

TOWARD AN ETHICS OF PSYCHOANALYSIS

An alien language will be my swaddling clothes.
 Long before I dared to be born
 I was a letter of the alphabet, a verse like a vine,
 I was the book that you all see in dreams.

—Osip Mandelstam, from “To the German Language”

A CURIOUS LITTLE BOOK

The Ethics of Psychoanalysis is a curious little book. Curious for the way it came to be as a book, and curious, also, for what it attempts to achieve, for the headings, for the ends at which it may be said to aim. Much like Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, it, too, is based on student lecture notes, stenographer’s notes in this case, taken during a seminar Lacan gave, his seventh seminar, at St. Anne’s Hospital in Paris from November of 1959 until July 1960. Lacan himself remarked on this some twelve or thirteen years later, in his 1973 seminar, his twentieth, entitled *Encore, the Limits of Love and Knowledge*. He began his session of February 13, 1973, by recalling *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, remarking how important Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* had been for the seminar. Lacan had been telling his hearers about the obvious problems translating Aristotle into French when he suddenly turned from this to a reflection on how his own seventh seminar, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, had, perhaps like Aristotle’s *Ethics*, been compiled and produced by a student, J-A Miller, in this case. Lacan recalled how Miller, “wrote it up . . . making it into a written text.” Of course, Miller had no desire to steal the seminar. He was only regretting that it had never been properly published and wished to do something about it. But, Lacan held the transcript back from publication. He said he would like to rewrite it himself one day and make it into “a written text” (S20: 53/50). But this never happened, not in Lacan’s

lifetime, anyway. *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, its text “established” by J-A Miller, who by that time was Lacan’s son-in-law and known as “faithful Acathe,” moral guardian of the work and even billed on the cover of the publications as its coauthor, was finally published in 1986 after a lengthy court battle, which Miller won,¹ through Éditions du Seuil as part of a collection, *Le champ freudien*, originally established by Jacques Lacan and now directed by Jacques-Alain Miller. The problem, of course, is that for both Aristotle and Lacan, the circuit from spoken lecture to written notes, and from there to a published book, which is itself then translated into perhaps dozens of foreign languages, in this circuit, something is always lost, bungled, or misinterpreted. The pages that comprise the published book, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, seem to be but a residue of that seminar, its “death mask.” In their written form, taken from stenographer’s notes, the master’s words never reach their destination. They nevermore run, let alone win, that race between speaker and hearer that seemingly parallels that race known through Zeno between Achilles and the tortoise, a race that shall never be won by Achilles due to the infinity that lies between each step of the way. Now that infinity between speaker and reader, that gap, that uncrossable, incomprehensible distance, is the distance of death, time, and the written word, which functions more like a veil than a wall for the way it is always inviting the reader to try and see what is on the other side. As Lacan asked of Aristotle’s *Ethics*, so we ask of his own seminars on the ethics of psychoanalysis: How can we understand this discourse, separated from us as it is by time and circumstance? What is Lacan trying to accomplish in this seminar? What is he up to? What is he pursuing? What slippery, shiny fish does he bring up from the depths of his thought? How can we think the revolution this text brings for us to read, like a letter from another world, a revolution in the way the human situation in all its social links can be thought and articulated? Is there any reason why it is not thinkable for the philosopher? But we can never have it all. There always seems “a remainder,” something left behind, some fish not brought up from the depths, something that cannot be made-up for, something missed, in short, by *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*. Perhaps it is the remainder of the voice, Lacan’s voice, perhaps it is a certain pleasure, a certain *jouissance*, a great love of truth that should not be and yet also could not fail to be something, a necessity, perhaps, linked to the impossible, something that “does not stop not being written,” something that would help us to understand, in other words, why “he got so worked up” (S20: 54–59/52–56). In any case, Lacan’s contemporary reader thus inescapably feels that he/she does not have all of Lacan in the written pages of his book, that the body of the text is somehow, “not

whole," that, it is not "One," that we, his readers, can never catch up with him, that his truth, the truth that speaks in his discourse, is never quite where one expects to look or to find it, and this but makes us run faster in that impossible-to-win race.

Lacan's seventh seminar, now published in English as *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, has since become one of the best known of Lacan's seminars, and the subject of much commentary. It created a stir in the psychoanalytic field of its time. Only three years after giving the seminar, Lacan was forced out of the IPA, the Association psychoanalytique internationale. Since that time, the seminar has become widely read outside of the field and territory of psychoanalysis, especially by philosophers. This is curious. Why would a text that seems on its surface to deal with a highly specialized and questionable field called psychoanalysis be of interest to philosophers?

AN ANTI-PHILOSOPHY?

Lacan's seminars are replete with references to philosophers and philosophical ideas, especially those of Hegel, Kant, Plato, and Aristotle. Nearly an entire seminar, *Seminar VIII*, from the early 1960s, was devoted to a reading of Plato's *Symposium*. Yet, Lacan himself occasionally spoke of his work as being a kind of "anti-philosophy." A growing body of commentary on Lacan's work also concerns the idea that Lacan was a philosopher of an anti-philosophy, that he no longer found the philosophical tradition to be relevant to what he was trying to think through in his seminars, and that he wished to distance himself from that tradition. In light of Lacan's continuous reference to the philosophical tradition, this anti-philosophical dimension of his work seems paradoxical. What does it mean in this case to be an anti-philosophy? The overall thesis of the following essays is that this thematic is not just a metaphysical and epistemological issue, but that it is especially pertinent to and developed in the context of the question of an ethics of psychoanalysis. It is in the domain of what the philosophical tradition called practical philosophy that the Lacanian anti-philosophy is most forcefully developed. Thus, while all of Lacan's seminars reference the philosophical tradition, his seventh seminar, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, with its focus on the tradition of philosophical reflection on ethics running from Aristotle through Kant and Bentham, seems one of Lacan's more philosophically imbued works. It is especially with regard to the question of the possibility of an ethics of psychoanalysis that we find Lacan's deepest engagement with the

texts of classical philosophy. In this regard, the Lacanian anti-philosophy might well turn out to be one of the ways Lacan ironically articulates a more profound engagement with the European philosophical heritage. Especially in his work on the ethics of psychoanalysis, Lacan develops a curious philosophy as an anti-philosophy.

