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**Title:** Ethics of schizoanalysis

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**Keywords:** schizoanalysis, ethics, *Anti-Oedipus*, desire, unconscious

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# Ethics of schizoanalysis

Mehdi Parsa<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

In this essay I read Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* from an ethical point of view. My main question refers to a claim that Michel Foucault made in his preface to *Anti-Oedipus*: "*Anti-Oedipus* (may its authors forgive me) is a book of ethics". I try to elaborate on this suggestion in conversation with Jacques Lacan's *Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, a 1959–1960 seminar published under the same title. This essay responds to Lacan's formulation of an unconscious desire by way of Deleuze and Guattari's social-machinic perspective. In my interpretation *Anti-Oedipus* accounts for an ontological ethics in terms of an unconscious desire that is exteriority. I take the notion of *socius* as the key element of this exterior desire and therefore as the true site of ethics.

**Keywords:** schizoanalysis, ethics, *Anti-Oedipus*, desire, unconscious

## Introduction

The book *Anti-Oedipus* radically critiques psychoanalysis and also introduces an alternative to it. This alternative Deleuze and Guattari, the book's authors, call *schizoanalysis*. I would like to construe the alternative Deleuze and Guattari sets out in *Anti-Oedipus* in light of Lacan's formulation of an ethics of psychoanalysis. Deleuze and Guattari introduce the figure of the schizophrenic as a basis for formulating their alternative for psychoanalysis. The figure of the schizophrenic takes the place of Freud and Lacan's "neurotic". This figure allows Deleuze and Guattari to radically transform psychoanalysis, and to invent schizoanalysis. Further, this replacement allows Deleuze and Guattari to disavow of the role of the Oedipal family in psychoanalysis. Here I will argue that the move from an ethics of psychoanalysis to an ethics of schizoanalysis entails a move

from a subjective or intersubjective morality to a truly ontological ethics.

## I. The transcendental synthesis of unconscious

This leads me to discuss the nature of desire, the unconscious desire, in Lacan and Deleuze and Guattari. First, desire is the notion that links ethics to psychoanalysis. In fact, psychoanalysis sheds new light on ethical thought by introducing unconscious desire. Before Freud, ethical problems were considered in terms of a conscious will. With Freud, ethics had to be redefined on the basis of a desire that was unconscious. Now, if *Anti-Oedipus* provides an alternative to psychoanalysis, and at the same time, as Foucault suggests, it is a work of ethics, it is because it reformulates the notion of unconscious desire. In this reformulation desire is defined first as non-familial, non-personal, and

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non-structural; rather it is considered *machinic*. Second, desire is defined in terms of production as a *legitimate synthesis*. The outcome of this account is that the unconscious is both exterior to and constitutive of persons and familial structures and entities. By introducing a machinic and productive desire schizoanalysis renders the unconscious as an exteriority.

This is the main task of Deleuze and Guattari's project: to reformulate the nature of the psychoanalytical desire by giving an account of the unconscious desire underlying pure exteriority. They criticize existing psychoanalysis for reducing the unconscious to an image of conscious structures and entities. According to them, psychoanalysis in Freud and his heirs, including Lacan, fails to liberate itself from the bounds of consciousness and therefore cannot provide for a true unconscious due to its dependency on the familial and on personal roles and structures (the roles of the father, the mother and the child). Deleuze and Guattari summarize this psychoanalytical familialism under the title of Oedipus, claiming that the true unconscious must be transcendental and not transcendent, which is to say that it must condition the production of conscious entities without itself being based on conscious products. Psychoanalysis must lay the ground for a true synthesis of consciousness, rather than analysing its pre-existing structure. Family, and particularly the Oedipal family, is a derivative and produced structure, and the persons involved are simply products. Therefore, the familial structure and the Oedipal unconscious cannot satisfy the requirements of a true transcendental unconscious.

