

## The ethics of singularity

Psychoanalysis is not an ethic, but it has an ethic. Which one? No answer among those proposed until now, including those given by Freud or Lacan, has been able to create a consensus.

Psychoanalysis had firstly situated ethics outside of its field: its founder, Freud, said he was “indifferent to the question of ethics” — a term he seemed to have often, if not always, confused with morality. This does not contradict the possible formulation of a Freudian ethics, which is not to be confused with the ethics of psychoanalysis, just as the “desire of Freud” is not to be confused with the “desire of the analyst.” One had to wait for Lacan so that ethics be placed at heart of psychoanalysis. He would first examine the ethical conditions of psychoanalysis — which are no less important than its epistemic conditions — before questioning and thematizing what he called, not the ethics of the subject, nor even the ethics of the psychoanalyst, but the ethics of psychoanalysis. This formulation, which forms a thesis, and which gives its title to Lacan's Seminar of 1959-1960, constitutes in itself a real coup de force.

Lacan's step consisted, on the one hand, in bringing to light the originality of the Freudian stance in matters of ethics, and, on the other hand, in affirming and sustaining that there is indeed an ethics of psychoanalysis — ethics which is deduced from its practice and which is neither confused with the *ethos* of the analyst nor with the ethical position of the analysand — ethics whose principles can be extracted from reservations and criticisms formulated by Freud against education, but also against religion and medicine.

To tell the truth, this step beyond Freud is not as one-sided as has been said here or there. In reality, there is a complex, even tortuous movement of Lacan's position, which accompanies the crucial moments of his teaching.

If Lacan begins to speak about the ethics *of psychoanalysis* in 1959-1960, it is to underline, on the one hand, “the importance of the ethical dimension in our experience and in Freud's teaching” (*L'Éthique de la psychanalyse*, p.11) and, on the other hand, to confirm that psychoanalysis makes a decisive contribution to ethical reflection as such. This might be why this ethics remains, at this stage, an ethics of judgment, which aims to be valid for any speaking subject. This quasi-Kantian universality contravenes and opposes the taking into account of any singularity.

With “Remarks on Daniel Lagach’s presentation” (1960), a first displacement takes place, insofar as the question on which Lacan expands is the following: how does “the path of chatter of analytic experience” leads to an ethic “converted to silence” by “the advent of desire”?

It is with “*Television*” (1973), in the aftermath of his theory of discourses — *L’Envers de la psychanalyse* and “*Radiophonie*” (1970) — that Lacan will, in a firm and definitive manner, establish his thesis regarding the relativity of ethics to discourse. Hence, the ethics of the discourse of the master is not the ethics of the discourse of the hysteric, just as the ethics of the discourse of the hysteric is not that of the discourse of the analyst, which is the only one on which Lacan lingers. It is the latter which he proposes to call “an ethics of Well-saying.” Neither ethics of *the Good*, and even less of the “Sovereign good” — Lacan had already refuted this in his seminar on the *Ethics of psychoanalysis* of 1959-1960 — nor an ethics of saying, but indeed an “ethics of Well-saying,” or an ethics of interpretation, if we are to believe the last lines of “*Television*.” Interpretation evokes and summons desire (cf. *Desire and its interpretation*), transference (there is no admissible interpretation outside transference or before its installation), the cut (which subverts and modifies the surface or the speaker's knot) and the act.

In short, if there is an ethics of psychoanalysis, it is the same that Freud deducts by emphasizing transference — its handling and its maneuver — and Lacan interpretation. The *ethics of desire* and the *ethics of Well-saying*, which we willingly retain as the alpha and the omega of Lacan’s advances on this subject, nevertheless remain within the structure and the universal. This has its price, but leaves in the shadows what, in a psychoanalysis and in psychoanalysis, slips between the particular and the universal, passes through hystorization, thus through original paths, distinctive traits sometimes accentuated in excess, in short, through singularity.

One of the dangers that psychoanalysis faces at present times consists in the various movements which, by wanting to bend the latter to the particularisms of their communal enjoyments, risk not only undermining its universalist foundations — those of the speaking subject, between language and discourse — but to object to what constitutes the very principle of any practice or clinical approach: the one by one. It is at this point that the question of what can be called, not singularity — no doubt because of its many connotations in the French language — but simply the singular, can be placed, a concern which must never leave the analyst, from the beginning to the end of the analytic experience. Indeed, that which should never be forgotten is that: if each

analysand is a subject — the effect of the signifier which divides them and which represents them for another signifier — it is because beyond the diagnostic categories – neurotic, psychotic, perverse – or other categories under which we sometimes place them – heterosexual, gay, lesbian or trans – each subject is a subject in their own way, singular, embodied according to their own style, therefore original or even exceptional.

It remains to be known, now, what should be understood under singularity, and whether it can or cannot articulate, found or constitute the aim of an ethics such as that of psychoanalytic discourse.

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