This philosophical element in Lacan's work, especially his overall concern for the ethics of psychoanalysis, certainly seems to distance him from the teachings of his master, Freud, who, in his autobiographical study, is quite clear about his disdain for any attempt to link psychoanalysis with philosophy and to make it subservient to a moral system.² While these are certainly not Lacan's overall goals, it is nonetheless true that Lacan is much closer to philosophy and to a philosophical reflection on the ethical directions of psychoanalysis than Freud ever was. Lacan's first concern in his seventh seminar is not for determining a set of moral directives and imperatives that would guide action or decide upon its moral worth, nor for determining the "meaning of life." Rather, it seems more concerned with the "directions for a cure," and the questioning of the "ends" of analysis. It is also concerned with the practical task of enabling his patients to answer for themselves the question that hangs over each of their lives: "Why am I suffering?" Thus, Lacan's seminar can be read as being tangent with an important European philosophical tradition, namely, the "care of the soul."

What is the beginning point, that point where the question of an ethics arises, for an ethics of psychoanalysis? Let us begin with Lacan's late seminars of the early 1970s, *Seminar XIX*, entitled . . . *Ou Pire*, and *Seminar XX*, *Encore*. Here, Lacan is discussing what by all appearances seems to be a strikingly classical philosophical proposition: *Ya D'L'UN* ("There is something of the One"). Being is *L'UN*. What is this *UN*, from which Lacan derives, however, not the philosophical foundations of unity and necessary sameness grounding the dominion of the many, but rather "pure difference," and this almost unreadable anagram of *ennui*, Lacan calls *L'UNIEN* ("oneyance," is offered by Marini's *Jacques Lacan: The French Context* as a possible translation of Lacan's neologism).³ Lacan's invention and usage of such strange new terms arises as a result of his probing a dimension of language hitherto untouched and unthought by the philosophical tradition. The term *L'UN*, for example, is, in Lacan's discourse, an instance of what he calls *lalangue*, which might be defined as the chaotic drift of polysemy that is the both the limit and the "underpinning" (*supporte*) for language, a dimension especially of speaking that although it is investigated only in and through language nevertheless works against it, turning it, bending into new forms. *Lalangue* is thus a

dimension that may be said to “support” language (taken in the sense of being a more formal and grammatical discourse), but in this case, “to support” would mean “bearing up” or “putting up” with language. But more importantly, the invention of such neologisms also shows that Lacan’s critical distancing of his work from the philosophical tradition will not be worked out only in the domain of concepts, but that it will also be worked out in the domain and field of language itself. Through the usage of such terms as *L’UN* and *L’UNIEN*, Lacan was playfully bending language so as to think against the philosophical tradition of the One, particularly against the idea that the “One” could provide some sort of ultimate foundation or unity of thought and being.

Lacan’s ethics of psychoanalysis develops over the course of his seminars into an ethic that thus has its foundations, its ends and its beginnings, in *L’UN*, taken precisely as a lack of foundations. Throughout his seminars, Lacan takes pains to undercut every possibility of there being any theoretical foundation, any metalanguage or metaphysical grounding for the ethics of psychoanalysis. There is no metalanguage, as he often says in his seminars, there is no transcendental “idea of reason” active here, no moral idea given in consciousness. Ethics arises only in relation to something other, some other source, something other than a pre-given desire for the Good or an *a priori* reign of moral law. Hence, while Lacan’s seminars thus may speak of “the One,” *L’UN*—“the One which is not just any signifier,” as he says—it is always something indeterminate, a “between,” located between the phoneme, the word, and the sentence, indeed, between the whole of thought. But, again, Lacan’s is not a philosophy of Oneness, but a philosophy—an “anti-philosophy?”—of difference. For Lacan, it is always a question of the signifier, its place, its function, its determining role in the unconscious and so in the whole architecture of thinking and the subject. One might ask in this regard, is “the One” a “master signifier from which the ‘whole of thought’ emerges”? “It is,” Lacan says, “what is at stake in what I call the master signifier” (S20: 143/131). We shall be returning to these themes over the course of the other essays in this collection.

For now, this addresses our question concerning the beginning point for an ethics of psychoanalysis. The “master signifier” is the point of inscription of the subject into what Lacan’s 1960 essay “The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire” (published in *Écrits*), calls the “treasure trove” of the signifier. This is the One mark, the “unary trait” (*trait unaire*), the mark of the One that makes “one,” that makes one something countable, a “subject,” a “person,” a solitary “soul.” The question at issue in the later Lacan, the Lacan of the twentieth seminar, concerns

not only the question of ethics, but also the question of knowledge, of the love of knowledge, and of truth, and the love of truth. "What is knowledge?" Lacan asks. How does one "learn to learn"? What is the significance of these seemingly epistemological dimensions for ethics? We can recall that for Plato, ethics required knowledge, self-knowledge. Such knowledge would defeat self-delusion and ignorance of the Good. Virtue is or requires such knowledge, Plato famously claims. But, Lacan asks, what kind of knowledge is this? Is it knowledge of the truth of desire or does it mask that truth? Whereas the philosopher may puzzle over whether or not such knowledge (in the sense of *connaissance*) can be taught to others, the psychoanalytic Lacanian might wonder if it is even desirable that knowledge of the truth of desire (in the sense of *savoir*) be something that can even be framed pedagogically and transmitted as a doctrine or is it closer to *jouissance*? For, is it ever univocal? Does it speak in one voice? Or is it strikingly individual and polyvocal? What would be the role of a master and of mastery in connection with such knowledge (*savoir*)?

