

HOW LACAN'S *ETHICS* MIGHT IMPROVE OUR UNDERSTANDING OF NIETZSCHE'S CRITIQUE OF PLATONISM: THE NEUROSIS & NIHILISM OF A 'LIFE' *AGAINST* LIFE.

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ABSTRACT: This paper sets to answering the question of how Lacan's 1959-60 Seminar on *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*¹, with its recurring critique of the Platonic idea of a moral Sovereign Good, might contribute to and improve our understanding of the Nietzschean project to diagnose the moral metaphysics instigated by Plato in philosophy, and by Christianity in religion, as a history of untruth and nihilism—*opposed to life*—in preparation for its overcoming. I explore the possibility that Lacan's *Ethics* might make such a contribution by i) its tripartite ontology of the real, the symbolic and the imaginary serving as an additional frame of reference for examining the nature of the Good and our configurations of desire beneath it; and ii) by its more detailed elaboration of the archaic, polymorphous perversity at the instinctual base of the drives, what Lacan in his *Ethics* will call *das Ding*, the somewhat diabolical Freudian Thing. I also attempt to indicate how Nietzsche's own ethics might make a contribution to those of the Lacanian, for the purposes of further combating what I will take to be the contemporary neurosis and nihilism of a 'life' *against* life—as indicated today for instance by such phenomena as the physical destruction of the environment, along with us as amongst its earthly inhabitants.

KEYWORDS: Lacan; Nietzsche; Ethics; Platonism; Aristotle; the Good; Nihilism; the Death-drive; the Real, Life.

INTRODUCTION: LACAN & NIETZSCHE.

In 2006 a Lacanian analyst and professor of philosophy at Buenos Aires contributes a small paper to a collection put together by Slavoj Žižek entitled: *Nietzsche, Freud, Lacan*². A paper in which said analyst-professor Silvia Ons, makes for the reasoned claim that the Lacan-Nietzsche relation remains still at present under-examined: something she finds both "surprising and symptomatic".³ Surprising because Nietzsche is the philosopher

1. Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-60: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book VII*, ed. J-A Miller, trans. D. Porter, Norton: NY-London, 1991 (will also be referred to as Lacan's *Ethics*, and cited in text with page number as LE).

2. Silvia Ons, 'Nietzsche, Freud, Lacan', in Slavoj Žižek ed., *Lacan: The Silent Partners*, Verso: London-NY, 2006, pp. 79-90.

3. Ons, 'Nietzsche, Freud, Lacan', in Žižek ed., *Lacan: The Silent Partners*, p. 80.

who would be *closest* to psychoanalysis: a precursor of whom Freud at one point concedes anticipates psychoanalysis in “the many instances”⁴. Nietzsche is the philosopher who as Ons puts it once discovers “the symptom in morality”⁵; or as I will put it here for further examination, discovers a certain moral idea of the Good to be *symptomatic* of a ‘life’ lived in too many ways *opposed* to life; an idea to be promoted as cure for precisely the problems it is many times source of.

Lacan’s Seminar *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, with its recurring critique of precisely this idea of the moral Good, contains what I take then to be Lacan’s most direct connection with Nietzsche’s main project of exposing the metaphysics underlying the history of Western morality as a Platonism which leads to neurosis and nihilism. Such metaphysics for both Nietzsche *and* Lacan might only mean now that some error, fiction, illusion or phantasy of the Good in the imaginary has been mistaken as ‘truth’, as ‘real’, when it is really only the symptom of the *abeyance* of a particular aspect of the truth, or modicum of the real. As a process which is diagnosable as neurosis or a nihilism, what can and will be argued here is its doing us *more harm* than ‘good’ in the end after bearing its load nigh for two-thousand years or more: ever since Plato in particular introduced its species into the cradle of the West—whereupon we might find that it continues to protract itself derivative forms, right up to this day.

Contextually, the conjunction I am detecting here between Lacan and Nietzsche in their mutual antipathy towards the moral metaphysics of Platonism *is no accident*—and not only because Nietzsche anticipates much in Freud and Lacan is a kind of Freudian: but also because Lacan in his early twenties reportedly gives Nietzsche an “avid reading” whence breaking away from “his mother’s Catholicism”⁶. What’s more, Lacan takes to Nietzsche around about the same time as his close to become acquaintance in Bataille was also attempting something similar: the very Bataille who later not only exerts at least an undercurrent of influence on Lacan, but also helps introduce Nietzsche into a position of prominence in the very intellectual setting that Lacan was to become something of a doyen in.⁷ Nietzsche was emerging as a key theoretical figure in Lacan’s post-war Paris, soon to be the driving force behind such luminaries as Foucault, Deleuze and Derrida after Heidegger had earlier helped drive him out across the Rhine⁸; whilst Walter Kaufman was also busily erecting Nietzsche as the monument forever to

4. Cf., Sigmund Freud, ‘On the History of the Psychoanalytic Movement’, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol XIV, ed. & trans. J. Strachey, Vintage: London, 2001, pp. 15-16 (Henceforth for instance as SE14:15). A study of the Freud-Nietzsche relation can be found attempted in Paul-Laurent Assoun, *Freud and Nietzsche*, Continuum: London-NY, 2000.

5. Ons, ‘Nietzsche, Freud, Lacan’, in Žižek ed., *Lacan: The Silent Partners*, p. 80.

6. William J. Richardson, ‘Jacques Lacan: Elizabeth Roudinesco’, *J. Amer. Psychoanal. Assn.*, 48: 645.

7. A chapter on the shared circles of Lacan and Bataille can be found in Elisabeth Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan*, trans. B. Bray, Columbia University Press: NY, 1994, pp. 121-40, and also in Fred Botting & Scott Wilson, *Bataille*, Palgrave: NY, 2001, pp. 79-92. For more on the thematic connections between Lacan’s *Ethics* and Bataille’s own project, see also Benjamin Noys, ‘Shattering the Subject: Georges Bataille & the Limits of Therapy’, *European Journal of Psychotherapy, Counselling and Health*, Sep 2005; 7 (3): 125-136, p. 132.

8. A study on the indebtedness to Nietzsche of postwar French thought can be found in Alan D. Schrift, *Nietzsche’s French Legacy: A Genealogy of Post-Structuralism*, Routledge: NY, 1995.

behold, out further across to the West.⁹

What I take to be at stake in my own paper can be expressed thus: Whereas the Nietzschean project can seem most prodigious in its affirmation of life, even though it has ostensibly dispensed with the ‘comforting’ illusions that the history of Platonic metaphysics has given; the project of psychoanalysis on the other hand can seem positive less so, but also appears to have gone further in the process of illusion rending with its more detailed disclosure of the Freudian Thing at the base of our drives. Thus given such findings of psychoanalysis, can we still make an affirmation of life as such within the *counter-nihilist* ethic of the full Nietzschean spirit? Or would we rather, with this Thing within which we deny and despise coming back at us in the real, in the form of mounting evidence of an ecological catastrophe approaching, be happily resigned instead to this deathly end as a welcome respite. Like the Oedipus Lacan presents at the end of his *Ethics*: as the man of knowledge who feels by now, only that he has *known too much*—and whose “last word is, as you know”, Lacan tells us, “that phrase μή φῦναι”¹⁰... as if not to be born were exceedingly best!

