

L'éclat de Antigone: For the Plural Form of Lacanian Ethics

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Abstract:

In this paper, starting from the idiosyncratic ethics of heroin, we attempt to follow the thread in Lacan to specifically delineate Antigone with her unbearable splendor. Antigone inherits her debt of the incest from her lineage while pays it off at the cost of her life. In an ambivalent sense, she does not succumb to the desire of the Other and not to the desire on her own, either. This Lacanian Antigonean ethics is antagonistic to the chimera of moral ideals as well as the commensurable politics for the good(s). By powerful and close reading, we rather take the very path to the archi-ethics through her traversal of the limit of Atè and of being human, bearing henceforth “beyond death” the connotation of the ever-presence of the signifier. In conclusion, the desiring subject for the void unravels the particular dimension towards the death-beyond-limit which vindicates the Lacanian ethics in plural form.

Keywords: Antigone, desire, ethics, death, Atè, *ex nihilo*

Introduction: Antigone as the ethics of hero-in

Antigone for Lacan is the perfect heroine who embodies an authentic ethical act all the way through death, a paragon who acts absolutely that accords to her unparalleled desire, be it recalcitrant, uncompromising or unapologetic, etc. Certainly, her end is atrocious at the cost of her life in exchange for the fulfillment of her astounding and concrete *desire*. However, before we survey Lacan's text, should we ask a preliminary question: isn't her heroism beyond all calculations, merely making her to become an extraordinary, non-pathological in Kantian sense, figure? Or what she eventually opts for is a whimsical idea, a *de-facto* paranoiac individualistic forbidden alternative, doesn't it? The answer is salient. Lacan exalts her image, sparing no effort on her unbearable splendor that she glistens and, in this regard, the unapproachable sublime object. The tragic hero(in) according to Lacan, insists upon his/her own desire until being elevated to the un-demolished Thing. It amounts to a radical rupture so much so that even abolishes the limit of the object, unfolding thereafter the dimension of infinity.

Who is Antigone? She is actually the personage who Lacan identifies with. She is inscribed in a contradiction: on the one hand, she defends rather than breaks up with her lineage, her loyalty to Polyneices. She is the fruit that through transmission inherits her very culpability from the incest of

her family's irrevocable genealogy. On the other hand, even so, she rips herself off from being the descendant, effacing being the offspring at her own fertility and exterminating the curse exerted upon her family. What she does is nothing but "céder sur son désir". In this light, she is inflexible, there is no such power enabling to distort her back onto a designated track, in the name of whatsoever common interest or under the dominion of the ruler. In a word, she then attains the limbo, representing herself as a living-dead between two deaths.

In Žižek's reading,

La mort naturelle qui fait partie du circuit naturel de la génération et de la corruption, de la décomposition et de la recomposition, donc de la transformation incessante de la Nature, et la mort absolue, la destruction, l'anéantissement de ce circuit lui-même, qui libérerait la Nature de ses propres lois et ouvrirait la place pour la création *ex nihilo* de nouvelles formes de vie (Žižek 2011, 329).

There is natural death, which is part of the natural cycle of reproduction and corruption, decomposition and recomposition, and therefore the incessant transformation of Nature. Then there is absolute death, which is the destruction, the annihilation, of this cycle itself, which would liberate Nature from its own laws and thus open a space for the creation of new forms of life *ex nihilo* (Žižek 2014, 175).

Between carnal death and absolute termination of the circulation, has Antigone found a new life, a life which is perpetual to readers? It's not hasty to answer this question. We endeavor to add an inter-text which should be read in juxtaposition with the previous quotation:

ici, si elle n'introduisait ce qu'on peut appeler la discordance des deux morts, introduite par l'existence de la condamnation. L'entre-deux-morts de l'en-deçà est essentiel à nous montrer qu'il n'est pas autre que celui dont se soutient l'au-delà (Lacan 1966, 776).

here did it not introduce what one might call the discordance between the two deaths, introduced by the existence of the condemnation. The between-two-deaths of the shy of [l'en-deçà] is essential to show us that it is no other than the one by which the beyond [l'au-delà] is sustained (Lacan 2007, 654-655).

Antigone is in custody alive and suffered from an ongoing death sentence, a chronic torture is imposed on her and thus gives rise to the predicament of double death. She is condemned to her primary mental death, or more exactly, she suffers the anticipation of her effacement in symbolic order by virtue of her insistent reclamation for the burial of her brother. We'd rather conclude instead that corporal annihilation does not necessarily take place prior to the symbolic one — which is in contrast with the aforementioned disintegration/rejuvenation of natural order: she appears in a place bringing to light a void which can neither be narrated nor historicized. Put succinctly, death traverses every clavier and is merely in concerto with the real, buttressing the whole texture which weaves into a symphony in and beyond Antigone.

Antigone is recalcitrant, she is obsessed with what she clings to. However, her seemingly odd and bigoted act is not pathological but takes on authentic ethical bearings. In Lacan's view, taking on the duty what we common people are reluctant to or are not able to attain embodies the highest debt in psychoanalysis: how to transfer it and terminate the very interminable? Antigone is she who gives it all up on her supposed mundane royal privilege while her act is not only indecent but also a treason to her identity. Notably, the original and extant political order is denied by her. Due to her idiosyncratic self-sacrifice, "Ne pas céder sur son désir" can be ambiguously read (either in third person singular form or in first person by third person perspective) as "don't succumb to the Other's desire" as well as even "don't succumb to the desire on one's own" (son propre désir), the latter of which implies *a fortiori* the imploding force for us to accentuate. Briefly, the common ground for them both breach positive politics and moral restrictions.