By introducing the stammering, polysemic dimension of *lalangue*, Lacan's work from the early 1970s shows that all such "practical knowledge," insofar as it requires the regulated working of grammar, logic, and univocality, also has as its "other side," as its incarnate edge and lining, the stammering polysemy, the *jouissance* of what Lacan is here calling *lalangue*, a dimension from which communication and articulation arise and upon which they break and shatter. Beyond the question usually asked by ethicists as to whether it is reason or emotions that dominate ethical life, Lacan shows in his account of the genesis of the ethical subject on the basis of the signifier and of the unconscious, how there is a dimension both beyond and beneath the domains of reason and the emotions, something that can only be approached and accounted for from the perspectives of both the structure of the signifier and the embodied, vocal stammering of *lalangue*. Lacan is asking, in other words, as to the emergence of the ethical subject as a subject not just of reason and the emotions, but as a subject of language, desire, and the unconscious. In doing so, he shows the spoken dimensions of polysemy and of disarticulation that are the effects and the affects of the unconscious. What Lacan seeks is to put the question concerning both the beginnings and the ends of ethics on a much wider stage than it has had in the classical philosophical tradition. Lacan's seminars are thereby calling into question the classical philosophical orientations of ethical life as being first of all concerned with the mastery of the emotions, as being bound up with or requiring a kind of ethical "knowledge" or a capacity to reason that will

be able to ultimately master the turmoil of the passions and appetites, a “practical wisdom” (*Phronesis*), as it has been called in that tradition. He is calling into question the whole trajectory of the philosophical conception of the ethical subject as being first of all a knowing subject and the subject of such knowledge, one who is a rational hearer/interlocutor of a philosophical-ethical discourse, and who, through his/her ethical choices, will realize his/her potentiality by putting this knowledge into action and so attaining his/her ultimate Good. It is, in short, the tradition of the “care of the soul” that is in question here, a tradition that begins in the early Socrates and Plato, continues strongly through Aristotle and the Stoic and Epicurean traditions, and that has continued down into modernity in the work of the Czech philosopher Jan Patočka, for example. It is this tradition Lacan wishes to “demystify” by showing that it has missed and occluded something deeply fundamental, namely, the dimensions of desire in relation to the functioning of language and the unconscious.

In doing so, the ethics of psychoanalysis puts another, wider perspective into play, a perspective that takes as its beginning point the discovery of the unconscious and the ascension of the ethical subject in and through the reign of the signifier. It shows how the discourses on ethics and the practical wisdom they have to offer both inhabit and yet must always attempt to put at a safe distance the dimension of the effects and affects of language, of desire, the body, and the unconscious. By the time of his twentieth seminar, Lacan is saying that the ethical subject philosophically posited as a knowing subject is but something “supposed,” “but a dream,” as he puts it, “a dream of the body insofar as it speaks, for there is no such thing as a knowing subject (*il n’y a pas de sujet connaissant*).” Beyond the measured articulations of the philosophical subject “who knows,” and who first of all has “self-knowledge,” Lacan approached through the neologism *lalangue* another dimension of the enjoyment of speaking that he calls the *jouissance* of speech, “an enjoying of speech qua *jouissance* of speech (*parole jouissance en tant que jouissance de parole*),” that is quite beyond and inaccessible to the measured articulations of the philosophical subject who knows what he/she wants (S20: 127/114). But this reference to *jouissance* requires that not only the enjoyment but also the suffering introduced by language be stressed. The effects of the introduction of language into the living human being are not always so salutary in Lacan’s view as they may be for the philosophical ethical tradition, where the measured eloquence of truth brings self-mastery and has a healing effect, for language in the Lacanian universe introduces not only mastery and salvation, it also brings subjection. It can even be seen as a parasite, a disease, virulence, an Other in which the subject, from the

day it is named, from the day it is a subject, is captured and defined. The aforementioned *jouissance de parole* is also bound with suffering. Words bring suffering by introducing a primal tear in life ultimately traced in the splendor and misery of *jouissance*. And it is Lacan's teaching that it is from this very binding of pleasure and suffering, of mastery and subjection, that we come to define and attain all that we call "the goods" of life, the goods that are the objects of desire and that are necessary to sustain our being. Thus, Lacan's ethics of psychoanalysis was in many ways an ethics of speech and the speaking subject, an ethic folded and enfolded across the surfaces of *jouissance* and suffering that defines the being of a speaking subject. Not just a theory that looked down, as though from a bird's-eye point of view, on the subject trapped in the maze of language and desire, Lacan's ethics of speech entered into that maze; it was first of all a practice that sprang from the twisting, turning liminal surfaces of speech it both encountered and enacted in the analytic situation.

Such perspectives can also be illustrated and approached by looking for a moment at a little experiment Lacan summarizes in his twentieth seminar (see S20: "The Rat in the Maze," session of June 26, 1973). Again, the question primarily concerns knowledge: "What is knowledge?" Knowledge in the sense of scientific knowledge is always linked to speech; it is a capacity of speaking beings. Speaking is, thus, a kind of limit: it demarcates those beings that have the logos, and those that do not. Studying, investigating this limit is crucial, for Lacan. A speaking being asks, "What is knowledge?" "How does one learn to learn?" In order to answer these questions, a scientist, one who is supposed to know, one who loves to know the truth, invents an experiment. The scientist asks, if knowledge is a capacity of speaking beings, what about those beings that do not speak? What can we learn from them? What do they have to teach us? It is in this regard that experiment shows in connection with language and the symbolic order precisely how and where desire arises.