I. INTERPRETATION OF LACAN’S TRIPARTITE ONTOLOGY AS FRAMING THE ANALYSIS OF PLATONISM: THE REAL, SYMBOLIC & IMAGINARY.

I will not, in fact, be able to avoid a certain inquiry into historical progress. It is at this point I must refer to those guiding terms, those terms of reference which I use, namely, the symbolic, the imaginary, and the real (Lacan’s *Ethics*, p. 11).

We make our way now into an interpretation of the Lacanian tripartite ontology of the real, symbolic and imaginary, first by considering the nature of Plato’s idea of the Sovereign good, the nature of the proto-Christian Platonism that Nietzsche in particular takes it to spawn, and then by considering some criticisms that Lacan and Nietzsche both make of it. Such criticisms I then aim to begin posing here in terms of all three parts of the said ontology: *but also to inform it*—in order then to properly orient our *experience*, and to theorise post-neurotically on what of life there *is*...

The idea of the Good then Plato typically defines as being the supreme Capital of all the ideas; as the most real, true and lofty of them all. This Idea of ideas as idea of the Good, Plato would take as the eternal, absolute power, source and sanction of all the other ideas which can individually come to mind, descending down to us from a

9. An account of Kaufman’s installing Nietzsche as a canonical thinker in Nth America by reason of their combined propensities to bridge the ‘rift’ between analytic and continental streams of philosophy, can be found in Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen, “Dionysian Enlightenment”: Walter Kaufmann’s *Nietzsche* in Historical Perspective’, *Modern Intellectual History*, 3, 2 (2006), pp. 239-267.

10. Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, p. 305 (LE:305). Actually, Oedipus’s last words, in Sophocles’ play *Oedipus at Colonus* at least are, and not insignificantly perhaps, to actually bless the King and lands of Athens whilst asking to be remembered. A paper by William J. Richardson, ‘Lacan & the Enlightenment: Antigone’s Choice’, *Research in Phenomenology*, XXIV (1994), 25-41, on p. 34 points out that the phrase Lacan attributes to Oedipus is uttered by the chorus earlier in the play on line 1225.

realm of their own. A heavenly realm, which Plato likewise takes to be the source of all the *physical* things we encounter each day in our here down below; here in the earthly, nature-bound world of our everyday life.

But of these physical-material and earthly things, Plato takes them as *fallen* in some way from the Idea of the Good—fallen and inferior by virtue of their physical-materiality no less, by virtue of the very predicates which make them our physical: ‘change’ and ‘bodilyness’ for instance. Plato holds our earthly things inferior by way of their purportedly greater distance from that purely psychical or spiritual realm he posits of the Sovereign Good; the Good he hints of in his *The Phaedo* for instance as “the power which makes things to be now disposed in the way that is best possible”—“the Good... which must unite and encompass everything else”¹¹. But what’s more, it is to the heavenly of this Good above that upon death, what Plato takes to be our immortal soul may return if we had lived our lives in accordance with its unearthly laws: as if the paradise awaits but only for those, Plato wagers, “such as have purified themselves sufficiently by philosophy”, who could joyfully then be “freed from the regions of the earth as from a prison”*, and “live thereafter altogether without a body”¹².

Plato articulates further this theory of ideas which places the Good up-top like the cap-stone of a pyramid in his *The Republic*. There he tells of a “reality, then, that gives their truth to the objects of knowledge and the power of knowing to the knower”—a reality which is none other for Plato than “the idea of Good”. This Good he implores we also conceive of “as being the cause of knowledge, and of truth insofar as known”; without forgetting any further that “the objects of knowledge not only receive from the presence of the Good their being known”, but also “their very existence and essence”. Though still Plato adds, last but not least, “the Good itself is not essence but still transcends essence in dignity and surpassing power”¹³.

After such the fecundity of formulation by his oft appropriated mouthpiece in Socrates, Plato has the interlocutor Glaucon of course only “very ludicrously” answer, “Heaven save us, hyperbole can no further go”¹⁴. But perhaps in accordance with Glaucon’s initial expression of ‘ludicrousity’ here, Lacan and Nietzsche might instead hold that i) the Good is not really real or true, it’s imaginary, a mirage or fiction, only one that *falsely* claims to be ‘real’, in actual fact to be *most* ‘real’, when the opposite would rather

11. Plato, ‘The Phaedo’, 99b4-c5, in T. Chappell ed., *The Plato Reader*, Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh, 1996.

12. Plato, ‘The Phaedo’, 114b-c, in E. Hamilton & H. Cairns ed., *The Collected Dialogues of Plato: Including the Letters*, trans. P. Shorey, Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1999, p. 94. *Translation here is from one by G. M. A. Grube, following Burnet’s Oxford text, in S. M. Cahn ed., *Classics of Western Philosophy*, Hackett Publishing: Indianapolis, 1979, p. 108, and I choose it because of the reference to the earth as a ‘prison’ which we may soon find of relevant interest, even though the Greek here does not contain the equivalent of this word specifically, but rather a participle for ‘freeing’ and one for ‘releasing’; the term ‘prison’ being rather implied.

13. Plato, ‘The Republic’, 508e-509b, in E. Hamilton & H. Cairns ed., *The Collected Dialogues of Plato: Including the Letters*, p. 744

14. Plato, ‘The Republic’, 509c, in E. Hamilton & H. Cairns ed., *The Collected Dialogues of Plato: Including the Letters*, p. 744.

be much closer to the truth; and ii) that this Good is also somewhat inimical in terms of valuation to all of that which is really real: i.e., to the material, earthly, somatic-sensual and instinctual real, especially the animal parts, the parts which make up much of our everyday life existence.

Nietzsche's admonition towards Plato is better known than Lacan's, if for no other reason than that it's more frequently pronounced and has been around for over half a century longer. But Lacan in his *Ethics* gives for instance the following indication of his own lack of sympathy towards the purported 'truth' and 'highest' valuation status of Plato's Good: whence saying of Kingly Creon in the midst of an analysis of his actions as they appear in Sophocles' play *Antigone*, that "His error of judgement... is to want to promote the good of all—and I don't mean the Supreme Good, for let us not forget that 441BC is very early, and our friend Plato hadn't yet created the *mirage* of that Supreme Good"(LE:259)¹⁵.

Clearly what can be predicated *mirage* here could hardly be likewise predicated as the 'real' and the 'true'—not without the severe perversion of the latter two terms. But Creon here is also being shown by Lacan to give a proto-Platonic example of how it might be, as he says, that "the good cannot reign over all without an excess emerging whose fatal consequences are revealed to us in tragedy"(LE:259)—thus giving indication of Lacan's view that not only is the Good not really real, but neither is it really 'good' either when we believe in it as such in terms of the effects it may have on us, excessive effects, and tragic whence believing too much the false to be 'true' and mirage to be 'real', precisely a view Lacan shares with Nietzsche.

The structure of this Sovereign Good can well be surmised by the Nietzschean maxim: "the less real, the more valuable. This is Platonism"¹⁶—where we might consider that one of the ways to successfully believe that what is 'less real' has 'more value', is to *falsely* believe it to be 'most real' as well. But this is precisely what can have the subsequent effect of reducing and devaluing all that really does exist as real to being, as Lacan says in the pejorative sense of Plato's gambit: "no more than an imitation of a more-than-real, of a surreal"—"since for him everything that exists only exists in relation to the idea, which is the real"(LE:141).

