

Article

The Lacanian Subject and the Philosophy of Education: Diagnostic with, or without, Therapeutic?

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Abstract: Jacques Lacan's ethical insights come up when he engages, inter alia, with Aristotelian and Kantian ethics. Tackling Aristotle's ethics, Lacan complicates how human life would be best lived and fulfilled, and discussing Kant's ethics, he sheds a different light on moral duty. In both cases, Lacan emphasizes the role of desire and law in the subject's actions. Many Lacanian insights constitute a fertile context for political philosophy and philosophy of education to explore the ethic character of the subject. However, some postmodern political philosophers who draw on fundamental Lacanian concepts have theorized the "Self-Other" relationship in a way that ends up in a problematic ontological accommodation of evil. In this paper, I outline the aforementioned to highlight the following lacuna: much of the literature in educational philosophy that has utilized Lacan's theory to deal with ethics has not addressed, head-on, whether the Lacanian subject is ethical, unethical, or none of these. Treating the subject as ethical or unethical would entail that Lacanian theory can mainly offer "diagnoses". Treating the Lacanian subject as ethically neutral and, thus, as plastic, entails that Lacan's theory leaves more ample space for "therapy". My aim in this paper is to show that some unanswered questions regarding the (un)ethical subject in Lacan's theory must be tackled if the philosophy of education that transfers Lacan's ideas to the ethical educational context is to avoid self-contradiction.

Keywords: ethics; evil; Jacques Lacan; postmodern philosophy



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1. Introduction

The field of the philosophy of education that is the broad topic of the Special Issue to which this article belongs very often follows a pattern of borrowing major theoretical frameworks and ideas (among them philosophical) and of transferring them to the domain of pedagogy [1]. This travelling of ideas from non-pedagogical theories to education equally often serves "medicalizing" purposes; it is meant to remedy an educational pathology or to cure a social ill through education or to offer therapy to problems that education suffers due to its being a social institution. Thus, philosophy of education sometimes becomes the terrain where the various theories (philosophical or other) that are extracted from their original disciplinary setting and are imported to this field as conceptual and interpretive analytical tools compete for educational applicability, relevance, and pertinence. Their verifiability and vindication are educationally–philosophically tested on the grounds of their significance and fruitful implications for concrete educational–philosophical puzzles. As Marianna Papastephanou has argued, more often than not, the concrete puzzle is tailored to the selected theory. The issue—the question that guides research and determines the method—seems to be "what would x (philosopher, theorist, scholar) think about y (educational topic)?" or "how could we make x's theory relevant and fruitful for y?" [1] (p. 451).

Though very important research ground is covered in that way, and useful insights and hybrid theorizations emerge from such practices of transfer, there are also risks. Theories may be imported uncritically or tailored to pedagogical sensibilities without concern about the theory's broader compatibility with them. Or, the major dilemmas, faults, and

challenges of the transferred theory may be bequeathed to educational philosophy almost unaltered. Finally, unanswered questions may be carried along and lead the hosting educational philosophy to internal contradictions. In this article, I will deal with such a question, namely, the question about the subject being ethical, unethical or other, that lies within the Lacanian theoretical framework. This question is discussed in some postmodern political philosophy in ways that have contradictory implications for the normative character of education. However, this question remains so far unanswered, and the problems that its postmodern philosophical tackling creates remain unaddressed by educational philosophers who have transferred the Lacanian framework to the philosophy of education.

In Lacan's thought, the law is theorized in a complex relation with desire and jouissance ("lost enjoyment", as will be explained later on). This theorization is essential to understanding Lacan's views on ethics, as these have been expressed, *inter alia*, through his critical engagement with Aristotelian and Kantian ethics. Beyond Lacan's explicit views on ethics, some postmodern philosophy (general and of educational) has drawn on fundamental Lacanian concepts (i.e., law, jouissance, desire, and lack) to gain a better insight into the "Self-Other" relationship (which has sporadically been tackled by Lacan). In doing so, this scholarship has ontologized evil and thus rendered the Lacanian subject inherently unethical. By presenting Lacan's views on ethics and the essentialization of the subject as unethical by some (paradoxically (I say "paradoxically" because postmodern philosophy is largely anti-essentialist, therefore, its essentialization of the subject as unethical through the ontological accommodation of evil proclivities is inconsistent with postmodern principles, to say the least)) postmodern political philosophy, my aim in this article is to bring to the fore the following point: before borrowing Lacan's insights on ethics, ethical pedagogy and educational philosophy should first tackle issues concerning the relationship between ethics and ontology in the psychoanalyst's theory.