A rat is placed in a maze. It must find its way to a button that it must learn to push in order to obtain its reward, its "good," the nourishment necessary for the maintenance of its being. For the researcher, the rat is first identified with its body and with its bodily needs for nourishment. These are recognized starting points. But when, in the repeated insistence of its need, the rat learns to find its way and to push that button, a transformation occurs that sparks Lacan's interest. When the rat is placed in the maze as part of the experiment, the rat itself is no longer just a body, but a "rat-unit." It becomes a countable one, a "unit." This marks the first ascension of the rat body into the discourses of science and knowledge, which is the discourse of mathematics. Submitted

to the discipline of the maze, the rat becomes a “rat-unit,” and so, like all such units, it becomes something repeatable and replaceable. The key moment inside the maze—and the way out—is when the rat extends its paw and touches the button. The button is itself a sign, and when the rat reaches to touch it so that its “good,” its reward, will appear, an appearing made possible by the sign, the rat itself becomes a sign. It learned (*appris*) something. It apprehended the sign by learning that it is something to be grasped (*à-prendre*); (*qu’il a appris la façon dont un mécanisme, ça se prend, qu’il a appris ce qui est à-prendre*). It grasps the sign and is itself grasped by the sign. It becomes a sign in that moment of learned reaching/apprehension. This is the moment of the “master signifier.” Now the key difference between the rat and a speaking being, something Lacan calls “the subject,” is that the subject extends its paw only in its acceptance of the signifying cut of castration, castration here being the operation, the cut, whereby the subject as a speaking being, the subject now defined in Lacan’s ways as a signifier represented to another signifier, comes to be through the acquisition of language by occupying a place or position within the symbolic order, and so becomes a speaking subject, a subject that can learn and that can learn to love learning, to love knowledge and truth. This is the moment, the infinite moment, the infinite field where desire insinuates itself; this is the infinite field of the *L’UN*, the first name. There is something called the One (*Il y a de l’Un*) because there is this “infinite” field that opens with the signifying cut of castration. This way of formulating the problem is suggested by the title of an article on Lacan’s work published in *Scilicet* 5, in September of 1972, “L’Infini et la castration.”⁴ What is in question here is the field, the “domain” of the emergence of language and knowledge, and so also of what Lacan is calling *lalangue*, “lalanguage,” or “llanguage,” for another translation.

Lalangue, the level of the polysemic, stuttering drift of speech, is an embodied effect of the unconscious, the unconscious by and through which the body speaks and from which spoken language arises; *lalangue* is something that the unconscious, “structured like a language,” “knows how” to use as its effect. In this sense, *lalangue* supports and shelters knowledge, here defined as the “know-how” (*savoir-faire*), of the unconscious. Knowledge in this sense “inhabits” *lalangue*. (“Knowledge, insofar as it resides in the shelter of *lalangue*, means the unconscious” [S20: 142/129].) *Lalangue* is there at the moment there is One, at that point of the inscription of the master signifier, where, after so many trials and errors, the subject rises and finally learns to extend its paw, to touch the button, and so get its reward, which is the nourishment necessary for its being. *Lalangue* is there at that point where the rat becomes a

being grasping and being grasped by the sign. The experiment shows in small letters the big letters—the letters of the big Other—of that point of emergence of the subject, that point where, just as at that moment the rat extends its paw, so the subject transforms himself into a sign, becomes a sign in an economy of signs that regulates the relations of all knowledge, as of all marriage and exchange. This is the moment, like the rat in the maze, at which the subject is inscribed in the Other, in the lack at the heart of the Other, in the symbolic order and the whole economy of the circulation of goods and rewards by which the subject's being is both marked and sustained. Humans, like the rat, cannot leave their being behind. They must learn to find their rewards, their “goods.” In order to sustain their being, to sustain the body of their being, rat and human must both submit, they must subject themselves to the maze of the sign, which is also the maze of desire. This is the point where both language and desire emerge, insofar as desire is what is left over from the articulation of need. This also is the point where “love” emerges, love as the love of knowledge and the love of truth, the kind of love spoken about in Plato's *Symposium* that leads the soul to the ultimate knowledge, the Good beyond being. This is precisely the point Lacan marks as the beginning point of ethics and of the discourse on ethics, the seminar entitled *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*.

For our purposes, this is why this little experiment is so revealing. It shows not only that moment where the subject becomes a subject in the sense that it becomes a speaking, desiring being, one condemned to always having its being elsewhere, but it also shows how, insofar as this subject reaches for its “good,” it becomes an ethical subject. The subject in the maze of language and desire brings into view *lalangue*, the language of the unconscious that “shelters” and supports knowledge and yet itself cannot be an object of knowledge.

The analogy of the rat in the maze brings into view something that is ordinarily missed: the rise of the speaking subject in and through castration and its institution as something represented by a signifier for another signifier. Knowledge implies or requires articulation. As the rat is the rat of the maze, so the subject is the subject of the unconscious. The subject as a speaking, ethical subject, the subject of the unconscious arises through castration, which is that moment it becomes a subject “represented by a signifier for another signifier,” just as the rat makes itself a sign, a sign of its presence as a rat-unit, by pressing its paw at the sign of the button. With castration comes repression (*refoulement*), a primary level of repression, that is not so much a psychic structure or the more secondary repression of a specific memory, for example, as it is

the effect, the logic of the signifier, which is a logic of differences. The first name, *L'UN*, is the One of pure difference.