Hence with Nietzsche *and* Lacan now, the Idea of the Good we can instead take here as the *un-real anti-real*, which the Platonist *misrecognises* as 'real', whilst claiming its mirage too as the 'truth'. But as Nietzsche is indicating with his maxim above, the less real more value move he considers not solely a feature of Plato's thought, but also of what he calls 'Platonism'—which for Nietzsche includes nearly all of the metaphysics to follow, but particularly the Christian forms, as indicated by his high summary execution at one point that: "Christianity is Platonism for the masses"¹⁷.

For instead of being satisfied with merely an *idea* of the Sovereign Good, Nietzsche interprets that Christianity substitutes a more Judaeo-anthropomorphic version of it. A

15. Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, p. 259 (my *italics* on 'mirage')

16. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. & ed. W. Kaufmann, Vintage: NY, 1968, section 572, p. 308.

17. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, Oxford Uni Press: NY, 1988, the preface.

Sovereign *God* now—a *God of the Good*.¹⁸ One who seats the throne warm of this same position, beyond the sky high like a Sinai, with a thunder cloud. A Yahweh who would one day *cross* with Paul the sunny shores of the Mediterranean, via Moses, and Egypt, and manage to take up some of the local garbs in a Grecian land already been made ready for “moral fanaticism”, as Nietzsche notes, by “Plato, the great viaduct of corruption, who first refused to see nature in morality”.¹⁹ For as hovering up above in an out-of-*this-world*, *after-world* accessible only upon death, this new Godly realm was still defined as with Plato to be most ‘real’, ‘true’, ‘moral’ and ‘good’ by and large, only insofar as it was *not* like the actual real-world here in nature upon the earth. An earthly world which is consequently rebaptised as ‘false’, Nietzsche writes, precisely on account of all the properties which actually make it *real*: i.e., “change, becoming, multiplicity, opposition, contradiction, war”²⁰—not to mention the full gamut of bodily sensuality, together with all that dirt beneath the nail.

However, before probing deeper into the question of what might *motivate* this *un-real*, *anti-real* entity of the Good towards such the overvaluation as *is* falsely calling it the most ‘real’, ‘good’ and ‘true’, but also in calling it the ‘source’ of all, the source of all ‘truth’, whilst posing it too as the afterlife destination for all who had submitted to its denatured Law—hyperboloid moves common to both Plato and Paul—I will firstly clarify further here what we who would be with Lacan and Nietzsche thus far might ourselves mean here by the *real*, and will do this along the way of both distinguishing and relating this real to the other two registers of the Lacanian tripartite ontology—the *symbolic* and the *imaginary*.

This I take to be an important step, and a question of conscience, given that we may all be to some degree, as Alfred North Whitehead once implied, living amongst the “footnotes” of Plato’s grandiose metaphysical constructions²¹; and given too that as Nietzsche once wrote, that even though we are supposedly surpassed of certain imaginary denouements: “we all still have bad instincts, the Christian instincts, somewhere within us”.²²

The *real* thus in contradistinction to that of the Platonist we might define here as being nothing so *other-worldly*, nothing so invisible, nor something only accessible upon death by our purportedly un-somatic components. It’s just the earth in its material, sensory-empirical actuality; the animals, plants and minerals of nature. It’s the bodies, their

18. Bataille also makes this ‘God of the Good’ connection in *Eroticism*, trans. M. Dalwood, London: Penguin, 2001(1957), p. 122-123.

19. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, section 202, p. 118.

20. From Nietzsche’s *The Will to Power*, section 584, but one should note that it is not the metaphysical or binary ‘opposite’, i.e., that which would require a facing-off between two perfectly fixed, diametrically separate, self-identical entities, that Nietzsche would ever ascribe to the change, becoming and multiplicity of the real; but rather, precisely that which *opposes* such metaphysical, simplifying and all too human constructions: by being something Other, something different!

21. A. N. Whitehead, *Process & Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, Cambridge Uni Press: Cambridge, 1929, Pt. II, Ch. 1, sec. 1.

22. Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, section 59, in *Twilight of the Idols/The Anti-Christ*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, Penguin: London-NY, 1990, p. 194.

instincts and what they can do, what they can make out of other physical materials in the real—materials both organic and inorganic—through all of the inorganic materials far off into space, there where we are yet to discover anything else *organic*: yet to discover anything more of what we commonly refer to along with ourselves here as *life*.²³ Out there in the greater universe together with all the force and energy that binds things, binds them together and pulls them apart, lights them up and sometimes explosively—all the way far into the hidden depths of the macro and micro aspects of the universe we are yet to even know about, and possibly never will we meagre mortals, who have done so well to even come this far: This is all the *real*.

To be sure, once we bring these particular entities or aspects of the real into relief here by putting them into such words as ‘plants’, ‘animals’, ‘molecules’, ‘atoms’, ‘force’ and ‘energy’, etc., then we are also having introduced here a *symbolic* dimension. For such words are of symbolic structures, of signifiers in links and chains differentiated from each other, and make up what Lacan would call the symbolic register: but only insofar as these symbolic signifiers, whether mathematical, linguistic or conceptual, etc., are used accurately enough according to standard and contemporary social practices, standardised moral-legal customs, or for the more statistically common intents and purposes within the utilitarian space of working life. Such work amidst the symbolic, where means-ends calculation and causal inference rule the day, imply a more specifically *determinate* kind of rightly-labelled, right-minded sense-perception, and a progressively more scientific, logical-empirical or conceptual-theoretical knowledge of a thing or process entity in the real: This is all the *symbolic*.²⁴

But there is thirdly introduced here an *imaginary* dimension, as mental images of plants, animals, bodies of people and the motions of outer-space, etc., may immediately be conjured for us and come to mind: via the recollected memory traces of perceptual images we might have formed of these natural kinds via our sensory neuronal apparatuses—or via memory traces of ideational images we once might have formed to aid us through our previous symbolic propaedeutic. Sometimes the imaginary can also be evoked via the mirror; or via a courtship or a duel. All such images which can also then be further embellished *in* the imaginary: whereupon as Kant might say, the imaginary takes then the lead of the understanding, setting the two off into a “free-play”, or as Freud would say a “free-association”²⁵, until these images corresponded to noth-

23. Nietzsche writes: “Let us beware of thinking that the world is a living being... We have some notion of the nature of the organic; and we should not reinterpret the exceedingly derivative, late, rare, accidental, that we perceive only on the crust of the earth and make of it something essential, universal, and eternal”. An awareness of that the earth is the only place of *life* we know of thus far might better help us to not denigrate its place in the real, whether intellectually or industrially. cf., *The Gay Science*, trans. W. Kaufman, Vintage: NY, 1974, section 109.

24. Lacan also tells of the symbolic in his *Ethics* as that which is “grafted on to the real”(LE:20-21). We *graft* the symbolic onto the real in order to understand, differentiate, categorise, rank and regulate it for our various purposes.

25. In his *Interpretation of Dreams* (SE4:103) to illustrate the role of the imagination with respect to reason during processes of free-association, Freud writes of “what Schiller describes as a relaxation of the watch upon the gates of Reason”. This seems similar to the dialectic between “imagination” and “understanding”

ing directly real in the external world any longer, and might even encompass all sorts of gratuitous improvisations which are not, however, altogether without their own hidden significance.

