

## Ethics, a singular concept

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The term 'ethics' derives from the Greek 'ethos' meaning 'custom'. It is at the origin of acts, customs and marks the norm that implies the behavior of the subject and its effects on the social, therefore having a double aspect that implies the particular and has consequences in the social.

Each subject is singular, the idea of singularity refers to the distinction or separation from the common. The singular is alone, it is the only thing of its kind, the rare. The singular is in opposition to the universal that would be common to all.

Each subject struggles between the need to be different and the need to be accepted in groups through common traits of identification. Those forces operating in opposite directions are always present.

Ethics carries in itself no code, no rules that indicate how humans have to conduct themselves, each subject has his own ethics, contrary to morality that entails regulation through rules that are marked from an authority that commands for all individuals.

Ethics entails an evolution in the individual who decides, not so much based on the mandates that regulate his community, but also according to his intimate judgment, which in turn also demands from him, judges him, or blames him. It is then something internal, something that is not written anywhere, from which the individual values, decides, acts and therefore is responsible for his act and his saying.

Individuals are bound by their social ties and cannot ignore their moral laws, so they have to deal on the one hand with their own self-imposed impulses and on the other hand they face the rules that govern coexistence, which sometimes leads to conflicts and to seeking treatment.

In her text<sup>i</sup> "The curse on sex" Colette Soler explains it clearly: "*The question of ethics is inseparable from that of the symptom, from the moment we say that the symptom is enjoyment, and that ethics is defined by what I call the question of enjoyment. The expression choice of enjoyment must not be understood in the sense of a choice made by the subject, it is the other way around, this, is rather found with enjoyment, so to speak*".

Ethics marks, therefore: acts, symptoms, affects and their effects appear in the clinic. It is something intrinsic to desire, but also to discourse, which has effects on politics, science and, of course, on social links.

The subject of ethics is the subject of the unconscious because "*the status of the unconscious is ethical and not ontic*".<sup>ii</sup> This subject is divided, sometimes fading, and may even lose its symbolic identification, which has effects on its libidinal

economy and introduces it into the order of desire. Mobilizing desire is an ethical principle in psychoanalysis.

Lacan points this out to us: the ethical question in psychoanalysis is articulated "*by the location of man in relation to the real*"<sup>iii</sup> that organizes psychic life and directs it towards a beyond of the pleasure principle.

Lacan writes a whole seminar on "The Ethics of Psychoanalysis" where he makes his own reading of Freud's formulations on ethics. In it he traces the ethics of Aristotle and the Kantian morality that he puts in relation to Sade's philosophy and the tragedy of Antigone. Lacan works on the genesis of the "super-ego" which he places under the register of a relationship with the signifier of the law of discourse. Lacan ends this seminar with the paradoxes of ethics.

It is in this last chapter about these paradoxes where he points out "*The only thing that one can be guilty of is to giving ground relative to one's desire, this proposition acceptable or not in this or that ethics, expresses quite well what we find in our experience*". That is, he maintains that the <sup>iv</sup> ethical act is one that is *in accordance with the desire* of the subject.

Not giving in to desire aims to the "saying well", to recognize oneself in the unconscious. It is about not falling into the sin of moral cowardice, nor of superego imperatives. For an analyst it means never renouncing the desire to know about the subject's being, accepting the singularity of its symptom and its enjoyment, is the ethics on which psychoanalytic practice is sustained.

The ethics of psychoanalysis acts to reveal the singular enjoyment and at the same time it respects the intimate judgment that governs the unconscious desire of the subject.

The next III Convention of Madrid in July 2024 on the "Ethics of Psychoanalysis" will allow us to reflect and debate about its clinic and situate the impasses of analytical discourse today.

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Translation: Chantal Degril

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<sup>i</sup> Soler, C. La malédiction sur le sexe [*The curse on sex*]. Université de Paris VIII Département de Psychanalyse. Academic year 1996/1997. Spring. (2000) p.185

<sup>ii</sup> Lacan, J. The Seminar Book X, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis. Trans. Dennis Porter. WW Norton, New York, London, 1986, p.34

<sup>iii</sup> Lacan, J. The seminar Book VII The ethics of psychoanalysis. Ed. Paidós, Buenos Aires (2003) p.11

<sup>iv</sup> Óp. Cit. P. 321