Now, the ethics of psychoanalysis also begins with the assertion that there is an unconscious. However the psychoanalyst posits the fact of the unconscious, getting back to this unconscious is not possible for the articulations of knowledge. The truth it seeks, the truth that speaks *lalangue*, can only be half-articulated in the language of knowledge. There are barriers; there are limits. The unconscious, which, for Lacan, is not just a dark bag full of instincts but something structured, “like a language,” is no doubt a kind of cause, a cause of the speaking, desiring subject. As a cause, the unconscious has its effects, which are themselves subject to being folded back, reduced (*rabattu*). Since the ethics of psychoanalysis cannot know this cause, since it cannot get back behind the barriers set up against it, it can only know its effects and the affects that arise from those effects. It can only be the knowledge of the affects of the effects of the unconscious, which are necessarily folded back, reduced, pushed back (*un rabattement des effets*) insofar as it they are potentially subversive.⁵ This is a paradox of the ethics of psychoanalysis: its knowledge, its shadow-draped, half-said truth, can never be the articulation of a knowledge of causes, as Aristotle said all knowledge must be insofar as it is to be knowledge. Psychoanalysis can only be but an ambiguous articulation of the effects and the affects of an unconscious domain. This is what it pursues, what it must make do with.

So, Lacan says he cannot enter here, cannot enter the domain of the unconscious “without a hypothesis.” And his hypothesis is this: The individual who is affected by the unconscious is the same individual who constitutes what I call the subject of a signifier” (S20: 142/130). It is this subject—and not the subject as one “who knows” (*connaissance*)—that must also become the ethical subject caught in the knots of desire and moral-ethical law, a subject that is bound by the limits of language and that is inscribed within the limits of the symbolic order. Among the affects of the unconscious on the subject, would also include a desire to transgress those limits, a desire, and an unavowed passion to get back behind or beyond the limits of language, to exceed the limits of the law. This is a desire for the “Real,” which Lacan names as the third field in his interlinked topology of the fields of the Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real. With the inscription into the symbolic order comes order, comes regulations, and the reign of moral law. The real is whatever disrupts that order and that law; whatever breaks the operation of the symbolic order. Access to the real is difficult and perhaps dangerous, but also not without a certain enjoyment, a certain *jouissance*. Even the love

of knowledge and the love of truth, insofar as they are ways of access to the real, are the ways of *jouissance* as access to the real. Ultimately, as we shall see in the other essays in this collection, for Lacan, this will be a feminine *jouissance*—a *jouissance* of expenditure, distinguished in Lacan's seminars from a "phallic *jouissance*" in that it cannot be put to work in the production of meanings or use values—and a "feminine way." It is this attempt at an access, however indirect, to the unconscious, an access to the "real" of the unconscious and to everything that is at the limits of language, that is so essential to Lacan's discourse on ethics, his teachings on the ethics of psychoanalysis. This makes of Lacan's ethics an ethics of the real and of *jouissance*, the *jouissance*, for example, of the love of knowledge and truth, the *jouissance* of the "extended paw."

We can now take this next step: While the ethics of psychoanalysis is based on the assertion, for example, that "there is an unconscious," this is an assertion of existence that is made and marked from within the horizon of the infinite and of a "beyond of being" Lacan calls ex-istence. Nothing is without it being said that it is, Lacan says: "*Il est évident que rien n'est, sinon dans la mesure où ça se dit que ça est*" (S20: 137/126). The assertions of the existence of castration qua signifying cut, and the infinite, qua mathematically articulated language of the unconscious, are thus, as statements, knotted together in the sense that the conditions for their possibility are in the same hole, the same cut, the same rupture torn in the fabric of the real through which the subject is plunged into the field of the symbolic. At the heart of the ethics of psychoanalysis one finds several such repeated and interrelated statements (*énoncé*), several essential "theorems of existence," as the *Scilicet* article previously cited calls them: "There is castration," "there is the infinite" (*il ya a de l'infini*), or, phrased mathematically, "there exists an infinite ensemble" (*un ensemble infini*), there exists a "paternal function" (*une fonction paternelle*), and, there is the One (*il y a l'Un*).⁶ These are all linked to what Lacan calls the "phallic function." As such, they all arise from the same rupture Lacan continues to call castration, which is the rupture, the hole of an infinite lack at the heart of human existence, the lack of desire, marked in the inscription, the signifying cut of the master signifier. Beyond the articulations asserting existence, nothing can be said to exist. The "nothing is" (*rien n'est*) names the ex-istence, the dimension of the "beyond" existence of the subject of the unconscious insofar as its being is also a kind of beyond-being, a radical alterity, the ex-istence of the inarticulable and so inaccessible real.

We have mentioned the "infinite lack." Let us pause and consider this word, the "infinite." For Lacan, the "infinite" has essentially a mathematical definition rather than a metaphorical or a figurative one. This

shows that Lacan's discourse on the ethics of psychoanalysis, its articulations, will tend in, especially in the early 1970s, toward the language of the *mathème*, toward formalization, as a condition for its discourse, at the same time that it also leans toward the poetic utterance, toward the plays of words and spoken language (his use of "*lalangue*," for example), and toward the psychotic, private languages of a poet like James Joyce. It is with these perspectives that the ethics of psychoanalysis finds its beginning points and its horizon, and that it returns to this infinite horizon, the infinite "*milieu élémentaire*," the "elementary inscription" of the One, the One of pure difference, where desire arises.⁷ Its horizon is the horizon of the infinite field where language and desire arise, and not the horizon of death and finitude, as one finds in much of the twentieth-century philosophy of the ethics of authenticity. If this is the case, then Lacan's ethics, as an ethics of *jouissance* and the real, is however not an ethics of finitude, for it finds its beginning point at that moment of the "milieu" of the infinite. Infinite and finite are not opposed here. One might even say that the *milieu élémentaire* of the infinite enfolds and shelters the finite, which, in the figures of death, the famous "double death," death qua "the death drive" (*pulsion de mort*), the infinite of repetition, and desire, open from within its horizon. Thus, the ethics of psychoanalysis is an infinite ethics, an ethics of the infinite, and not an ethics of the pathos of finitude.