And though we might adequately symbolise and form perceptual images of certain portions of the real, and with ever increasing degrees of accuracy as time progresses unhindered—as time mostly has since our Christian Dark Age has passed—in a substantive sense, the real is still independent of us, it still exceeds us, exceeds our cognitions and interpretations of it. For we could never comprehend its infinite entirety with our finite mind and its finite organs, nor envisage it from all possible perspectives at once, thought to be endless: this would be as Lacan is often pointing out about the real—*impossible*²⁶. And were we to here, as we might well suppose, one day completely die out as a species: then here the real would also out-exist us. It would still be here, here and there, albeit changed at the very least in the fraction through our absence—as indeed it was t/here before us, before there even was a planet earth let alone a species: a time before ‘time’ where there was only just the *real*.

The real is thus what I define here as coming *first* and *last*. I ‘define’ it thus but it is also my *argument*—and a winnowing fan sorting wheat from chaff. For anything that would only instantly, completely be blown-away by the wind without our own brain’s cognitive presence here—*cannot be real*—but is rather only a product of our own subjective and *projected* outward imaginings. “What is real is also there outside”, Freud tells us, whereas “what is unreal, merely a presentation and subjective, is only internal”²⁷. The prime examples of the latter ‘internals’ being an anthropomorphic God who created the universe, a heavenly-superior world which the ‘good’ amongst us can return to after death, and a Sovereign idea of a moral Good which is the ‘cause’ and ‘telos’ of all things considered.

But the real as argued-defined here to be both first and last, is also my interpretation of what Lacan means when he says in his *Ethics* that: “the real, I have told you, is that which is always in the same place”(LE:70). For if it is *always* in the same place, then this ‘always’ would mean that it was there *before* we were born as a species, and that it will still be there *afterwards* should we presumably die out. In short, regardless of whether there are humans around or not, and regardless of the multifarious ways that different humans might interpret certain aspects of it: the real itself flows on and on, it’s *always*

Kant utilises in his third critique, where the aesthetic experience is characterised by these two faculties in “free-play”. cf., Kant, *The Critique of Aesthetic Judgement*, §9. There is perhaps something worth considering here of Lacan’s “symbolic” and “imaginary” distinction as well.

26. William Richardson touches on this ‘impossible’ aspect when he depicts “the real” as “the raw experience of what-is, the not yet symbolised or imaged, the ‘impossible’—i.e., impossible to inscribe in any symbolic system or represent in any form of image”. I think he is very right insofar as he means that the real is “impossible” to represent in its absolute entirety. cf., Richardson, ‘Psychoanalysis & the God Question’, from *Thought* Vol. 64 No. 240 (March 1986) 68-83, p. 73. Richardson is a professor of philosophy at Boston College who has published much on Lacan and Heidegger, both of whom are treated in the here cited paper, together with an attempt to retrieve the question of God in philosophy and psychoanalysis. I would however distance myself here from many parts of the latter attempt.

27. Cf., Freud’s paper, ‘Negation’, in SE19:237, which Lacan makes several references to in his *Ethics*.

there and in the same place...²⁸

Though while we *are* still around, the real is also ‘always’ *there* in that ‘place between our legs’—where indeed it can set itself upon us as what we’d rather to forget. Such is desire’s up-swelling of the parts of the real which make up our own bodies: the “private parts, the hairy ones, to be precise, the animal ones”²⁹, as Bataille would write; just two years before Lacan would launch his own inquiry into this underside of *Ethics*. For such is desire as stemming of our *inner*-real which we’d rather to reject: like the being who “censures”, Lacan tells us, because “he doesn’t want it”(LE:14)—on the surface at least if not in the recessed heart. But this inner, bodily aspect of the real, presencing as desire and *experienced* subjectively from within, is the aspect most important for the psychoanalyst. For as pulsing beneath the foam and crest-tops of all our thoughts, dreams, reflections in the imaginary: and as ostensibly unbearable to acknowledge, bearing “the kind of discomfort”, Lacan adds, “that makes it so difficult for our neurotic patients to confess certain of their fantasms” (LE:80)—such portions are pushed then hurriedly aside. Out of ‘mind’ and out of ‘sight’ or such is the plan, to push desire deep into the *un*-conscious as if the source of all life’s woes and ills—where indeed it can be insofar as it seeps out unbeknownst to our selves, out in through the cracks and joinings of even our best symbolic structures; at the interstitial peripheries of even our proudest, and too one-sided, symbolic rationalities.

However, such unwelcome showings of the inner-real are also important for the non-Platonic philosopher-psychologist like Nietzsche. For it is precisely here that we might then be tempted to ‘imagine’ and ‘symbolise’ the real, both without and within, only so as to hide and disguise it better. To *slough* it off; to conceal rather than to reveal it, whilst pretending instead to do the opposite: as if to promote ourselves by saying that we were ‘not’ neurotically inimical to the real of nature and the *life* it gives, but rather, leading in fact the ‘right’ kind of life, one in indubitable accordance with the moral law of the most Sovereign idea, or with the one true God, the God of the Good—raining

28. Further enquiry into this tripartite ontology may also be sought in Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, trans. K. Blamey, Polity Press: Cambridge, 1987(1975), pp. 115-160; an ontology he also explores in a later work published just before his death where he instead, “for heuristic purposes”, attempts to begin with the “imaginary” rather than with the “real”. However, insofar as this entails, as he says, “seeing in the physical world a deficient mode of being”, it could possibly leave one prey, perhaps, to the Platonism of valuing highest whatever is less real, and with a subsequently devalued conception of the real which is less than detailed, stabilised or accurate. cf., Castoriadis, *World in Fragments*, trans. D. A. Curtis, Stanford Uni Press: Stanford, 1997, p. 5. Yiannis Stavrakakis has recently written on some of the ontological commonality between Lacan and Castoriadis despite eventual differences. cf., Stavrakakis, *The Lacanian Left: Psychoanalysis, Theory & Politics*, Edinburgh Uni Press, 2007, pp. 41-45. Castoriadis was a member of the school Lacan founded in 1964 though by 1977, had broken away publishing some heavy criticisms of among other things, the Lacanian shortening of the analytic session; cf., his ‘Le Psychanalyse, projet et élucidation: Destin de l’analyse et responsabilité des analystes’, *Topique* 19 (April 1977): 73, 74. Perhaps a weaker but no less revealing rebuke of the tendency with some Lacanians to offer an excessively “short-session”, which sometimes reportedly involves cramming “fifteen or even more analysands per hour” into “four-minute sessions”, can also be found in Bruce Fink, *Fundamentals of Psychoanalytic Technique: a Lacanian approach for Practitioners*, Norton: NY, 2007, p. 60.

29. Bataille, *Eroticism*, p. 143.

divine will from superior ‘aboves’ which are really only of *our own construction*. Such constructions, however, we can’t always admit to being the author of, because they’re precisely those in the *imaginary* we’ve used to patch-over the truth of what is *really* real—the real which is nothing so concerned for our apparent likes and dislikes, our pleasures and pains, and nothing so wholly rational, moral, divine and good as we might on the surface have thought to have wished for.