In this article, we will defend that the Lacanian ethics is the ethics of desire, the ethics of tragedy¹, the ethics of the real as well as lastly, the ethics of the hero(in). It is *maleur* (misfortune) which is opposed to *bien-être* (well-being) that reveals the core of psychoanalysis, given Lacan is enamored with Antigone in particular. In essence, the hero-in is not becoming great because of what he or she does; on the contrary, from the act to the plot, it is not sacrifice itself wherein lies the crux, do as what the ethics of desire inspires people to do matters the most. Basically, it surpasses not only any utilitarian account but also subverts the standard we habitually define what is success and defeat.

In my mind, I hold the view that Antigone's immutable *appalling* act and sheer break from the matrix of routine co-constitute the polarity for the heroic ethics: the refusal both to morality *en tant que* set pattern and to politics where we settle down — this is with no doubt the bedrock at the threshold of Antigone.

A Too Exigent Moral Ideal Chimera or Politics Beyond Community

Lacan is a labyrinth, he is always circuitous and roundabout. That means the linchpin to ethics² requires people not to be submerged in cliché, even though moral implications denote an insurmountable horizon. Therefore, the origin of morality and the traditional analytic ideals have vehemently been the target and Lacan has thus taken a radical position, unraveling eventually the cornerstone of his ethics. There is a deep transmutation in Lacan that between the particular duty, where lies the veiled desire beneath which pinpoints the duty and the imperative which straightforwardly opens up a trail to affirm the kernel of morality that constitute a tension: an interrogation stemming from the subject is actually in conflict with obsessional superegoic imperative. The difference is stark: duty is never the patent of morality. In essence, the duty to maintain one's own desire is uniquely the gist of Lacanian ethics. As we know, demand from the analysand always draws to the proclaimed outcome of *ne pas souffrir*, though the analytic ideals of conduct is nonetheless paradoxically in lack of this accomplishment and becomes henceforth unattainable. It is not completely ideal at all because the sufferance is bound to arouse, there must be something that inevitably breaches the possible imposition upon the restrained subject (*Wo Es war, soll Ich werden*). Not any imperative can make up for its gap with desire.

We should not neglect the semantic distinction which is essential in the moral-ethical couplet. There in Lacan, it's never been vague and indifferent to what merely belongs to ethics. Moral, the word literally designates an inclination to construct a common ground, to co-habit with one another. Even though he is not prone to deny common life which is entangled with the good(s), needless to say that he, not deity, just can't ignore it totally — the insight is he insists clearly and assuredly on the importance wherein moral rules play a vital role in view of “idéal de l'amour génialisé, idéale de l'authenticité, idéale de non-dépendance” (the ideal of genital love, the ideal of authenticity and the ideal of non-dependence). But what is his own “authentic” idea?

Eh bien, chose curieuse pour une pensée sommaire qui penserait que toute exploration de l'éthique doit porter sur le domaine de l'idéal, sinon de l'irréel, nous irons au contraire, à l'inverse, dans le sens d'un approfondissement de la notion du réel. La question éthique, pour autant que la position de Freud nous y fait faire un progrès, s'articule, d'une orientation du repérage de l'homme par rapport au réel (Lacan 1986, 21).

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. Insofar as Freud's position constitutes progress here, the question of ethics is to be articulated from the point of view of the location of man in relation to the real (Lacan 1992, 11).

Except the interwoven fabric of the symbolic and the imaginary, Lacan extracts separately the real, not the least to grant it a unique place which is absolutely distinct from the idealization: the ideal is ironically unreal, but the real is all the more ungraspable. It's evident that for him the question of the ethics is a realm where man is implicitly attached to the real, either encountering it in a sudden passively or voluntarily bursting into the real by one's proper acts. The core distinction between the fictitious and the real once taken into account, then we are easily to discern the further discordance inside the moral axe repleting with calculations and its un-symbolized kernel. What is ideal attests to be unreal, even though these three ideals are responsive to the demand in psychoanalysis “not to suffer” and its appeal purports to be freed from “ignorance”. These ideals are neither solely derived from moral imperatives nor sheltered in analytic refuge. They grow in abundance as quote. Although the sense of obligation should be maintained which normally is pervasive in a certain register of moral thought, we should yet ascertain that it is not the duty of psychoanalysis indeed. In narrow sense, these ideals are actually not attributed to Lacanian psychoanalysis. It is complicated to be rid from all of them and merely get to what Lacan clings to for his idiosyncratic ethics. We begin with the preliminary examination on these ideals.

The first ideal is the fulfilled love (*l'amour achevé*). Through this love, moral optimism specifically directs to genital love.

Et vous savez que j'ai souvent pris ici comme cible le caractère approximatif, vague et entaché de je ne quel moralisme optimiste, dont sont marquées les articulations originelles de la forme dite de la génitalisation du désir (Lacan 1986, 17).

And you know that I have often taken aim at the approximative and vague character, so tainted with an optimistic moralism, which marks the original articulations taking the form of the genitalization of desire (Lacan 1992, 8).

By contrast, for Lacan, once the genital love is soaked into a dual relation, i.e., to make a baby, it becomes enclosed/fulfilled. The intersection of the homonym *docte*-love and doctor-love inscribes the rudimentary difference: for a relation examined in the copulation of genitals, it has an external standard of measurement, for instance to maintain hygiene in the doctor's barometer; since love which is a too subtle and *docte* theme to explore, psychoanalysis does not constrain its scope to an ideological tone of hygiene. Rather, love is a notion at all times to be deployed and rewritten in macrocosm. In this direction, psychoanalysis is a novel sort of erotology. It is devoted to reveal *Was will das Weib?*, the fundamental query of Freud.