Regarding this mathematical conception of the infinite, let us in closing cite the paradox that Lacan says obtains in modern European science: First, Lacan's work could be thought of as articulating a "theory of ensembles"; a mathematics of ensembles, a logic of sets, defines his topography, which might even be characterized as his way of writing a poetics of the unconscious. Yet, this topography, this theory of ensembles is not intended to be merely a *model* of the unconscious. Rather, it is something actually produced in the realm of the unconscious. In other words, Lacan is not attempting in his ethics of psychoanalysis to produce a discourse *on* or *about* desire (his shall not be "a discourse *on* semblance" as he says in the title to his eighteenth seminar [S18]), but rather a discourse that is itself the register of the effects of the unconscious. Here is where the *Scilicet* article pinpoints a "crisis of European civilization," such that mathematics and science are understood to speak and work on the basis of a terrain, the terrain of the unconscious, which would be a subversive terrain of breaks, ruptures, and contradictions—the unconscious does not abide by the logic of noncontradiction—but at the same time, the mathematical-scientific articulation speaks only in the language of pure entities; it necessarily speaks a language from which all pulsions have in some sense been exhausted, rendered safely non-contradictory,

with all their breaks and potentially disturbing movements and whirlpools plugged up, their reserves of pulsions effectively reduced, pushed away, such that the “mathematical machine,” as one might call it, can finally create and deliver not only a “finished product,” but a finished and resolved state of mind, as well. Phrased otherwise, one might say that at the level of the scientific-mathematic statement, the level of the *énoncé*, which is the level of the finished product, there is also a level of *énonciation* that underlies it and circumscribes it, but which has been forgotten. This forgetting, however, is no doubt essential to its being what it is. Behind or within every “said” there is also a “saying” that must be pushed back, reduced, or censored in some way in order to insure the operation of the scientific and mathematical apparatus. And as long as we’re at it, let us stress the parallels with truth here: behind every truth conceived as the truth value of a statement, which pretty much defines scientific truth, there is a truth as *aletheia*, a truth, in other words, that both gives and reveals, and in this giving also withdraws and conceals, a truth that cannot be said, a truth only half-said. This truth goes unremarked in scientific statements, but it is there, an unapproachable level of “ex-istence.” To characterize this situation as a “crisis,” as the author of the *Scilicet* essay claims, shaking the European scientific discourse down to its roots, in some ways obviously echoes the Husserlian conception of a “crisis of the European sciences.” Indeed, it is tempting to suggest that both Lacan and Husserl might agree, but in different ways and according to different criteria, that the universality and objectivity of scientific conceptions—and this would be especially true for the so-called sciences of the human soul, the “psycho-logos”—and the regulated functioning of their conceptual apparatuses, have been uprooted, displaced from their sources and origins. Not that this situation is something that could have been avoided, or that things could have been otherwise. Nonetheless, in the spirit of this, Lacan would not wish to repeat the degradation of what one might call the infinite discourse of desire, as the *Scilicet* essay phrases it, which is certainly something one finds in the “master discourses” of philosophical ethics and morality. Instead, Lacan would oppose to any such discourse “on truth,” or “about truth,” a discourse that, like a seismographic needle, registers the trembling effects of the truth of desire, a discourse that is the register of the effects and the affects not of a pure object but of a pure, infinite lack. This would be not an ethics *about* the infinite, but an infinite, or rather, an “in-finite” ethics.⁸

Not only desire and death, the word “love” also returns here within this horizon of the infinite. It must be said at this juncture that Lacan’s ethics of psychoanalysis has “love” as its strongest passion and in some

ways its guiding ideal. In his eighth seminar, for example, he maintains that he has always been passionately interested in love, one of the oldest and most essential of passions. But, again, this is not the sort of “love” whereby two become One. Lacan made two important remarks in his seminar on “love” and “the limits of love,” the seminar entitled *Encore*, given in 1972–1973: First, that “love is the linchpin (*pivot*) of everything that has been instituted on the basis of analytic experience” (S20: 39/40). In saying this, Lacan might well be referring to “doctor love,” which he says in his seventh seminar has almost become a guiding ideal for analytic practice, something active in “the transference.” In certain circles of psychoanalytic practice that Lacan rejects, such love is highly valued for the way it is essential in their idea of a “cure” as identification with the ego of the analyst. Second, he defines love as “lack,” as “giving what one does not have.” Now since it is precisely “truth” that one does not have, not the whole truth, anyway—it is the truth that is always lacking—we could say that Lacan’s discourse gives the gift of truth, that it constitutes a kind of “love of truth” that at the same time is a questioning of the philosophical “love of truth.” Does such an anti-philosophical gesture not yet speak from the very heart of philosophical discourse, which above all others, leaps from the embers of a “love of truth”? Perhaps. In its ethical-practical dimensions, Lacan will situate this passion called love not just in terms of truth, but more importantly in terms of the field of “the Other.” But what Lacan is calling “the Other” must not be confused with that enigma-laden field ethical and political philosophers call “intersubjectivity” and “community,” whereby the Other is taken to mean the face of the other, of the other as “neighbor,” in other words, the “other” as site and source of the moral command to “love one’s neighbor.” Lacan’s seminars distance themselves from such traditional discourses on love. It is not a love for the neighbor as Other that is at issue here. For Lacan the Other qua neighbor is the Other qua “symbolic order” that is in us “more than us.” It is a question of a love—like the other passions of hatred and ignorance—that does not originate in us, certainly not in the depths of our souls, but that comes to us and is provided by this “Other” (*Autre*), by the Other as lack and by the lack that is in the Other.