Unlike Freud, whose favourite patients are neurotics, Deleuze and Guattari formulate the unconscious in terms of psychosis, and particularly schizophrenia. It is in the figure of the schizophrenic that we should search for the na-

ture of unconscious desire. With schizophrenic figures such as Adolf Wölfl and Judge Schreber Deleuze and Guattari show that unconscious desire initially is desiring-production.<sup>2</sup> Here, the unconscious is the field of production, and consciousness the field of consumption, and it is in the figure of the schizophrenic that the nature of the unconscious comes to the surface. This is why they replace the traditional Freudian metaphor of the theatre with that of the factory; the unconscious does not represent things, it produces them. And desire, the unconscious desire, is machinic. Therefore, if the unconscious is primary and transcendental, desire cannot be considered in terms of produced, representational entities. Desiring is essentially different from willing or needing. Despite the psychoanalytical account, the schizoanalytical desire is not negative or grounded in lack; desiring means producing. And Deleuze and Guattari insist that the production of desire is not imaginary or fantastic; rather, it is real.<sup>3</sup>

The transcendental unconscious must be impersonal and exterior to personal minds, as it marks a transcendental exteriority. Hence, the conscious will is the product of a real transcendental desire. A real, immanent synthesis undergirds productive unconscious desire. Production here is indeed synthesis but not the transcendent synthesis of complete objects we associate with a full subject; rather, it is an immanent synthesis of partial objects. This constitutes the core of Deleuze and Guattari's account of desiring-production: If the relation of the psyche to the outside is called experience, this experience takes place in terms of production. Further, the unconscious experience is the productive site of both the subject and the object of experience. On the one hand, experiencing and constructing the subject are one and the same process. On the other, the process through which the subject is under production

<sup>2</sup> Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 15–16, 19.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

is identical to the process through which the outside world is under production. This view underlies the central role of the unconscious: The unconscious is not a site of cognition, and also not a site in which a fully produced subject experiences, but rather the site where the subject has real experiences. This subject, furthermore, is permanently under production. And more importantly, and more radically, the unconscious marks the productive register of the outside world.

In this sense, experience underlies a practice linking speculative reason to practical reason. Ethics belongs to the transcendental exteriority, formulated by Deleuze and Guattari in terms of unconscious desire. In short, ethics is not the matter of psychology (or any Oedipal psychoanalysis) but rather ontology.

## II. Desiring the event

Now, we have a double formula in defining desire: it is desiring-production as immanent synthesis and it entails exteriority (the ontological register). This relation between desire as immanent synthesis or production and its exteriority is at the centre of my reading as it constitutes the ethics of schizoanalysis. The relation forms the ground of our interrogation of Lacan and Deleuze's Stoicism.

In the conclusion to his 1959–60 seminar on the *Ethics of Psychoanalysis* Jacques Lacan formulated his view of ethics around the question “have you acted in conformity with the desire that is in you?”<sup>4</sup> In my reading, what Lacan formulates is the exteriority of desire: “the desire that is in you” is different from “your desire”, and you should regulate your acts, which are normally based on “your desire”, with the exterior desire which is in you as the unconscious. Lacan considers ethics in terms of “the relationship between action and the desire that inhabits it”.<sup>5</sup> I translate this into the relation-

ship between the unconscious desire and the conscious will. The conscious will must be regulated in conformity with the unconscious desire. The latter is prior to the former. You should act in conformity with the desire which already is in you and constitutes you. In this way, Lacan's formula is compatible with the Stoic formula of ethics which can be summarized as an injunction to “live in accordance with nature”. The Stoic formula implies that nature signifies what is exterior to the living subject and beyond his conscious control. Such an exteriority is exemplified in the Stoic thinking about misery, suffering, and death. The Stoic ethic is a method to live with your miseries and, ultimately, with death, with the inevitable factuality of your death. These are things that happen from without; they cannot be reduced to conscious categories. Deleuze's specific term for this irreducible exteriority in *Logic of Sense* is the event or fate. In “Twenty-First Series of the Event” in *Logic of Sense* he introduces Joe Bousquet as a true Stoic who takes his “inclination for death” as the truth of his desire. In reference to Bousquet's Stoicism, Deleuze writes,