The second ideal calls for authenticity. Lacan's emphasis is once again to traverse the limit of commonsense, this time not on hygiene but on moral experience. The preoccupation is not the avoidance to the very task of his own peculiar field of ethics but to debunk the imprudent, excessive and inadequate formulations not viewed by those moralists circumscribed in the economy of inter-human relations, i.e., the pseudo-moral authenticity. Aside from the norms demanded underneath social relations, the clinical guidelines are distinctively formulated in line with something desirable as specific value to seize. Psychoanalysis therefore can not be standardized because it is not a path, a stage or a progress that applies for or adjusts to the set norms in society. Lacan uncovers the persona of morality by virtue of the "as if" logic posed by Helene Deutsch: as if marked by the others, however no other than catering for adaptability and control stemming from them. In short, pondering over the conditions adequate for the subject to satisfy such and such demands and maintain its function, this restrictive perspective seems quite reasonable or "moral" but halts over here. Lacan denounces this "as if" logic and at the same time christens the very significance of "unmasking", refuting that the "absence" of the ethics in life lies utterly where routinely the ways trailed and the virtue takes its root. Thus, we can't be more clear to find out the general disposition for Lacan's delimitation between the moral and the ethics: it is rather in a "*d'avec*" relation which designates a sheer rupture within a continuum. "As if" follows the non-reflected social norms, conducted by the anchored others reacting upon the subject-for-recognition and thereafter virtue is actually hollow or imaginary.

Last but not least, the third ideal is forged to the prophylaxis of dependence. This is obviously the only one Lacan enlists in affirmative sense. As is indispensable in order for his thought to keep sound, the final boundary now is transmitted to the distinction between orthopedics and ethics. There is some misunderstanding in analysis, the analysand would incessantly aspire to ask: can the

means of the analyst verify the purpose for cure? Assuredly, this is exactly the chimera of dependence. Means vindicates its end is typically a long-kept ideal seemingly out of question. However, it's far from being true in analysis. The fundamental field retained in analysis can never bear with any encroachment of the interventions by means of embracing our habits, disposition or presupposition no matter they are good or bad. In other words, the means people accord to achieving their ends does not correspond to what they employ and insist on. More precisely, it is owing to the split between means and ends once touching upon the "real". What are then the interventions and what is the desirable? The ethics of analysis involves effacement, withdrawal, and even cleansing from culpability that embedded in obligation. Put it bluntly, the ethical thought persists in view of a very trauma which haunts and precedes us. The kernel of tragedy is what utilized to fill up the blank since morality is removed. The ends, in other words, is not on the same plane with the means we implement afterward; rather, means in Lacanian sense should be attributed to the category of the desirable, to its dynamics.

In Charles Freeland's recapitulation, he orients us a direction:

While Lacan's ethics of psychoanalysis did not promise new foundations or ideals, it does offer something else. One could account for this "something else" [...] where for the classical European tradition, the primary passion was a passion for the Good, the True, the Just, the Beautiful, and so on, in Lacan, there is something one is almost tempted to call a "passion for the real... and in particular, a passion for the *jouissance*, for the "limitless love", that is access to the real (Charles Freeland 2013, 191).

Admittedly and objectively, psychoanalysis is not external to politics; however, we should assert primarily that by itself, it trails a specific approach toward politics quite distinct from the others. For instance, Lacan holds that psychoanalysis unfolds the kernel either overlooked or veiled in our seemingly tranquil life — the genocide in the second world war emerges from the ashes of all the past theories, it attests to anything but the sacrificed — this appalling and horrendous scene is captured by the chthonic deities. Following Lacan's thread, this is more a metaphor which implies what leaks from the science of the politics than plain superstition that can only be broached in Lacanian analysis in the real — the obscurity, the terror, the abominable and the devastating. All of them induces the extimacy of the politics-in-platitude.

In Chantal Mouffe's *the Return of the Political*, she considers that politics doesn't entail a sort of establishment or social status, what it leaves aside is the ontological condition. In this sense, the lack is what the morality (eudemonia/well-being) does not enable to evade — the tension lies in-between the attempt for the suture of the tragic and the eventual failure, the crack *per se*, indicating the unattainability from the hole to the whole, in Lacan, the *faute*.

L'impossibilité est ici meilleur signe d'authenticité d'une éthique que la faisabilité la plus directe qui ne fait que faire tourner dans l'illusion des objets et des biens. Une éthique qui n'a pas l'impossible comme mesure de nos actes et de nos objectifs n'en est pas une à la hauteur de nos désirs. Seul un point pris à l'infini évite le constant retour, par interposition d'un circuit d'objets, à la même place (Jean-Pierre Cléro 2006, 92).

Impossibility is here a better sign of the authenticity of an ethics than the most direct feasibility which only causes objects and goods to revolve in the illusion. An ethics that does not have the impossible as a measure of our actions and our objectives is not one that lives up to our desires. Only a point taken at infinity avoids the constant return, by interposing a circuit of objects, in the same place (my own translation).

A natural person, prior to becoming a subject, is apolitical; politics is possible but tends toward the impossible (e.g. one famous slogan of May '68: "Soyons réalistes, demandons l'impossible!"). More essentially, even though human being cannot reside alone which is yet far from buttressing the necessity of the community. What is the tension within politics? From another angle, we'd rather delve into this point by posing a question: why is there only the ethics of the desire rather than the politics of the desire? Put succinctly, "never giving ground to one's desire", the very motto of Lacan marks that the subject's undertaking its individual fate — the ethics in Lacan's context is stripped off from the operation of positive politics, regardless of in different regimes it is multifarious. Nonetheless, the category of politics itself is equal especially to a cluster of notions such as collectivity, universal will, the texture of public expression, the commonwealth, so on and so forth. We can't help asking that the Lacanian duty to take on one's own fate, is it even too selfish? Anyhow, this opinion isn't still floating on the surface? There exists assuredly the collective desire after all, exemplified through Luther's preach, Lenin's revolutionary will, etc. More objectively and more exactly, here is our answer: desire should not be confined to the spectrum of politics — desire is not entirely predicated by politics no matter the latter's conceptual potential is for combination or for separation.