A questioning of truth, a question of making truth speak, is also an important part of Lacan’s seminars on ethics, and this both brings his discourse close to philosophy and maintains a distance from it. This is not the sort of philosophical saying of truth whereby truth is opposed to semblance in the sense that truth is opposed to what is in some way false. Truth is semblance for Lacan, where semblance refers to an important function of language and to the play of masquerade, being semblances

that are lures, that are “semblance(s) of being,” as *Encore* puts it (S20: 84). The whole world knows that there is nothing truer than that truth that speaks in the enunciation, “I lie.” An unbreakable truth here speaks. This enunciation is thus far from the shadow of the false. But who or what is it that speaks in this enunciation that says, “I” (*Je*)? It is semblance itself, Lacan says in his eighteenth seminar, *D’un discours qui ne serait pas du semblant* (S18: 14). Moreover, as Lacan continues in that seminar, semblance is continuous with discourse; it a question of a *semblant* that regulates the economy of discourse (S18: 18), an economy that is also an economy of truth insofar as the truth is not only what obtains from within language as something said, but especially insofar as truth is always only “half-said” (*mi-dire*). These are the Lacanian theses and questions on truth that we shall be following in our reading of Lacan’s seminars.

In all these ways, Lacan’s *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* is philosophical not only in its passion, but also in its purpose, which is to question the possibilities of and the limits for an ethics today. If Lacan finds those limits in the field of desire, which is to say, in the field of the signifier, then Lacan’s discourse on ethics is in some ways a “critique of desire.” It seems to ask as to an Other source of ethics, and another heading, as well. How does this relate to a possible questioning not only of ethical discourse, but also to political discourse, and to the relations between ethics and politics, as well?

With these perspectives in mind, let us return now to what was posed earlier: However Lacan’s book, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, stirs up philosophical questioning, it is also curious for the way it succeeded in casting Lacan as an “anti-philosopher.” Is this correct? Is this a helpful way of characterizing Lacan’s confrontation with philosophy? It certainly has the merit of bringing the relationship between Lacan’s teachings and those of the European tradition of philosophy more closely into question. Lacan indeed says in his seventh seminar that he wanted to “demystify” the classical European philosophical ethical traditions. It is from Freud’s discovery of the unconscious that a whole new ethical domain presented itself throughout Lacan’s seminars, one seemingly opposed to philosophy, a domain that might be misunderstood by philosophers, but that could not be ignored. Freud’s discovery, to which Lacan returned with a messianic sense of urgency from the 1950s through the 1960s, thus provided him with the hypotheses and the language that made a stark questioning of the European classical traditions in ethical and moral discourse a theoretical and a practical necessity. This questioning is also perhaps his finest philosophical moment.

BETWEEN "CARE" AND "THE CURE":
PSYCHOANALYSIS HAS AN ETHIC

So, "Toward an Ethics of Psychoanalysis." As we have seen, the path toward such an ethics is the path of demystification. Just as Plato, for example, had to demystify the sway that the poets held over Greek education and ethical life in order to clear the path toward a philosophical ethics, so Lacan uses the poets Shakespeare, Sophocles, and Claudel, for example, to demystify the sway that the philosophical tradition, especially that of the "care of the soul," has had over the European ethical imagination. He does so in order to clear the path toward a new ethics of psychoanalysis and a new way of articulating the truth of desire. But this is a double path and a double demystification. There is not only the path of the demystification of the philosophy and of "the care of the soul"; there is also the demystification of the practices and theories of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy itself, the path of the demystification of "the cure."

An early essay, "Variations on the Standard Treatment," initially published in 1955 at the request of Henri Ey for the *Encyclopédie Médico-chirurgicale* and republished in 1966 in *Écrits*, with changes and updates, gives us an important indication regarding the role and place of an ethics in Lacan's teachings and his psychoanalytic practice. In this essay, Lacan makes an important, guiding distinction between psychoanalysis and psychotherapy. The deciding difference between these two is that psychoanalysis has an ethic; it possesses a "rigor that is in some sense ethical, without which any treatment, even if it is filled with psychoanalytic knowledge, can only amount to psychotherapy."⁹

As Lacan continues in this essay, the question of rigor bears on the requirement for a "formalization," a "theoretical formalization," which he says has not been provided because it has all too often been confused with a "practical formalization," which Lacan says would in turn become nothing more than a set of rules regarding what is and what is not to be done during the analytic session.¹⁰ Such theoretical formalization will continue to develop over the course of Lacan's seminars to the point where mathematics and logic become the key discourses for his theoretical work.

An important question for us shall be the bearing of this "theoretical formalization" on philosophy. What is the relation between this theoretical formalization, as Lacan calls it, and "practical philosophy," on the philosophical formalization of ethics and politics?

For Lacan, the concern for a "rigor" and for an "ethics" bears directly on the question of the goals or ends of analysis, something he touches

on in the opening pages of *Seminar VII*. What, he asks, is to become of the traditional, guiding ideals of analysis: the ideal of “human love,” of “authenticity,” and of “non-dependence”? Shall these be maintained uncritically? Clearly, he concludes, the ethics of psychoanalysis will involve an “effacement,” a “setting aside,” and a “withdrawal” such that the it shall be distanced from the sort of philosophical ethics that preceded it, namely the ethics of “good character,” the ethics of “habits, good and bad habits,” (S7: 10/19) for that ethical tradition, rooted as it was in the teachings of Plato and Aristotle, is an ethics of “improvement,” and so is an ethical tradition that became identified in Lacan’s seminars with a kind of orthopedics of the human soul.