It is in this sense that the *Amor fati* is one with the struggle of free man. My misfortune is present in all events, but also a splendor and brightness which dry up misfortune and which bring about that the event, once willed, is actualized on its most contracted point, on the cutting edge of an operation. (Deleuze 2015, 154)

Deleuze translates the Stoic passivity in relation to an exterior event into what constitutes the interior of free man. This entails a tension within will or desire, which is indeed the tension between conscious will and unconscious desire:

<sup>4</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII*, translated by Dennis Porter (Norton: 1997), 314.

<sup>5</sup> Lacan 1997, 313.

It comes into being when I will what happens to me, whatever it may be, including my misfortune, my miseries, and my death. Thus, the Lacanian formula of acting in conformity with the desire that is in you can be construed in the Deleuzian terminology of *Logic of Sense* as making a passive synthesis with the event, incorporating the exterior event within yourself, and in short, loving the fate (*Amor fati*).

In *Anti-Oedipus*, this exteriority receives a more ontological register as it is rendered in terms of machines: everything is a machine and a machine is composed of flows of desire and of interruptions of these flows. My desire is that in me which is exterior, which is to say that it is the same as that which flows in nature. What Deleuze and Guattari take as machines are natural machines, and nature is composed of machines that interrupt, break, and connect the flows of desire. Ethics, however, is the practical affirmation of the flows of desire as my nature, an affirmation which is evental. Desire-production is the flow itself which is understood as the processual or immanent synthesis. This renders the synthesis with the event in me as the practical affirmation of the exteriority of the event (my death) as my essence and my nature. Human nature must essentially be exterior nature itself. A Stoic living in accordance with nature implies a whole, a conflagrant fire, which synthesizes immanently, and my consciousness is just one of the ephemeral products of this fire. But the fire burns in me (or walks with me) as well as in any entity; this fire is the unconscious desire.

### III. Ethics of the Real

In this way, we can connect Lacan's ethics of psychoanalysis with Deleuze's reading of Stoic ethics, and with Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* as a book of ethics. They are connected by a similar approach to unconscious desire. But as mentioned, *Anti-Oedipus* at the least is critical to Lacan because of this psychoanalyst's

affinity with Freudian Oedipalism. Deleuze and Guattari's relationship with Lacan is indeed very controversial. Let us discuss this relationship in more details.

Lacan's formula seems well compatible with Deleuze's ethical view in *Logic of Sense* and with Deleuze and Guattari's account of the unconscious desire in *Anti-Oedipus*. But this is just one side of the picture. There are indeed two tendencies in Lacan's work regarding desire. Deleuze and Guattari summarize these two tendencies or two poles in a footnote in reference to Serge Leclaire:

Lacan's admirable theory of desire appears to have two poles: one related to 'the object small a' as a desiring-machine, which defines desire in terms of a real production, thus going beyond any idea of need and any idea of fantasy; and the other related to the 'great other' as a signifier, which reintroduces a certain notion of lack. (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 27; footnote)

According to the first tendency, Lacan defines desire in terms of lack. This is indicative of Lacan's structuralism of the symbolic order which is organized in terms of the big Other. This tendency is harshly criticized in *Anti-Oedipus*. According to this criticism, Lacan's account of the symbolic order does not sufficiently break with the imaginary order. For Lacan, the subject emerges within a linguistic structure. This symbolic structural emergence is far from what Deleuze and Guattari take as real production. Therefore, his account of the unconscious remains in the image of consciousness; the structural unity reflects the imaginary ego, despite Lacan's efforts to distinguish them. The real, in this account, remains impossible, which is far from Deleuze and Guattari's approach in which the real is necessary. For Deleuze and Guattari,

who stand against the structuralist moments of Lacan, the unconscious is not a symbolic structure, but a real process. It is machinic, has to do with natural and vital machines, not structural ones. Deleuze and Guattari's notion of desiring-production is indeed a positive counterpart to what Lacan calls the Real and renders impossible.