The ethics of desire refuses to get bogged down in the narcissistic love of the neighbor, refuses to stir up the overflowing sympathy and refuses to endorse the not in the least goodwill. On this basis, Lacan drains off the gigantic root of humanism — human being inherently is not commensurable, neither can they be naturally assembled in a certain establishment. Obviously, Lacan pulls away a maximal distance from any utilitarian consideration. The thread is clear and thorough: by means of the lacunae in the Other, we are able to look back into the ever procrastinating character of desire. Between desire and all sorts of *biens*, this unfulfilled discrepancy exacts the inevitable sacrifice, the hard-to-payoff debt. Desire in essence exceeds both the principle of the market and all what is partaken — the real of psychoanalysis has broken *le calcul des phénomènes* (the calculation of phenomena).

The cornerstone in politics, i.e., the community, is quite like a category mistake for Lacanian psychoanalysis. In *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Benedict Anderson has demonstrated that either the collective identity or the illusory equality is circumscribed by the convention of politics. If we look through the geographical space, it is only by means of the imagination out of mental imagery, the disconnected people are thus integrated. Put succinctly, the origin of nation state is none other than attached to *Erde und Blut*, in native soil society, the constraint and appeal that nature and pedigree bring forth prior to its incorporation by politics is an obscure sentiment thus do not suffice. However, from Lacan's viewpoint, there is no solid social relationship, and there is no such social construction no matter in nationalist version or

whatever else. Based on resembling logic of the imaginary, this community is yet devoid of its ground to the access of symbolic register (the imaginary and the symbolic cannot be mingled or replaced), let alone tackling the *ek-sistence* of the real and its in-congruence which is non-political.

The Splendor of Antigone and the Traversal of the Limit

Polyneikes – for tending to your body, this is my recompense! And yet to those wit clear thoughts I did well to honor you. For I would never my assumed this burden, defying the citizens, if it had been my children or my husband who had died and had been left to rot away out there. In deference to what law do I say this? — Were my husband dead, there could be another, and by that man, another child, if one were lost. But since my mother and my father are hidden now in Hades, no more brothers could ever be born — this was the law by which I honored you above all others (Sophocles 2003, 95).

For any of the other characters, this excerpt of declaration may smell like a scent of scandal. Nonetheless, the exception merely leaves for the eternal Antigone. All the notions and questions we have coped with purport to reach this destination. In this epic drama created by Sophocles, we need to probe into his intention at first sight: the characters under his plume are in majority very recalcitrant and laudable, it reflects his own ideal of the hero(in) — the heroism comes from the epoch of Homers. After the Greco-Persian war, this thought has since then been deeply rooted in people's heart. The characters of Sophocles bear a common trait: no matter it is Antigone, Electra or Teucrus, they either commit some faults but brave enough to take on the responsibility by themselves or commit suicide for the sake of glory — all of them endure the tribulations that ordinary people cannot even imagine. Once Sophocles recounted that he wrote according to what the characters should be like while for Euripides his figures were as what they looked like.

The traditional reading to this play aims at revealing the multiple meanings of it, for instance: first, Creon's deeds to keep up the social order are correct, but his means toward Antigone is a felony; second, the law of gods is higher than that of human, what Antigone does has safeguarded no other than ultimate justice, so this play is progressive; third, since patriarchal society gives its way to civil society, so there is a split between text analysis of Antigone *per se* and the advancement of history for its inevitability; fourth, the dispute between security (for the *polis*) and fate (for Antigone) overlap on the figure of Creon, who is an agent at the juncture of the transformation of society.

Frankly speaking, I can't deny none of the above points, but the more acute should-be-posed question is: what about eradicating the teleology of history? The coolest out-of-order women certainly have nothing to do with wickedness or being egoists — they are not narcissistic or soaked in self-pity, annihilation is the unchanging *terminus*. Inherited from Antigone, the ancient image of the female does not take on the burden, the very fetter of history, which is therefore not contradictory to carry on one's own duty. Born for herself, the difference between hero and heroin at least lies in that for female, the primacy is not the loyalty/treachery dichotomy in the political context — strictly speaking, there is no enemy for her, obviously she doesn't need to conquer anybody. In a word, she incarnates *l'échantillon sanglant* (bloodshed sample) of the desiring subject.

Ever since history is already terminated in Napoleon, according to Kojève, only through war, the new conqueror is the succeeding terminator who cuts off all feeble pleasure at the end of history. “At the end of history”, borrowing this expression, the desire of Antigone is irrelevant of the then-dominance. History halts and never continues. Except burying her brother, what else glory can she pursue? The *polis* doesn’t belong to women, so the root to gain “great achievements” is transcendently deprived, despite Antigone originates from the royal family. It is not bizarre for Creon grumbling like “it’s not possible for me to lose under a woman”. The logic in the operation of spirit merely aligns with the rational principles of the daylight, as the ruler, defying the secular law is worst offence of rebellion — no matter through the chthonic, the bygone, the dark and horrendous underworld. If darkness elevates high above the ground, the original pedigree among the siblings must not cede its place to the vertical relation of dominance fraught with slaughter, alliance, conspiracy and collusion fades away. Without sanguinary battle, without history. But without the underworld, without the detachable distinctive politics.