In this 1955 essay, Lacan asks whether it is the overall intention of psychoanalysis to evaluate itself in terms of whether or not an “improvement” in the patient has been effected. How can psychoanalysis make its assessments according to such terms as “improved,” “much improved,” or “cured?”¹¹ Even Freud, in Lacan’s view, only saw the “cure” as “an added benefit (*la guérison comme bénéfice de surcroît*) of analysis and not its motivation. In fact, Freud expressed caution regarding the “misuse of the desire to cure.” Lacan: “This is so ingrained in him (Freud) that, when an innovation in technique is based upon this desire (to cure), he worries deep inside and even reacts inside the analytic group by raising the automatic question: ‘Is that still psychoanalysis?’”¹² Perhaps one of the chief reasons for this scruple regarding the desire to cure is an inner uncertainty about precisely what it means to have brought about a “cure.” Would it mean to ‘normalize’? Would it mean that the patient, in a completed “transference,” has successfully identified him/herself with the supposedly active, normal functioning of the ego of the analyst? Would it mean that the patient has finally achieved a “normal” genitally based sex life? Would it amount to “happiness,” entailing the “exclusion of the bestial desires,” (S7: 13), the telos par excellence of ethical thought since the ancient Greeks? Is psychoanalysis an “orthopedics” of desire? (See S7: 11) Such were some of the goals set by many analytic parishioners, according to Lacan, and it was such perspectives and such performative goals that Lacan questioned throughout his teachings.

Clearly, then, “the cure,” at least in the sense of bringing about the realization of human happiness, was not to be the deciding criteria for an ethics of psychoanalysis. Rather, the sought-for ethic in Lacan’s work seems to be more concerned with the desire of the analyst in the analytic situation. Would the analyst, in other words, demand a cure that would in some way meet the demand of the analysand for happiness? After all, Lacan’s early audiences were comprised for the most part of

aspiring or practicing analysts. If the desire of the analyst was not to be chiefly aimed at a desire 'to cure,' in this conventional sense of the term, what, then, was its objective? Perhaps there is an ethical dimension here by which there is more at stake in the analytic act than restoring in the analysand's ego an imaginary sense of well-being and 'happiness.'

Lacan's 1955 essay establishes three criteria that he continued to explore in his subsequent seminars: First, the dynamic of psychoanalysis, which meant that "formalization" would not lead to a static structuralization, but would concern the "pulsation" of the opening and closing of the unconscious. Second, the topography, which in Freud's work first divided the human psyche into the three systems of the unconscious, the preconscious, and the conscious, and in a later topography divided into three agencies of the ego, superego, and the id. Lacan developed his own 'topology' as a way of developing a theoretically rigorous (i.e., non-intuitional) structural differentiation of the three fields of the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real. This is not just a metaphorical expression of the structure of the field of the psychoanalytic adventure; rather the topology is that structure itself. This topology privileges the signifying "cut," or *coupure*, by which a continuous transformation can be distinguished from a discontinuous one. This has an important bearing on treatment. Using the example of a Möebius strip, Lacan shows how the "traversal of a fantasy," as he calls it would be a continuous transformation such that the subject, the analysand, would not have to make a leap from the inside of a fantasy to its outside. A discontinuous transformation, on the other hand, would be brought about when the analyst brings about an interpretation of the subject's desire—and this is what analysis offers, namely, "interpretation"—that would modify the structure of that desire in a radical way, effecting a complete and discontinuous transformation of it.¹³ The third criterion named by Lacan in his 1955 essay is that of an economy, which, in Freud, refers to the "economic point of view." This concerns the circulation and distribution of a quantifiable energy that can increase and decrease. In terms of the treatment, this allowed Freud to scientifically understand neurotic symptoms expressed by patients who felt that "there was something in me that was stronger than me," and by the energetics of sexual discharges that often triggered neurotic symptoms.¹⁴ This also relates to the "transformation of the energy of desire, which makes possible the idea of the genesis of repression," that and the "attraction of transgression" that Lacan singles out as an important, indeed decisive ethical dimension of analytic practice (S7: 6 and 2, respectively).

These criteria only sketch the most general levels of conceptualization in Lacan's hands. They were also continuously transformed, enriched,

and carried beyond themselves in a movement he calls “the principle of extraterritoriality.”¹⁵ Each of them opened a new level—better, a *renewed* level of questioning—that came to define *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*. A new level and a new way of envisioning the ethical subject, Lacan’s was thus an ethic that surpassed, or at least sought to surpass, the limitations of the sort of “ego analysis” and “object relation” theory more typical in the psychoanalytic doxa of his times, thereby taking psychoanalysis in new directions.

Hence, the first criterion, that of the dynamic, not only resists the stultifying effects of a static, structural approach in psychoanalysis, but it also effectively downgrades the “ego” in relation to a new privileging of the unconscious, which is shown to be dynamic rather than static, and so renews Freud’s concerns for the importance of the death drive and the “beyond” of the pleasure principle. Speech, desire, and death are thus linked, dynamically entangled. No longer captivated by the “ego” and its trembling before death and finitude, the Lacanian ethics can now take its start from the horizon of the in-finite.

The second criterion, whereby the Freudian topography becomes a Lacanian topology, is of fundamental importance for it occupies a place where the topoi of the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real overlap. It is here that Lacan encounters not only the whole question of the formation of the ethical-political “subject,” but the question, as well, of the relation of the subject to the community, the ethical to the political dimensions of human community. This criterion shall allow us to see just how Lacan proposes to completely recast the philosophical perspectives of these domains.

As for the third criterion, that of the economic, this is a level both theoretical and theatrical, a level with its own formalities, rigors, as well as its requisite ethical, political, and poetical dimensions. This is the level of *jouissance*. In that it marks the very limits of what can be said, *jouissance* is the most insistent ethical question and conundrum for psychoanalysis. Where *jouissance* is conceptualized and articulated in terms of a double economy of production and expenditure, it is a *jouissance* that not only simmers across the surfaces of the poetic, tragic, and dramatic discourses, it also infuses the Lacanian psychoanalytic discourse, as well, the discourse of his famous seminars, the discourse that gives voice to the “I who am speaks the truth.” Is this articulation of *jouissance* not the central anti-philosophical moment of Lacan’s “ethics of psychoanalysis”? And where Lacan speaks of death and desire does he not also transform, “demystify,” as he says, a monumental tradition of ethics, that of the “care of the soul,” by placing at its center this decentering dimension of