But it would be a simplification to reduce Lacan's work to this pole. Deleuze and Guattari, in the quoted remark, summarize another tendency in Lacan's thought under his notion of '*objet petit a*' and identify it with their own 'desiring-machine' and desiring-production. Let us review the moments in Lacan's *Ethics of Psychoanalysis* where this tendency surfaces.

In the second section of chapter 22, Lacan discusses an inherent relation between life and death and suggests that death intrudes into life and life into death.<sup>6</sup> Apparently, death here signifies the impersonal processes which are beyond the symbolic order. So the intrusion of death onto life is indeed the injection (synthesis) of desire in me. Lacan also refers to it by the German term *Das Ding* and devotes two chapters of his seminar to this notion: here, according to Lacan, the object of desire is not merely a lack but a real thing-ness, a dead thing-ness, a plenitude. This compares well to Deleuze and Guattari's idea of a body without organs as anti-production (death), which in synthesis with production of partial objects (life) grounds desiring-production. It is in his 1957–1958 seminar *Formations of the Unconscious*, that Lacan introduces the object of desire as *objet petit a* in reference to the Kleinian partial objects, which are the main ground of Deleuze and Guattari's account of desiring-production.<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, the distinction Lacan makes between analysis and suggestion, as well as his position against the therapeutic desire of ana-

lyst, indicates that he was aware of the exteriority of real unconscious desire. Suggestion, in this view, is when the analyst applies his own image of reality onto the patient. Lacan here rejects any presupposition that good human nature or proper adaptation within representational reality may serve as definitions of health. He makes a similar claim with regard to the therapeutic desire of analyst to cure:

We have to deal with that as if it were something that is likely to lead us astray, and in many cases to do so instantly. I will even add that one might be paradoxical or treacherous and designate our desire as a non-desire to cure (Lacan 1997, 219).

The analyst does not possess a better human nature than the patient, he is not better adapted to reality, and therefore he does not have a therapeutic task. The ethics of psychoanalysis rejects any therapeutic relationship between the analyst and the patient. Deleuze and Guattari's schizoanalysis takes exact direction from Lacan's thought, by positing the schizophrenic, not as the subject of therapy, but rather as the productive idea.

Let us summarize these two tendencies in Lacan's thought as the two poles of structuralism that Deleuze unpacks in his early text "How do we recognize Structuralism?" One pole consists of a structural fixation and systematicity, and the other of a structural permanent circulation which is only possible as a paradoxical element, or aleatory point, an element which is moving by nature, serves to circulate the structure, and constitutes its life and existence. By the first pole desire is designated as lack, and by the second as production. Obviously, the second

<sup>6</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Ethics of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII*, translated by Dennis Porter (Norton and Company: 1997), 294.

<sup>7</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Formations of the Unconscious: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book V*, translated by Russell Grigg (Polity: 2017), 148–9; cf. 213–216; cf. 363.



pole is the site of freedom and defines the ethics of schizoanalysis. In this regard, the figure of the schizo must be considered in terms of the circulative element of structure, the element of freedom.

#### IV. A Machinic Socialism

The ontological nature of ethics receives a social register in *Anti-Oedipus*. Ethics as the glue of societies, as what connects people together by generating them, is described in *Anti-Oedipus* in terms of a pre-individual *socius*; in other words, *socius* marks the pre-individual sociality of desire. Here, Deleuze and Guattari provide an account of ethics which is beyond the intersubjective register of the symbolic order: *socius* provides a source for an ethics in the real.