Compared to politics which is bright and positive, what emerges from the underworld is beyond verification — it incorporates the mythic elusiveness, a formless world reigned by the imaginary non-entity, despite this force is paradoxically so stalwart upon the nether world and keeps its firm but raw force. We thus cannot neglect that the archi-formulation of politics is in fact not unitary: the antagonism is never dissolved — what is obscure for the lucid deliberation in the order designates on the other side the real, the eruptive void that chisels the substantive, i.e., the tragedy for the splendor of its figure. Antigone claims that she is born for love instead of for hatred. This love is perverse in the modern perspective of reading aforementioned; nevertheless, as I have pinpointed, the heroine is apolitical, it is she who copes with the deities, distinguished drastically from what is shrouded the ode to human being, especially the power and craft of man, by the chorus. Evidently, that’s why it leaves endless room for the scholars to interpret generation by generation and opens up a very rich field for feminism on sexuated being, no matter from what stance.

It was not Zeus who made that proclamation to me; nor was it Justice, who resides in the same house with the gods below the earth, who put in place for men such laws as yours. Nor did I think your proclamation so strong/ That you, a mortal, could overrule the laws of the gods, that are unwritten and unfailing. For these laws live not now or yesterday/ But always, and no one knows how long ago they appeared. And therefore I did not intend to pay the penalty among the gods for being frightened of the will of a man (Sophocles 2003, 73).

The renowned play writer Jean Anouilh has modified his own namesake Antigone in Mid 20th century. In contrast, that Antigone bears some tiny but stark difference compared to Sophocles’. If for the ancient Greek, the figure of Antigone is “inhuman” and sublime, for the modern Frenchman, she is all the more belligerent and childlike. On the one hand, she takes on the short-circuited means-end encounter — burial for her second brother adumbrates actually her own fatality while on the

other hand, she is exacting her idiosyncratic life (not in the name of gods), for she cannot bear with even an instant of being alive without burying Polyneices. There is no such tension in Sophocles, for the ancient former, the dichotomy indicates the not-whole life/the doomed death; however for the modern latter, the dichotomy turns into the seemingly whole life/the extremely slim improbable death. That's the drastic difference and modern twist between classical tragedy and romantic drama. However, all in all, Anouilh's dispute is uni-directional: since she is a rational being, hence freewill (deliberate reasoning which is too much emphasized) rather than deities must overwhelm fate (preordained obligation) that fundamentally goes too far and too narrow-minded (although we don't overlook the background of Vichy regime and the resistance movement), tearing their intertwining obscurity in Sophocles. In my view, it is the insight from Lacan designating the desire from the unconscious that totally transforms the superficial active/passive contention (such as she said to Ismene, "you choose to live but I choose to die") to another realm, marking the unparalleled contribution on Lacanian analysis of the ethics.

Une ligne, donc, se franchit — "ici et maintenant, et non pas *ad aeternum*". L'au-delà de cette ligne, c'est à la psychanalyse, comme éthique ou comme archi-éthique, non pas seulement de le désigner, mais d'entreprendre d'y accéder. Il y va d'un "espoir", dit Lacan avec une particulière gravité, la gravité qu'on peut attendre d'une pensée que hante, c'est partout lisible, une eschatologie catastrophique: s'il n'y a pas cet espoir, la promesse de cet espoir, si le pas ne peut être franchi, alors c'est la fin, le monde du bien "nous entraîne tous à notre perte", nous sommes au bord du désastre — ce qu'il faut entendre littéralement si, du "discours surgi des petites lettres mathématiques", ce "discours qui, par structure, n'oublie rien" et qui affecte la "toute-puissance" du signifiant, on ne sait pas s'il faut attendre "l'intégration de la Nature ou... sa disintégration" (Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe 1991, 24).

A line, therefore, is crossed — "here and now, and not *ad aeternum*". Beyond this line, it is up to psychoanalysis, as ethics or as archi-ethics, not only to designate, but to undertake to access it. There is a "hope" at stake, says Lacan with particular gravity, the gravity that one can expect from a thought that haunts, it is readable everywhere, a catastrophic eschatology: if there is not this hope, the step cannot be taken, then it is the end, the world of good "drags us all to our doom", we are on the edge of the disaster — what must be understood literally if, from the "discourse arising from small mathematical letters", this "discourse which, by structure, forgets nothing" and which affects the "omnipotence" of the signifier, we do not know whether to wait for "the integration of Nature or... its disintegration" (my own translation).

It is tantamount to remould an ethics in its stark contrast to virtue ethics, deontology and utilitarianism. There are a series of questions to pose: what is the unlimited ethics of Lacan?; is it legitimate to discuss hope in the context of Lacan?; what is the discourse that forgets nothing?; etc. Intuitively, we are not conscious of the boundary that we live in a habitual world, and it needs to be interrogated. Our world is the one surrounded by the good but at the same time gets caught in

discomfort and irreparable lack, and also a world covered by capitalized knowledge and science. In this situation, the possibility to delineate the traversal of the limit is already *en souffrance* (in suspense).

It is incisive to divide several strata from Lacan's original text:

First, needless to look back *Kant avec Sade*, the inherent dialectics is evident — the world of good turns directly and immediately into the world of evilness. It is reflected through the prospect in pursuit of happiness in contemporary politics. The good/s circumscribed within moralism stands merely for the sake of the positive politics while the future happiness is the cause that masks the approaching terror and massacre.

Disposer de ses biens, chacun sait que cela ne va pas sans un certain désordre, qui en montre assez la véritable nature — disposer de ses biens, c'est avoir le droit d'en priver les autres... La dimension du bien dresse une muraille puissante sur la voie de notre désir (Lacan 1986, 270).

What is meant by defending one's goods is one and the same thing as forbidding oneself from enjoying them. The sphere of the good erects a strong wall across the path of our desire (Lacan 1992, 230).