Here with such ‘cosmic’, cosmological constructions: “‘the true world’ is supposed to be the good world—why?”³⁰ asks Nietzsche; noting how oftenest is the case that “to imagine another more valuable world is an expression of hatred for a world that actually makes one suffer”—i.e., *a hatred for this world, the real, earthly one*—and hence the nihilism-despair when the fictions dissolve, as merely the underlying “*ressentiment* of metaphysicians against actuality is here creative”³¹. But perhaps there is some-*thing* residually real even Nietzsche misses?²—when we consider what Lacan in his *Ethics* will call *das Ding*, the somewhat diabolical *Freudian Thing!* It’s our somewhat extra perverse little portion of the real; and a concept to be examined in the section that follows.

2. INTRODUCING THE THING: AN ETHICS THAT WANTS TO GO FURTHER INTO THE REAL.

Well, as odd as it may seem to that superficial opinion which assumes any inquiry into ethics must concern the field of the ideal, if not of the unreal, I, on the contrary, will proceed instead from the other direction by going more deeply into the notion of the real. ... To appreciate this, one has to look at what occurred in the interval between Aristotle and Freud (Lacan’s *Ethics*, p. 11).

In the previous section, having laid out an interpretation of Lacan’s tripartite ontology, and having done so in order to begin the examination of the Platonic structure in terms of its three—I have also begun intimating that it’s usually the aspects of the *real* most commonly referred to and experienced as ‘nature’ without and within, that are aimed at antipathetically by the Platonic move. I wish now to examine further the reasons for this by way of Lacan’s *Ethics* seminar concept of the Thing, but also by way of this seminar’s deployment of the great product of Plato’s Academy—the thought of Aristotle—whose *Nicomachean Ethics* Lacan invites us to ponder as the exemplary point of both reference and departure...

It’s important when making reference to nature, to what is *real* of what we experience and signify as ‘nature’, that we don’t let form in us a conception that is too idyllic. To be sure, nature is capable of such moments, but that’s not all. As Bataille would say: “nature herself *is* violent”³²—and he’s very right insofar as he means that nature is violent *as well* as it is in part idyllic; and that it’s these violent parts that particularly concern

30. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, section 578. Lacan in Seminar 17 says similarly: “One fails to see why truth would always necessarily be beneficial. You would have to have the devil in you to imagine such a thing...” cf., *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis* (1969-70), trans. R. Grigg, Norton: NY, 2007, p. 106.

31. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, section 579.

32. Bataille, *Eroticism*, p. 40.

when it comes to morality, along with by and large nigh all that is *sexual*.

Lacan in his *Ethics* asks us to look at Aristotle's notion of nature, in order that we may, as he says: "consider how far that notion of nature is different from ours"(LE:13). Since to Lacan's way of thinking, Aristotle's notion is one to support an ethics which believes it can legitimately exclude the perverse elements from the field of morality, a dreadful weight as shed along the primrose path of a 'natural' development, and a life of happiness and fulfilment. Yet these excluded elements constitute a class of desires which we might well with Lacan now consider right "in the forefront of our experience"(LE:5); particularly with the questions of ethics since raised by the findings of psychoanalysis, whence put into relation with the contemporary destruction of *life* in our earthly environment. Here Lacan might further add that "the pile of garbage is one of the sides of the human dimension that it would be wrong to mistake"(LE:233).³³

However, somewhere back in the fourth century BC, Aristotle has a theory of the macrocosm which he believes supports him. It's no doubt "a tidied-up, ideal order"(LE:315) for him Lacan tells us, a universe that's logical and rational. Its origin, first-cause and end-point are, as with Plato, a kind of perfect notion of the Good: thus it's natural that *Aristotle* thinks we might 'naturally' steer away from the bestial objects of desire. Lacan speaks of how for Aristotle, a particular ethics must be inserted into the better part of the macrocosm: "brought together in a Sovereign Good"—so that a "this" ethics becomes "the" ethics, "and beyond that, with an *imitation* of the cosmic order."(LE:22) To borrow the language of Kant, as Lacan indeed at one point does, it's as if Aristotle thinks that the "starry heavens above" would 'naturally' lure the "moral law within"(LE:316) us towards the moral Good he purports to be the incorruptible guiding-source of the entire universe. Aristotle even begins his ethical treatise with what he calls the "well said" claim that "the Good is That at which all things aim"³⁴—unless of course, as he qualifies later, one were of "disease", "sexual perversion", or had perhaps been "abused from childhood", causing bad "habit" which had "arrested development"³⁵.

But unlike the psychoanalyst—though perhaps in some accordance with the depiction of the noble or *aristocratic* master-morality once depicted by Nietzsche—Aristotle

33. Ray Anderson, CEO of the world's largest carpet manufacturer, makes the following striking claim: "There is not a single, scientific, peer reviewed paper published in the last 25 years that would contradict this scenario: that every living system of earth is in decline", from *The Corporation*, a documentary film by the Canadian professor of Law Joel Bakan, and based on his book *The Corporation: The Pathological Pursuit of Profit and Power*, Constable: London, 2004.

34. Jonathan Lear, an analyst and philosopher at Chicago, sees the impersonal-passivity of this claim, the "it has been well said", as a possible symptom of Aristotle's wish to cover-over part the origins of this Good: contained perhaps in the ghost of Plato's murdered Father function in Socrates. cf., Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I. i.1, Loeb Classical Library, ed. G. P. Goold, trans. H. Rackham, Harvard Uni Press: Cambridge-London, 1999, p. 3; and J. Lear, *Happiness, Death & the Remainder of Life*, Harvard Uni Press: Cambridge-London, 2000, pp. 7-8, 10-11, 101-4. Lacan himself returns to examine this opening passage in his later Seminar XX, *On Feminine Sexuality: the Limits of Love & Knowledge, 1972-3*, trans. B. Fink, Norton: NY-London, 1999, p. 52.

35. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VII. v. 4, p. 403 & v. 2, p. 401.

seeks to keep such the “pathos of distance”³⁶ between us and the perverse bestial that at one point, he even seems to consider animals themselves as unnatural—given that they are *not* rational, and hence can be considered as “aberrations” from the good, clean, ordered essence of “nature” and the universe as defined by him!³⁷ Nietzsche would of course at this point tell the great Aristotle that he was on his own, and much too much like his old teacher Plato, promoting ‘fictions’ which were if not ‘ignoble’ in intent, than at least so perhaps in their lasting consequence...

For Lacan, however, analysis turns ethics on its ‘back-side’ by revealing a *far smaller distance* between us and the perverse class of desires Aristotle wants to exclude. But this might only mirror the fact that by the time of Nietzsche—heading beyond what Lacan refers to with respect to ethics as “the moment when the disorienting effects of Newtonian physics is felt” (LE:76)—advancements in the methods of science were in piecemeal fashion, further revealing the *real* of what we commonly symbolise and imagine as the ‘universe’ to be far less clock-work and virtuous by design than scores of generations had previously hoped. Soon there was nothing so supra-celestially good and rational anymore, to guarantee or enforce our preferred type of moral ‘life’.

Nietzsche is consistently able to roll the meta-ethical implications of such scientific advancements together into a series of paragraphs that leave the reader bracing and in no doubt as to where precisely we are *at* at present—aptly surmised by his de-teleologising phrase when considering the universe overall that: “becoming aims at *nothing* and achieves *nothing*”.³⁸ That said, Nietzsche also continues to speak of a return to nature that, like it or not, is a far more “frightful nature and naturalness”³⁹ than such moves previously had imagined—and that great tasks were no longer possible without the utilising mindfulness of these more terrifying aspects as well.