(De-)essentializing good or evil in humanity is crucial for the field of philosophy of education in the following sense. If human nature is taken as inherently good, education's role becomes to bring out or encourage this inner nature [2]. If human nature is taken as evil (as is the case in much postmodern political philosophy, which has drawn on Lacan's theory), the role of education is unavoidably restricted to modest, piecemeal change, or reproductive tasks [3]; this means that "human nature disarms education, resists educational vision and continuously renders futile all efforts to radical human redirection" [4] (p. 22). Hence, particular attention must be paid to this meeting point of philosophy of education and anthropology, since the latter impacts what counts as an achievable goal regarding ethics for the former (for more on this see References [3,4]). This justifies the present article's aim to underline the necessity that ethical pedagogy and educational philosophy should first tackle issues of the relationship between ethics and ontology in Lacan's theory before borrowing the psychoanalyst's theory. In this respect, the present article does not contribute to the scholarship that explores ethics and education in and through the Lacanian framework by providing the answer to the following question: whether the Lacanian subject is intrinsically unethical—something that would imply that the theory of Lacan can offer, as ethical pedagogy, only "diagnoses", but not "therapy" (Although I am not answering this important question in this paper, here I am stating that this question constitutes fertile ground for future research). Any such contribution would require a book-length discussion. The article, rather, contributes to the relevant scholarship by pointing out that this crucial question has so far remained unanswered, and its significance has been bypassed.

There is one more important point here. As I have already posited, if the Lacanian subject is inherently unethical, the theory of Lacan can offer, for ethical pedagogy, only "diagnoses", but not "therapy". This necessitates the following clarification: psychoanalysis approaches diagnosis and therapy, as well as ethics, differently from the philosophy of education. (A) On the one hand, diagnosis and therapy in psychoanalysis are pragmatic. The aim of psychoanalysis is to diagnose the symptom and cure it. For instance, concerning neurotics, "psychoanalysis is about our saying things to them that have a life-changing effect on them" [5]. On the other hand, in the philosophy of education, diagnosis and ther-

apy function metaphorically. As Papastephanou explains [6], much recent educational philosophy has drawn on a medicalized pattern to indicate and to diagnose socio-political pathologies and to suggest a cure through depictions of a better future. (B) As for ethics, in Lacan's theory, ethics is mainly an ethics of desire [7] (p. 254). In Sigmund Freud's work, the possibility of happiness is offered through sublimation, that is, satisfaction without repression [8]. "In Lacanian terms, sublimation is the realization of one's desire, where one realizes that one's desire will not be realized, where one realizes the lack of being that one is" (p. 76). This is so because the object of desire is never found, as will be explained later on. Hence, psychoanalysis does not place ethics in relation to the subject with the Sovereign Good, as much philosophy and philosophy of education do, but, rather, in relation to desire.

In what follows, (1) I will elucidate the meaning of Lacanian jouissance, desire, and law. Then, (2) I will briefly sketch Lacan's critique of Aristotle's and Kant's ethics. Afterwards, (3) I will present how some postmodern political philosophy has drawn on Lacan's insights and ended up ontologizing the subject as unethical. Finally, (4) I will outline how some scholarship in ethical philosophical pedagogy has drawn on Lacan's theory without discussing, let alone fully addressing, issues of ethics and ontology in Lacanian thought.

2. Jouissance, Desire, and the Law in Lacan's Theory

Jouissance, desire, and the law play crucial roles in understanding Lacan's critique of Aristotle's and Kant's ethics, as well as in the reading of Lacan by some postmodern political philosophy. For this reason, I begin with clarifying how these three terms operate together. Jouissance depicts the lost enjoyment that the subject has sacrificed in order to be introduced into the symbolic world and be constructed as a subject through her separation from her mOther (For reasons of accuracy, let me mention that jouissance also describes the enjoyment that the subject derives from their symptoms (see References [9,10])). Bruce Fink's quote is quite illustrative:

the Lacanian subject is 'between language and jouissance': the subject can 'have' either some sort of primordial pleasure or language, but not both (it is a 'vel', that of the 'forced choice' which the infant has to be 'seduced', enticed, or encouraged into making in favor of language. [11] (p. 278)

In this explanatory framework, jouissance is "what comes to substitute for the lost 'mother-child unity,' a unity which was perhaps never as united as all that since it was a unity owing only to the child's sacrifice or foregoing of subjectivity" [9] (p. 60). And "we can imagine a kind of jouissance before the letter" that corresponds "to an unmediated relation between mother and child, a real connection between them", which is "cancelled out by the operation of the paternal function" (p. 60) (a point to which I return later on).

Consequently, the lost jouissance constantly and metonymically causes desire, but the object of desire is never found. As Lacan explains:

the subject does not have to find the object of his desire, he is not led, channeled there, by the natural rails of a more or less pre-established instinctual and, moreover, more or less stumbling, adaptation, such as we see in the animal kingdom. He must on the contrary refind the object, whose emergence is fundamentally hallucinated. Of course, he never does refind it. [10] (p. 85)

In a nutshell, according to Lacan's theory, if the subject is to be constructed as separate from her mother (a process that is called "alienation"), the primordial pleasure stemming from the union with the mOther, jouissance, must be sacrificed. The sacrificed jouissance is what triggers desire and, more importantly, explains why the object of desire is never found.