Second, no matter historically or theoretically, there is always a limit to traverse for Lacan. But what lies on the other side of it? Briefly, it designates the archi-ethics which we have cited from Lacoue-labarthe. However, this limit should not be a singular term — there are multiple barriers to traverse; and moreover, the barrier of knowledge is more resistant to cross over. Basically, the supposition of psychoanalysis steers towards the unconscious, i.e., the unknown realm for explicit knowledge. It is clear that *Antigone*, the mythos, appeared much earlier than the establishment of the later Socratic-Plato philosophy, let alone the virtue ethics for good since Aristotle.

Third, as is axiomatically shown that the good/s lies in the centre of politics which is highly entangled with interest and all the tangible gains and benefits, essentially, in the turmoil of political intrigues, the good is still caught in exchange among the images. In this sense, the schema of politics shuttles back and forth between the imaginary chimera and the forbidden Good which is neither reachable nor commensurable in practice.

Fourth, there is an inherent transition towards death. In the narrow sense to grasp what it means beyond death, it designates nothing other than to live as long as possible which is merely within commonsense seizure, the immortal — in *Antigone*, this prototype has opened up the zero degree of death that ordinary usage cannot reach. In essence, it is the signifier that settles the subject beyond death for mortal beings. Whence the signifier is attached to the subject, the latter has been coagulated as stagnant, comprising in itself a paradox — insofar as it is dying, it immortalizes (the content is hollowed out). Moreover, this zero-degree pierces into public reason which is un-symbolized or can never be absorbed by the matrix itself. There is a penchant of an ultimate opposition between disintegration, destruction or disorganization and solidity or consistency.

Qu'Antigone sorte ainsi des limites humaines, qu'est-ce que cela veut dire pour nous? — Si ce n'est que son désir vise très précisément ceci — au-delà de l'Atè.// Le même mot, Atè, sert dans atroce. C'est ce dont il s'agit, et c'est ce que le Chœur répète à tel moment de son intervention avec une insistance technique. On s'approche ou on ne s'approche pas d'Atè, et quand on s'en approche, c'est en raison de quelque chose qui est lié dans l'occasion à un commencement et à une chaîne, celle du malheur de la famille des Labdacides. Quand on a commencé de s'en approcher, les choses s'enchaînent en cascade, et ce qui se trouve au fond de ce qui se passe à tous les niveaux de cette lignée... (Lacan 1986, 306).

What does it mean to us if Antigone goes beyond the limits of the human? What does it mean if not that her desire aims at the following - the beyond of *Atè*? That same word *Atiè* is to be found in "atrocious." That's what is involved here, and that's what the Chorus repeats at a given moment in its speech with an emphasis that is technical. One does or does not approach *Atè*, and when one approaches it, it is because of something that is linked to a beginning and a chain of events, namely, that of the misfortune of the Labdacides family. As one starts to come close to it, things come together in a great hurry, and what one finds at the bottom of everything that goes on at every level in this family (Lacan 1992, 263-264).

The very term *Atè* is the key to further treat the limit that Antigone traverses: etymologically, it designates the goddess of

mischief, delusion, ruin, and blind folly, rash action and reckless impulse who led men down the path of ruin. She also led both gods and men to rash and inconsiderate actions and to suffering. *Atè* also refers to an action performed by a hero that leads to their death or downfall (Wikipedia: *Atè*).

True, Antigone is ruined and she definitely encounters her death but it is hard to attribute this to rash action or reckless impulse. She traverses this line of *atè coûte que coûte* (at all costs) which is opposed to Creon's suffering from his own fatal blow out of *harmatia*. If we pose a question like: what does she want? The answer leads to nothing more than the horrific total non-recognition which doesn't exist in daily life amid you and me: she is devoid of worry, fear, terror and regret, for her act has nothing to do with the catharsis already.

Her initial talk with Ismene is too clear to repeat over again:

– Ismene: Must I, in my misery, fall short of your fate?

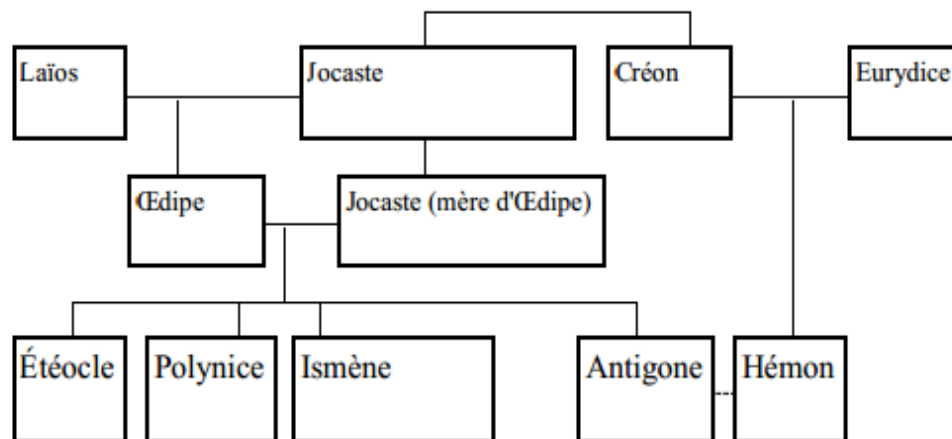
– Antigone: Yes — because you chose to live, and I to die (Sophocles 2003, 78).

From the below family lineage, we are not laborious to discover the correlation Antigone bears with Creon: both as his niece and daughter-in-law, as for Haimon, he is Oedipus' nephew as well cousin. In a word, in this very complexity and distortion within domestic relation, no one can be spared from the oracle, the lingering condemnation originated from this blood, from the same womb

that gives birth to the brothers and sisters. In Antigone's stance, after her death, the cursed family, notably, the sin of the incest finally comes to an end. Antigone's deed is an enigma, a human being without humanity, and this enigma is not only incredible but also can't be imitated, either. This inhuman-ness discloses an alternate legality outside the public sphere which emits a scandalous smell of her **presumed incest³ whilst** for Lacan, conspicuously, he puts the martyrs in contrast to the "human" category, no matter the tyrant or the headsman, and he writes that:

Il n'y a que les martyrs pour être sans pitié ni crainte. Croyez-moi, le jour du triomphe des martyrs, c'est l'incendie universelle. La pièce est bien faite pour nous le démontrer (Lacan 1986, 311).