Like Freud, when it comes to the more unsavoury aspects of what is *real* in what we conceptualise as ‘nature’, Nietzsche would encourage a kind of responsively rigorous, *gaya scienza* rationality, and a genuinely grand-style, artistic-creative sublimation, rather than say repression, falsification and phobic denial. Though Freud is perhaps essentially correct to claim—and this might qualify his earlier cited comments about being willing “to forgo all claims to priority in the *many instances*”⁴⁰ where Nietzsche was his antecedent—that Nietzsche had “failed to recognise infantilism”;⁴¹ that is, had failed to fully

36. Cf., Nietzsche’s, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, First Essay, Section2; and also Nietzsche’s, *Beyond Good and Evil*, section257.

37. To some bemusement from the translator who almost seems to doubt himself over this, Aristotle writes, “for animals have neither the faculty of choice nor of calculation: they are aberrations from nature, like men who are insane.” Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Goold, Book VII. vi. 6, p. 411.

38. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, section12. Another extended example of Nietzsche’s de-anthropomorphising of the *real* of what we more commonly symbolise and imagine as the ‘universe’ or ‘nature’—which Kaufman considers as the following-up of the consequences of the death of God—can be found in section 109 of *The Gay Science*, trans. W. Kaufman, Vintage: NY, 1974, where Nietzsche writes, “None of our aesthetic and moral judgments apply to it”; at least not the most Platonic ones!

39. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, section48.

40. Freud, SE14:16 (my italics).

41. Cf., Paul-Laurent Assoun, *Freud and Nietzsche*, p. 8.

elaborate upon the polymorphous, perverse sexuality born in every infant child. Thus in this sense perhaps, Nietzsche's ethics, though completely devoid of the manicuring accounts of the universe that dominate Platonism—centred around belief in a 'more-than-real' Sovereign good—is still a bit like Aristotle's ethics in that it at least *aims* for a greater pathos of distance between us and the abject aspects of our inner real, than the findings of psychoanalysis would then render so admissible.

This abject core is what Lacan in his *Ethics* will call *das Ding*—that Thing of our bodies as experienced from within: perhaps corresponding in some ways to what modern neuroscience refers to as the older "reptilian" (brain-stem) and "paleo-mammalian" (limbic) parts of the brain—sending still their signals to our higher-order peripheries⁴²; sending as what Lacan and Freud call the "archaic" "nucleus" at the instinctual "source of the *Triebe* (drives)" (LE:93). Such drives are said by Lacan to *ideationally represent* these archaic, somatic instincts stemming from the Thing, if and when they eventually do come to mind, for they do so by way of language and image in addition to being felt, by way of what Lacan would simply refer to as *the signifier*. Yet at the centre of these signifiers is no Sovereign good (LE: 70, 300), but this Thing like core which includes nearly all the pre-genital functions and fixations surrounding the infantile organs of sensing, eating, excreta and pleasure. The sexual pleasures too—"from the oral to the anal" (LE:92) as Lacan lets quip—and then some we fear with aggression in the mix. But through then to the genital phase we go then presumably: through to the promised lands of reciprocal love.

Yet of this latter genital phase, the purported crown of our libidinal development, it is not always so stable an equilibrium Lacan tells us, but rather one which is later forged or formed to synthesise our still component pre-genital instincts, our ever present and lingering antecedents. But this later forging must only then to face the prohibitions on incest⁴³ and thence the rules of consent, the rules of attraction, as well as all the more general considerations of propriety concerning time, place, the who the why and all the rest, transpiring in a world already brimming with neurosis: full of the many frustrations and loss which suggest that the path to genital oblativity is not nearly as smooth

42. The neuroscientist Paul MacLean explores something of this thesis in his *The Triune Brain in Evolution: Role in Paleocerebral Functions*, Springer, 1990. See also a paper by Fred Levin, 'Neuroscience: The Amygdala, Hippocampus, and Psychoanalysis', *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 66:555-560, 1997, where the amygdala and hippocampus, as located in the limbic system, seem to be connected with memory and emotion: the amygdala especially associated with rapid response fear. Back in 1959, Lacan himself spends the first division of his *Ethics* focussing on Freud's posthumously released in 1950 *Project for a Scientific Psychology* (1895), SE1:283-399; a project Freud initially undertook yet soon abandoned to make psychology into a quantitative-material 'natural' science, just four years after Waldeyer's 1891 discovery of the 'neurone'. Lacan for his part is sceptical of the "assumption" that the "nervous system" can adequately account for the concrete psychoanalytic experience: claiming that no one yet had bettered Freud's then superlative yet still at times "fanciful" attempt (LE:30). However, it would likely be but a Platonic prejudice for us now to discourage dialogue with more recent neurological findings, as if our wondrous higher-order 'forms' and functions wouldn't dare to traffic with the gore, blood and rippled, chemical-electric *real* that the brain presents!

43. Lacan remarks that Freud stood first to identify "incest as the fundamental desire" (LE:67).

as we might've wished. Such *promising* moves of oblativity in the hands of the analyst Lacan even goes so far as to declare a “moralising hustle or a bluff, whose dangers can't be exaggerated”(LE:312); insofar as they again seek to cover over the true nature of the Thing, leaving its effects too beyond of our assailable jurisdiction.

Freud at one point defines these disallowed impulses of the Thing as “egoistic, sadistic, perverse or incestual”⁴⁴; whilst elsewhere he also refers to them as our “individual” sense of the “prehistoric”⁴⁵: a second sense he takes himself to have discovered in each of our childhoods, to go with the one Darwin discovers for our species way back in the Palaeolithic. Following Freud, this Thing of our species *and* individual births is what Lacan depicts in his *Ethics* as “the pre-historic Other that is impossible to forget”(LE:71). Though forget it we try, for when it surges, it can be fundamentally *transgressive* and addictively so, towards the norms and forms operating within our selves and societies. Hence it is split-off during the course of our socialisation, made object of that great wave of primal repression said by Freud to usher in the latency phase for the child around the age of five, as the Oedipal material cleaves into the incest taboo, meaning that the most sexual aspects of being can only re-emerge later in puberty, but only by continuing to “magic circle”(LE:134) around that Thing below, which is still much forbidden, and often the *real* of our desire.

Darwin could eventually be forgiven his Thing; by science at least if not by Christendom. But less so for Freud it seems still today, as the Thing he uncovers ‘lies’ closer to *home*. Certain aspects of this Thing would still only cause too much *pain* to consider; let alone *experience*. And for Freud, this very much explains the perpetual resistances towards the truths of psychoanalysis: as well as the perennial temptations of subsequent scholars to ‘refute’ its claims nigh by any means at the intellect's disposal⁴⁶. But more specifically for Lacan, this Thing also explains the role of the pleasure-principle: a principle whose aim is not as we might at first think simply to satisfy as many of our instinctual-drives as directly as possible; but rather, to keep our tension to a minimum level, by keeping us *constant* from a painful self-admission of our Thing. To “maintain the distance”(LE:58) as Lacan puts it, as we seek instead our pleasures cast a drift, from signifier to signifier, which never lead us directly to the Thing, even though unconsciously at least, one searches if not for *it*, than at least because of *it*. But as Lacan says, “one never finds it, only its pleasurable associations”(LE:52)—through objects which can signify some associative connection, but which are still chosen, more or less, because in accordance with the prevailing etiquettes of a ‘reality-principle’ which tells us that certain things we want will not give us pleasure, because they might risk us punishment, as still most forbidden.

