the ethical dimension. Note, however, that the good is not the only barrier that separates us from it: Lacan argues that the true barrier which stops the subject before the unnameable field of radical desire, and therefore before absolute destruction, is, as we have just seen, the phenomenon of beauty. Here we find the model for the technique of *jouissance*, as an aesthetic act and, perhaps, as an ethical act.

We would like to conclude this article by returning to Freud (1929), more poignantly, man's disposition to evilness, to aggressiveness and to destruction, which Lacan compares *Civilization and Its Discontents* to the sadistic elucidation of the problem of moral. Here he claims that we need to face the fact that the evil *jouissance* of our neighbour is what appears as problematic for our specific love. For Sade, it is a question of a technique directed to a non-sublimated *jouissance*, just like Freud claims, in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, there is no common measure between the satisfaction offered by *jouissance* in its first state and the satisfaction offered by *jouissance* in its deviated or sublimated forms. If Kant wanted to reconcile reason to its practical dimension through the grounding of an unconditional, categorical, and universal moral law—which would allow the construction of a regulating horizon that could validate our rational conduct; in Lacan we have a sliding from the moral law to the phallic and paternal law, something that can be

noticed in the way he tried to introduce an erotics at the centre of his ethical interrogation.

We could say that, throughout the whole *Seminar VII*, Lacan binds the moral action to the subject's capacity to recognize herself in something that pries apart her unity and her identity. To clarify this point, however, we need to remind ourselves of the peculiar way that Lacan deals with the death drive. As the person who penned "every drive is virtually a death drive" (E, p. 719), he operates with a kind of drive monism. In this monism, the life drive is related to a narcissistic illusion, in which the unifying character of the life drive refers to the unifying power of the imaginary. According to Safatle (2006), Lacan understands the death drive as something more than the compulsive repetition of the instinct for destruction. This opens up the possibility of our structuring a new reflection about the forms of the negative in the clinic, placing the subjectivization of negation at the centre of the analytic reflection about the cure protocols. This, in its turn, would free the category of the subject of thought from identity, relating thus the cure to an experience of de-centring, of non-identity. Unlike Freud, however, Lacan does not think of death as the return to the inorganic. Rather, he seeks the possibility of satisfying the drive via a symbolic death, that is, a "second death".

In this sense, the death drive, the death drive does not necessarily appear as destruction in the social tissue. It can also appear as a kind of power, one that can lead a person to act beyond her own interests. This "second death", dealt with by Lacan (1959/60, 2008) in his commentary on *Antigone* in his *Ethics* seminar, concerns the objectual dimension of the subject of psychoanalysis. This subject is already a deject, reduced to remains, since he is marked by the signifier that is inscribed with death. In other words, the relation of desire to death follows from its constitution in the field of the Other. Following the seminar, we see that it is precisely this tragic status of the subject in her objectual dimension that will result in an ethic proper to psychoanalysis. Before philosophy properly so called appeared in the 4th century B. C. E., and then formulated the universal parameters of ethical behaviour, of a regulating knowledge, Sophocles' tragedy presents, in the act, the ethical dimension in Antigone's glance—Antigone, who lives in the most absolute solitude, without guides or comfort. This is the dimension highlighted by Lacan in order to deal with desire, a desire that must be sustained in act, that constitutes the transgression of the law that grounds and constitutes the ethics of psychoanalysis.

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