Only the martyrs know neither pity nor fear. Believe me, the day when the martyrs are victorious will be the day of universal conflagration. The play is calculated to demonstrate that fact (Lacan 1992, 267).



In other place, the hymn for Dionysus in this case runs invalid because the limits away from the field of the conflagration have been breached. In Lacan's view, Antigone takes on her own desire by means of trespassing the human law, and this marks the highest form of desire — the desire of nothingness so as to accomplish this supreme univocity. The image of Antigone directs toward the kernel of tragedy: this little, flickering and enthralling figure which is so vivid and full of tension. She lies, with no doubt, at the centre of tragedy, and the ethics of Antigone opens up a space between two deaths — the sepulchre, the limbo that is located between the secular and the chthonic. Antigone is neither lured, nor directly related to the irredeemable punishment; instead, for Antigone, it is through her own act rather than incurred from something described as "erroneous" that penalizes the obtrusive behavior (e.g. for Creon). What Antigone does cannot be confused with the pseudo-transgression soaked in perverted jouissance under the hidden dominion of the Other, either. Evidently, what should be accentuated steps one leap forward in the contentious debate within and beyond humanism:

[...] thinking and talking about death has been always part of the humanistic discourse. Testing the limits of mortality and considering human finitude, especially in the context of Antigone, have been raised succinctly, as of late, by feminist scholars as part of the discourse renegotiating our humanity... Thus, are we entitled to talk about post-humanism and rather than humanism? Death, we all agree, is part of the human condition: can we draw the fine line that distinguishes between 'death' as a discourse of the human condition and "death" as "voice coming from elsewhere", that is, the "voice of the non-human" (Karakantza 2017, 22).

It is clear that from Homer onward, death is regarded as a part of human condition, for instance, Odysseus chooses mortality over Calypso's immortality no matter it is superior or divine. The backdrop of Antigone's act originates from the wretchedness of her family and the war that broke out in Thebes. Actually, there is a transition inside the play from being too humane to inhuman — she cannot hold back her tears and lamentations at the end of her life:

O tomb! O bridal bedchamber! O deep cave of a dwelling-place, under guard forever, where I must go to be with my own dear ones/ Most of whom Persephone has received dead among the shades! And I, the last of them, will go in the worst way of all down there before my portion of this life comes to me.// But as I go I hold strong hopes that will arrive as one loved by my father/ Loved by you, mother, loved by you, my own Dear brother — for when you died I washed and laid out your bodies properly with my own hands... (Sophocles 2003, 94-95).

Is such thing the ordinary groan or is she pursuing some relief? Obviously, in this situation of deadlock, although she's not arrived the palace of Hades yet, up till then, she still treats the dead in a disproportional way — because she cares none other than the burial of Polyneices. We are usually bogged down in the platitude of the set-patterned tripartite definition of human: the individual autonomy of will and behavior, the authenticity to express such autonomous individuality in social dimensions of labor, language and desire plus the reflexive unity of what is conscious of itself as the cardinal attributes of the humanity of human beings. Nevertheless, for Lacan, the key turn he accomplishes moves from human control to therapy: the sufferance derived from the indetermination for treatment rather than for cure versus a certain normativity of life constrained in political science. In brief, a small step realized *from* stability and determination *to* designate the incompleteness of non-substantial subject which is not disposed any longer through the correspondence of objective validity with the very foundation of ego.

Insensé contresens, car pour Antigone, la vie n'est abordable, ne peut être vécue et réfléchie, que de cette limite où déjà elle a perdu la vie, où déjà elle est au-delà — mais de là, elle peut la voir, la vivre sous la forme de ce qui est perdu (Jacques Lacan 1986, 326).

It's an absurd misinterpretation, for from Antigone's point of view life can only be approached, can only be lived or thought about, from the place of that limit where her life is already lost, where she is already on the other side. But from that place she can see it and live it in the form of something already lost (Lacan 1992, 280).

How to evaluate this distinction between socio-historical catastrophe (still within the Symbolic) and subjective impasse beyond recognition in social structure that indicates the very limit traversing already human and inhuman? This is a difficult problem to investigate for sure, for in Lacan's thread, both the man-made world and the underworld are covered by the anchoring of signifier: her birth, her grown-up are all mingled with her lineage, her destined tragedy. In this sense, the tautology, "my brother is my brother" is bound up with such efficacy. The name Antigone has been captured in advance by the commendation of the Labdacides family is indelible. For the ever-presence of the signifier, *le défilé du signifiant* (a signifier represents the subject for another signifier), concretely, the death leaps beyond or to expiate the family atè, and both of them co-direct toward the desire, the fundamental non-eradicable desire:

Mais Antigone mène jusqu'à la limite l'accomplissement de ce que l'on peut appeler le désir pur, le pur et simple désir de mort comme tel. Ce désir, elle l'incarne. //Réfléchissez-y bien — qu'en est-il de son désir? Ne doit-il pas être le désir de l'Autre, et se brancher sur le désir de la mère? Le désir de la mère, le texte y fait allusion, est l'origine de tout. Le désir de la mère est à la fois le désir fondateur de toute la structure, celui qui a fait venir au jour ces rejetons uniques..., mais en même temps un désir criminel...//... Il n'y a personne pour assumer le crime, et la validité du crime, si ce n'est Antigone (Lacan 1986, 322-323).