However, it is here we can ourselves *re-find* again the temptation then to interpret ‘reality’ in *accordance* with our pleasure principle; i.e., to deselect the parts we do not

44. Freud, SE19:132.

45. See for instance Freud's 1924-5 paper on ‘The Resistances to Psycho-Analysis’, in SE19:220.

46. A not wholly uninteresting recent example can be found with Todd Dufresne, *Against Freud: Critics Talk Back*, Stanford Uni Press: Stanford, 2007. Todd has dedicated this book to his father Raymond.

'like'. And truth is many times the casualty here, the truth of what is actual and *real*, as Nietzsche argues of the whole phenomena of Platonism, Freud of the resistances to psychoanalysis, and both of the inability of too many still to relinquish the opiate phantasies of religion. Our pleasure and reality principles might collude thus together, so that what we define as 'reality' is not necessarily our best approximation at the truth, but also a means to veil over it, especially the Thing like aspects within. But painful fearing of this Thing within leads us to cover over some of the real's external aspects as well, insofar as this external covering might feign give us comfort, and help us to achieve this inner denial. For example, as belief in the Devil might help us disavow such sexual instincts and have them come from some place else; or like belief in an external Heaven and Hell could help motivate us in this inner sex-negating task—or like belief in a clock-work, incorruptibly end-directed universe, guided by and heading towards a Sovereign good, might help us believe that we can and should be a little more clock-work and incorruptibly end-directed ourselves.

"Well then", as Lacan likes to say, what we have here in the end is rather "the notion of a deep subjectivisation of the outside world": one stemming from a fundamental compartment within us that "sifts" and "sieves" reality in such a way that it is often only perceived by us "as radically selected". A human hence only ever "deals with select bits of reality", Lacan concludes, when admission of any Other would yield the loss of pleasure⁴⁷. But that the pleasure and 'reality' principles thus can work together in this subterfuge way, i.e., that they don't simply oppose each other, that "each one is really the correlative of the other"(LE:74), is one of the key points that Lacan in his *Ethics* seeks to make; though not without making the additional qualification that this concerns "not so much the sphere of psychology as that of ethics"(LE:35).

For to circle in too close to the Thing which is ethically forbidden by our reality principles—yet too the *real* truth of much desire—does hardly give us pleasure at all but anguish of the heaviest kind. Even if done so only as a thought experiment; as a free-association. So go *there* we generally don't, and our 'realities' reflect as much. But henceforth when desire builds up, damns and flares return of the Thing: this is how Lacan specifically characterises the move we might make that goes *beyond* the pleasure principle, whose other name for Freud is 'death-drive'. There where there is no, not pleasure yet *jouissance* in the transgression that the Thing would bring, a *jouissance* of transgression which Lacan suggests is the most *direct* satisfaction of a drive humanly possible⁴⁸. But it's also one perhaps unconsciously masochistic, that which Freud writes up as being only preliminarily sadistic, in eventually expressing itself as an "unconscious need for punishment"⁴⁹. And if indeed we are feeling guilty, then we may yet still seek

47. Cf., LE: 47. On p. 225 he even adds that, "In truth, we make reality out of pleasure."

48. Cf., LE: 200, 209, & 322 where he says, "Sublimate as much as you like; you still have to pay for it with something. And this something is called *jouissance*." *Jouissance* is the satisfaction of a drive beyond the pleasure-reality principle; hence the role of transgression or law-breaking within it.

49. Cf., Freud, *Civilisation & Its Discontents* (1929), Ch VIII, and also in *The Economic Problem of Masochism*(1924), SE19:166. Lacan's *Ethics* makes several references to the structures there, particularly on p. 15, stating that we'd "have really arrived at the heart of the problem of existing perversions, if we managed to deepen our

to pay the price. Why? For unknowingly possessing and inadvertently re-accessing this Thing in our real, beyond the pleasure-reality principle, our moral transgressions casting shadow long into the unconscious we know next to nothing about, and refuse even to acknowledge.

Could it not be thusly then that our *time* is behind now a sadomasochistic, wilfully ignorant drive towards death for nigh the entire species? Such punishment would too overly suffice, to be sure, for even a two-millennium length in repression...

But with our advancements in technological power outmatching by far any correlative advance in the awareness gained as a whole of our prehistoric Thing within: the great 21st century ecological disaster that too many academics and activists now increasingly predict, seems more than just a little possible. But to this increasingly macabre scenario, we must also add the renewed proliferation of nuclear weapons which occurs, no less, amidst a world where vital resources for energy and democracy are wearing thin⁵⁰. For just such reasons, wilful ignorance of the Thing now bares results which Lacan's *Ethics* reveals as far too terrifyingly possible to rationally accept; given that we have the Thing armed to the teeth now from that primitive id-like part of the brain, with no Sovereign Good, and all the way into a nuclear age.

CONCLUSION: THE NEUROSIS & NIHILISM OF A 'LIFE' AGAINST LIFE.

This is why Lacan proposes that his enquiry into ethics must be one to go "more deeply into the notion of the real"(LE:11). Further into what he would rather call the *real*, given that previous notions of 'nature' have been too far 'different'—from being far too Platonic—than his own; and because it's the very exclusions in these previous notions which upon return, as return of excess, are yielding our most tragic problems.

Today when faced with problems of the magnitude of global warming—a special but by no means solo case of adverse environment change at present due to our physical treatment of the planet—we often think the answer is to be more moral, more good, and we are thankful when exponents of the Good in some way bring attention to the problem. However, the idea of the Good as introduced by Plato, and nigh all of its descendants whether secular, rationalist, religious or not, continue to predicate themselves on a radically false picture of the human-condition: if not still of the entire cosmos—which only then lines itself up aside of an age-old repression, a repression of das Ding, that Freudian Thing in our inner real which, when it returns after being disavowed and denied in the name of the Good too long, is even more devastating.

Presently we are accelerating along the path of what Lacan discloses as our civilization's "race towards destruction", a "massive destruction", "a resurgence of savagery", snaking the paths traced out before us by the centuries long dominion of Western moral-

understanding of the economic role of masochism."

50. Professor Noam Chomsky for instance states then sources to great detail that the very real terminal threats to our survival include, "Nuclear war, environmental disaster, and the fact that the government of the world's leading superpower is acting in ways that increase the likelihood." cf., *Failed States: the Abuse of Power and the Assault on Democracy*, Allen-Unwin: NSW, 2006, p. 1.

ity⁵¹; and the nihilism detected by Nietzsche before the turn of the 20th has never threatened to reach such the grand finale. But what I would have us take from this enquiry here is that this is *not* because we aren't in accordance enough with a moral ideal of the Sovereign good, but rather, it's because we aren't in accordance enough with *a proper understanding of the real*. It's because we still at some level think that being more moral, in accordance with the Good's inherited repressive structures towards our drives, desire, and truthfulness about the real, is actually the answer to—*rather than the source of*—our most tragic problems.