The prohibition of *jouissance* is imposed on the child by the first paternal metaphor: Assuming “that the father has been assiduous (or simply lucky) enough to drive home to the child what is prohibited, a link is established between language and meaning (reality as socially constituted), between signifier and signified, that will never break” [11] (p. 93). This is how the law is first established. The important thing for our purpose here is that the law unavoidably carries the prohibition of primordial enjoyment/*jouissance*, and, thus, it carries the desire to transgress the law. This conceptual toolbox (of *jouissance*, desire and the law occupies a pivotal role in Lacan’s critical engagement with Aristotle’s and Kant’s ethics.

3. Lacan’s Critical Engagement with Aristotle’s and Kant’s Ethics

Lacan holds that Aristotle’s ethics rest upon a kind of supreme enjoyment [12]: “Aristotle’s thought on the subject of pleasure embodies the idea that pleasure has something irrefutable about it, and that it is situated at the guiding pole of human fulfilment, insofar as if there is something divine in man, it is in his bond to nature” [13] (p. 13). Lacan deconstructs Aristotle’s hypothesis that happiness comes from a life of the supreme good and, thus, that the supreme good is the implicit goal of human desire [14]. He does so because the goal of desire cannot be the supreme good. As we have seen, what triggers desire is the forbiddance of the primordial enjoyment through which the law is established. Thus, enjoyment, on the one hand, and what is declared as good through the law, on the other hand, are mutually exclusive, something that explains why Lacan [13] (p. 5) critiques Aristotle for situating a whole register of desire (that is, desire other than the Kantian one) outside of the field of morality. As John Rajchman puts it,

Aristotle taught of a Good which the free man would come to know, finding in it the source of his ethos, and in its contemplation, the highest eudaimonia of which the soul is capable. Against such a wisdom prior to myth or law, Lacan places the picture of a tragic universe, where the law in living is prior to the knowledge of the good, and fundamentally incompatible with it; where one can transgress the law without knowing it, or only knowing it after the fact, too late, as in the case of Oedipus Rex—a world in which [...] the ideal of the self-sufficiency of virtue carries a terror it cannot understand; the world for which the Good itself appears as a ‘grimace of the real’. [15] (pp. 54–55)

This framework implies a radical (re)theorisation of virtue: what the idea of virtue now carries is the prohibition of the lost, primordial enjoyment/*jouissance* and thus the wish to transgress the law. Here we need to remember that rejecting this prohibition amounts to the failure of the triangulation between the subject and her mOther and thus of the construction of the subject as such, as it has already been explained. It seems that the Lacanian and the Aristotelian subject are not compatible, since what is, for the latter, self-sufficient in virtue is what carries prohibition and terror for the former.

Accepting that the law exists before the knowledge of the good and that what the subject wishes is to transgress the law leads us to the following question: if the subject wishes to transgress the law, then what keeps the world from descending into anarchy? Why do people obey the law holding their community together? This question has been given the following answer: “What holds a community most deeply is not so much identification with the Law that regulates the community’s normal everyday circuit, but rather identification with a specific form of transgression of the Law, of the Law’s suspension” [16] (p. 55). In other words, according to Žižek, society is organised under the law, and in spite of the desire to transgress the law, because of the enjoyment one obtains from observing, or participating in, forms of law transgression: the law cannot be transgressed, if it does not exist.

The law also serves a key role in Lacan's critique of Kant. According to Kantian ethics, "the good revolves around the supreme principle of obligation", the obligation to be moral [17] (p. 30); In Kantian ethics, moral duty "could not be rooted in prudential considerations, in our love for our good, or in our passions and compassions, indeed in anything in ourselves or our world that affects us" (p. 55). Thus, Kant distinguishes ethics from any concern about a good [17]. As Lacan puts it, with "this radical rejection of the pathological, of any concern for a good, for a passion, even for a compassion [. . .] Kant liberates the field of the moral law" [18] (p. 59). However, in Lacan's theory, desire (and thus passion) is inseparable from the law. Drawing on Freud, Lacan argues that "the law and repressed desire are one and the same thing" (p. 68): in this psychoanalytic framework, what we desire is to transgress the law, to transgress an imperative [17], and we do so because, as already explained, what lies beneath our desire and triggers it is the lost *jouissance*. "It is when we see that the 'subject of the law' is constituted through repression that we come to understand the real ethical consequences of Kant's 'liberation of the field of the moral law'" (p. 50). Therefore, in Lacan's thought, the moral law cannot be conceived as free from desire and thus from passion. In other words, contra Kant's view on the moral law, Lacan's theory leaves no space for the moral law to be understood as separate from *pathos*: once the prohibition of *jouissance* establishes the law, the law is correlated with desire (and thus with passion).