In the third chapter of *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari provide a social-historical account of the ontological nature of ethics along three registers of territorialism, despotism and capitalism, in which *socius* evolves and takes different forms along with different formulations of freedom (natural freedom or contingency, determination, individual freedom or free will). In this account, desire as an element of ethics is discovered primitively in the materiality of the earth. Deleuze and Guattari then goes on to explain how the territorialization of this material desire results in the formation of persons and Oedipal structures. Their account aims to disavow an understanding of societies as essentially grounded in common needs of established individuals. Rather, it describes how these individuals are historically produced and the character of their material sociality as it was prior to their emergence. It would then be wrong to understand ethics in terms of the relationship between conscious individuals and their needs or wills. There must be an *a priori* and ontological ethics grounded in the flows

of desire, or material *socius*, in nature. This underlies the way natural freedom or contingency generates conscious and subjective freedom, and transcendental material ethics leads to empirical morality.

Hence, Deleuze and Guattari introduce the primitive existence of *socius* in terms of the very materiality of the earth, which is where territories and group-identities emerge. *Socius* is a name for the flows of desire in nature at a point where human and other persons are under construction. Thus, and in this view, primitive societies, where such constructions first appear, are not familial in the Oedipal sense. It is only later, under despotism, and through the mediation of the imperial state, that the role of the father appears as mirroring the task of the despot. And then, under capitalism, this role receives an independence generative of nuclear families. This is indeed the history of the emergence of conscious persons.

Hence, society is a machine that produces individuals, and not a primary structure that determines them. In other words, the exteriority of the transcendental unconscious renders it a primary sociality which is not structural but machinic: "Our definition of schizoanalysis focused on two aspects: the destruction of the expressive pseudo forms of the unconscious, and the discovery of desire's unconscious investments of social field".<sup>8</sup> The expressive and structural forms of the unconscious must be destroyed to clear the space for a true sociality of an unconscious which is machinic and productive. In Lacanian terms, there are two accounts of exteriority: one that relies on the Real and another that draws on the symbolic order. Structuralism takes only the latter as a site of sociality, but Deleuze and Guattari introduce a sociality grounded in the Real, a machinic sociality, or *socius*.

Thus, at the heart of the primary *socius* stands the notion of desire. The established

<sup>8</sup> Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 167.

posterior society is based on individual needs, whereas the notion of desire marks a primary sociality which is not composed of fully-formed individuals. In the same manner, in “Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Precursor of Kafka, Celine and Ponge” Deleuze rejects the idea of common needs as the *raison d’être* of societies, declaring that “one of Rousseau’s constant themes is that need is not a factor which brings people together: it does not unite, it isolates each of us”,<sup>9</sup> Along with Guattari Deleuze claims in *Anti-Oedipus* that, “society is not exchange, the socius is inscriptive: not exchanging but marking bodies, which are part of the earth”.<sup>10</sup> First, it is desire that unites. But it does not unite isolated individuals, rather it is social desiring-machines that are primarily linked together on the earthly body. Second, this approach to sociality entails a related view regarding the economy which is primarily based on desire and production, rather than need and exchange.

## Conclusion

An ethics of schizoanalysis deals with the natural flows of desire which are exterior and prior to any conscious interiority and any Oedipal (familial) or structural (symbolic) unconscious. The critique of Oedipus mirrors the critique of structuralism and results in a machinic account of desire. If ethics is the site of desire it is a site of true unconscious desire which cannot be reduced to conscious needs; if ethics is an element to any sociality, it is so in terms of a socius that is a productive element in any sociality, and this is why it must be defined on the basis of

desiring-production. In *Anti-Oedipus* Deleuze and Guattari repeat that desiring-production and social production are one and the same thing (1983, 28–29). In so far as theirs is a matter of persons, which is to say, the connection between ethics and morality, an ethics of schizoanalysis discovers the exteriority of *my* unconscious desire which appears as living in (discordant) accordance with nature, or of a love of fate. The unconscious desire is the alien in me, the exterior which is inside, the death within life.

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<sup>9</sup> Deleuze 2004, 52.

<sup>10</sup> Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 185.



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