The goal here is by no means then to encourage all to let their Things run wild—which would probably be nothing short of an instant conflagration—but this is why and precisely why we must desist from deluding ourselves under the tightening grip of a Sovereign Good, for this is precisely the move which cuts the Thing loose after pressing down for far too long, a slippery hand's palming on the coils of a spring, forever readying the subsequent explosion. For when that which is really real—as opposed to what Christian-Platonism *falsely* called the 'real'—is forced from mind, it can't really disappear because it *is* real, and it tends to end up only in our gun-sights as an imaginary overlaying of an external other, when the signifier 'enmity' appears. The earth itself can even seem like the enemy after while, one which like Plato in his *Phaedo*, we might think then to escape from "as if from a prison", and especially from "the bonds of the body", in the hope that we may live one day without the earthly altogether⁵². Following such negations to their logical conclusion, life itself becomes enemy too, for as being made up of the earthly and organic, life could never be free of what it *is* in essence. And what is the *death-drive* Freud tells from the start, if not to return us sundry to that dust-bowl of the inorganic; as per that "second death"⁵³ fantasm Lacan salvages from the *Monstre de Sade*, which wills to go beyond the destruction of mere beings, by destroying too the principle from which fresh sets could emerge. Such negative devaluations of our earthly, organic life though are really of our own construction: as de Sade, like any pervert, is only the mirror which shows expressed what Platonic-neurotics are but hide inside—a cess-pit of loathing contempt for life, built up from the unconscious and disowned, distorted and damned up, built up, instinctual-ideational elements of their own subjective psyches, phobically ferocious of that Thingly *real* lying not so dormant, and readying within...

But is it now still possible as Nietzsche teaches to say 'Yes' to the *real* of nature both

51. See in particular LE:231-235, where by no means can one easily overstate the level of deep foreboding Lacan contains towards our prospects of a decent survival; probably outmatched today only by the more empirically detailed and sustained political evaluations of Professor Chomsky. The phrase "race towards destruction" comes from a similar moment of foreboding in Lacan's first seminar, some six years prior to the *Ethics*, where he links the problem of annihilation and "hatred" directly into the mechanisms of Western morality; thus indicating in lieu of the later *Ethics* seminar, a long growing intellectual concern for him here. Cf., Lacan, *Freud's Papers on Technique 1953-1954, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book I*, ed. J-A Miller, trans. J. Forrester, Norton: London-NY, 1991, p. 277.

52. Cf., Plato, *The Phaedo*, 114b, trans. G. Grube, in S. M. Cahn ed., *Classics of Western Philosophy*, Hackett Publishing Company, 1979, p. 108.

53. Cf., LE: 232, 260, 294-5.

without and within—to *return to it!*—even though it is more frightful and we are less guaranteed protection of it than the Platonic history of metaphysicians taught? For with the further disclosures of *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*—Lacan’s following up and extension of the meta-ethical implications of Freud: perhaps even Nietzsche, our great intellectual *übermensch*, may too have bitten off more snake-head than he could chew? From certain moments in Nietzsche’s texts we can perhaps interpret that he may have had this Thing in his sights, but saw nothing much to come of it, so instead, elected to turn away, though not without some perhaps hinted at self-amusement.⁵⁴

But with psychoanalysis, rightly or wrongly, such truths are out. It doesn’t seem all positive at first, and perhaps it never entirely will. But we must not let this deeper disclosure desist us now from the core Nietzschean project of locating and overcoming the nihilism which begs us to take cover in idealising fictions, as if life as *life* is not worth living. Not because nihilism and the annihilation of the species is wrong in the sense of being immoral, but rather because it is bad art, mediocre art, and the ‘knowledge’ claims it trumpets on should only make us flare. If we are at our full intellectual and creative will to power, we can only consider such cultural-civil regressions as we saw on display with that whole propaganda comedy that surrounded the war for *more* oil in Iraq as infantile; the hapless results of sibling rivalries gone too far astray. But we must also resist being caught up in the imaginary of those who would only re-preach to us now of a return to the Good, who would only redeploy such versions of nihilism’s precursory defensive fictions, the pernicious ones, which would only then re-falsify our data, and leave us disappointed when the truth then re-emerges. Doing more harm than good does Platonism in the end by leaving us untrained for the real, with the habit instead to take some truth as ‘error’, and error as ‘truth’—as *‘real’*—to the point even of epistemic dysfunction. Take the grotesque intellectual poverty of that whole Christian middle-ages for example, whence put into relation with the heights of Aristotle and his fellow Greeks, as Augustine and Aquinas amplified some of the worst bits of Platonism, and threw the rest into abyss.

The overcoming of the moralising good of Christian-Platonism though does by no means imply then a subsequent affirmation of all that brutal Roman like greed, slavery, decadence, circus-bread corruption and mindless colonial expansion that we’ve heard all about, and are hardly so free of with our corporate today—just ask a Latin-American for instance!⁵⁵ For it is possible within the perspectives opened up by *Nietzsche, Freud, Lacan*, as Silvia Ons puts it, to view a social-historical or individual neurosis of any kind: including the expressed acted-out, perverse-sadistic form that escapes when the Good is temporarily loosed of its repressive grip—and say to the would be Platonist: ‘No, not

54. Cf., for instance Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, preface for the 2nd edition (1886), section 4, where he writes, “No, this bad taste, this will to truth, to ‘truth at any price’, this youthful madness in the love of truth, have lost their charm for us ... Today we consider it a matter of decency not to wish to see everything naked, or to be present at everything, or to understand and ‘know’ everything.”

55. Cf., Chomsky, ‘Simple Truths, Hard Problems’, *Philosophy* 80, 2005, © The Royal Institute of Philosophy, pp. 14-17; and ‘Moral Truisms, Empirical Evidence & Foreign Policy’, *Review of International Studies* (2003), 29, 605-620, © British International Studies Association, pp. 607-615.

that, that's not a cure, that's a mirage; that's sheer fantasy, resentment, spite; that's not a cure it will only make things worse; worse in a different way, but worse nonetheless!

By greater mindfulness then, with guided affirmation towards even that fearsome Freudian Thing that *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* has us find now in our inner natures: we can eventually again say 'Yes'-to-life in such the way that it overcomes the nihilism of not caring too much whether we as individuals or species live or die, whether we as culture or civilisation advance or decline. But we can only do this with fullest efficacy by freeing ourselves of all that wasted neurosis sickness that feels it must deny our Thing like aspect of the real: because from all those Christian-Platonic prejudices of the Good, it has been taught that such 'things' are too far beneath it. We must continue instead to train ourselves to stare the real directly in the face, without flinching, and that's all we can do at least to start. For unless we can continue to utilise, sublimate, enjoy and get a positive, well-guided *jouissance* out of all aspects of life—including that Freudian *Ding* in our real—then the chances are we're going to be at least in part, happy enough in no longer living it: offering not even a puff of genuine political praxis! We either face up to the death-drive snaking long beneath the dank, hidden history of the *un-real*, *anti-real* Good of Platonism—or let the disowned, *un-understood* drive resurge of its own volition until it accidentally finishes us!

“That is why when we ask what is beyond the barrier erected by the structure of the world of the good—when we ask where is the point on which this world of the good turns—as we wait for it to drag us to our destruction, our question has a meaning that you would do well to remember has a terrifying relevance.” Lacan's *Ethics*, May 1960.