Yet she pushes to the limit the realization of something that might be called the pure and simple desire of death as such. She incarnates that desire. Think about it. What happens to her desire? Shouldn't it be the desire of the Other and be linked to the desire of the mother? The text alludes to the fact that the desire of the mother is the origin of everything. The desire of the mother is the founding desire of the whole structure, the one that brought into the world the unique offspring...; but it is also a criminal desire. [...] There is no one to assume the crime and the validity of crime apart from Antigone (Lacan 1992, 282-283).

In the fissure and limit of atè, the signifier which incarnates Antigone's anticipatory death simultaneously accomplishes through *au-milieu, vers* and *au-delà* (in the midst of, toward and beyond). It is via this dynamic of the signifier and in this a-temporal eternalization of this proper figure that she, by her own sacrifice, perpetuates *l'origine de tout*. Death stalks language and desire, but how about the purification of desire? What if the desire of the female is beyond symbolization?

We endeavor merely to touch upon what is this very purification. Dialectically, any life fraught only with affirmative trait is not worthwhile to possess. Imagine, the subject doesn't pay the price to

trespass the barrier of the good is s/he who simply doesn't make the sacrifice, that pound of flesh *par excellence*. How can s/he thus not succumb to the call of sensual stimulation and temptations? For Antigone, frankly speaking, Jocaste delivers life without conferring death because the sin is successively befallen to her offspring as long as the subsequent generation stretches for the "good" in life. The mother breeds her children, she passes her sin that is obviously "known" to her utmost in the unconscious. Nonetheless, the pathway of purifying the origin of this criminal desire is unknown upon Antigone's birth, so her own desire is to entirely terminate the catastrophe of the incest. The given life turns directly into the total annihilation with no mediation for instance exhibited from Ismene's pragmatic choice.

However, the daughter/sister made from Jocaste's intercourse with his son Oedipus, although branding the name "opposed to be born", is not possible to go back to her mother's womb, what leaves for her is the sheer rebuttal to her generation/genesis, the rebuttal for her inheritance of maternity. This purification by means of desiring the void on the plane of the secular takes the place of prolonging the tarnished blood, notably, the inherited debt should be cleansed. Other than regarding her as the true heroine, there is another opinion that attributes her as an absolute victim. With no doubt, she was the survivor, together with Ismene, of the family, after the male siblings (including Oedipus, in this incestuous sense) have perished. But this life mingled with her mother's desire is not worthy in her eyes: evidently, the desire of Jocaste is not pure at all — it is rather a mixture with complicated ingredients, i.e., foundation and dispossession, birth and death, inheritance and clearance. They are overlapping and converged into the unwipable debt. For Antigone, she can deliver nothing other than the void *per se*. From the demise of her brothers, she excludes her noble lineage, her narcissistic and imaginary identification with it *par excellence*. Moreover, she finds thereafter her chance performed and permitted by herself to cut off the dominance of atè once and for all. Importantly, Antigone is reluctant to rather than incapable of being a mother.

It inevitably gives rise to another poignant and impressing issue: Lacan talks too much about death, such as death drive, between two deaths, etc. Is the end of the purification of desire, always and merely leads to death? After all, not everyone is Antigone! In my view, as I have stated, psychoanalysis possesses its own gist and foothold. In other words, only because of the incredible stance it adopts which not only breaches common sense but also seems counter-intuitive and even anti-human that it seems idiosyncratic and precious. Thus, we cannot debase Lacan as someone preaching the nihil and destructive force, and who is also incapable of transforming the negative into the creative. Inspired by the sublime second body of Sade outside life cycle, Lacan reveals the dimension of *ex nihilo* that glitters through Antigone's particular death beyond limit. Besides, in ancient Chinese thought, the distinction of *You* (有) and *Wu* (无) can be supplementary to this bi-dimensional variation. *You* (有) refers to the state of a thing after it has come into being and before it dies out; *wu* (无) refers to the state of a thing before its birth and after its death. The void of desire indicates meanwhile the presupposition and circumscription of the symbolic order which just denotes the proper subject before the birth and after the death.

All in all, Antigone incarnates this fundamental purified desire (not the purification of fear and pity in tragedy for sure) as the personification for us all.

Endnotes:

1. According to Jean Bollack, tragedy plays its role not aside from its knot and conflict, but more precisely in its core, the contradiction does not lie utmost among the figures in the intrigue; rather, we should make a clear-cut distinction between theatre and its story (*histoire*). The former is not a witness of the meaning anchored by the latter. On this basis, it is to be circumscribed that since there is no ready-made material to coincide with a concrete setting, we need to explore its own causality as what is still remaining to open up. In a word, the tension and split *per se* rooted in its theatricality precedes the internal contradiction of its *mise-en-scène* in the plot.
2. In Lacan, the authentic ethics is instead opposed to goods and interests (*des biens*). The good in Lacan is a conceptual establishment in two aspects: the corruptible things are mostly good, they erect themselves as a first barrier man should come across all the way to desire; the good written in capitalized letter denotes beyond “natural needs and satisfactions”, therein it reaches (rather doesn’t reach) a Good that mustn’t be touched. When we examine this particular use of Good, it amounts to a supreme ideal from antiquity in pursuit of *Souverain Bien*. Lacan calls the Supreme Good is nothing other than a “transcendental appearance” that whisks the final and fatal object out of sight. Henceforth, it loses all positive determination and can only be defined negatively, as something irrevocably prohibited.
3. According to Bernardete, he poses a hypothesis: if Polyneices is still alive, Antigone’s claim “lying abreast the dear in Hades” seems entirely incestuous, but I don’t agree with him because this particular smell of incest once laid upon her name Anti-gone in literal meaning then dissolves.

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