Here, I suggest that what we should distinguish is not the law from desire (and passion) (something that is incompatible with Lacan's theory), but the law from ethics. I am suggesting this because the law is correlated with a lack of understanding or of justifying why *jouissance* is forbidden. Let me remind the reader how the law is imposed according to Lacanian psychoanalysis: the child *assumes that the father imposes the law only because he is lucky or assiduous*. But, what counts as good and ethical and the obligation to be ethical are distinct from the Lacanian law in the following sense: deeply, we understand and justify why something (an action or an attitude) is ethical according to a common and widely accepted conception of the good and this is why we adopt it, rather than doing so because a lucky or assiduous father has said so. For instance, we construct, adopt, and follow ethical values and norms because they are relevant to, and promote, let us say, respect, tolerance, and a secure and peaceful world for everyone; thus, following ethical values would guarantee a safe and irenic world of mutual respect and tolerance. A relevant example here would be recycling. Wherein recycling is not mandated by the law, choosing to recycle is not a matter of obeying the law (or enjoying participating in/observing its transgression), but a matter of acting ethically: we do so because we understand its importance for the environment and for the next generations. Such an understanding is absent in the law, and it might be understood as what distinguishes ethics from law and desire. This distinction between the law and ethics (which does not entail that the law cannot turn out to be ethical) might leave some space for understanding the good otherwise than in relation to the law and its transgression. I acknowledge that this admittedly broad-brushed suggestion here is not enough to show that there is some room for ethics in Lacan's thought, but I am mentioning it as a loose end of this article.

4. The Self–Other Relationship from a Lacanian Perspective: Implications for Ethics

Let me now turn to how some scholarship in postmodern political philosophy has essentialized the Self–Other relationship by drawing on Lacan's theory and what such essentialization implies for ethics. First of all, it must be clarified that, on the one hand, Lacan understands the Self–Other relationship as one of friend–foe; what lies beneath such an understanding is the theorization of lost *jouissance*, namely, that an Other must be found and blamed for the stolen *jouissance*. On the other hand, Lacan does not seem to essentialize this relationship, inasmuch as he mentions: "leaving this Other to his own mode of *jouissance*, that would only be possible by not imposing our own on him, by not thinking of him as underdeveloped" [19] (p. 36). Despite the fact that Lacan does not essentialize the Self as incriminatory of an Other (as the aforementioned quote proves), some of the literature

in postmodern philosophy has indirectly, or perhaps even unwittingly or inadvertently, acted as such. This unavoidably leads to theorizing the subject as inherently incriminatory of an Otherness and thus as intrinsically unethical, as I will illustrate in what follows.

Slavoj Žižek holds that “the fascinating image of the Other gives a body to our own innermost split, to what is ‘in us more than ourselves’ and thus prevents us from achieving full identity with ourselves” [20] (p. 206). He goes on to argue that, by mirroring the fact that the subject’s castration is primordial, the lost, sacrificed jouissance leads the subject to blame Otherness for stealing the subject’s enjoyment:

What, then, is the factor that renders different cultures (or, rather, ways of life in the rich complexity of their daily practices) incompatible, what is the obstacle that prevents their fusion or, at least, their harmoniously indifferent co-existence? The psychoanalytic answer is jouissance [. . .]. The subject projects [. . .] its jouissance onto an Other, attributing to this Other full access to a consistent jouissance. Such a constellation cannot but give rise to jealousy: in jealousy, the subject creates or imagines a paradise (a utopia of full jouissance) from which he is excluded [. . .] one can call [this] political jealousy: from the anti-Semitic fantasies about the excessive enjoyment of the Jews to the Christian fundamentalists’ fantasies about the weird sexual practices of gays and lesbians. [21] (p. 75)

Elsewhere, Žižek explains that the Lacanian enjoyment “is ultimately always enjoyment of the Other, i.e., enjoyment supposed, imputed to the Other, and that, conversely, the hatred of the Other’s enjoyment is always the hatred of one’s own enjoyment, is perfectly exemplified by this logic of the ‘theft of enjoyment’” [20] (p. 206). This explains Žižek’s assertion that the clash between the Self and the Other is not a clash of civilization but a clash of enjoyment(s) [22] (The Žizekian approach to the “Self–Other” relationship has been critiqued by Derek Hook (see Reference [23]) as, inter alia, “a depoliticizing psychological reductionism” and “conceptually decontextualized” (p. 244)).

In the same vein, Sheldon George [24] draws on such an understanding of racism as a process of othering on the part of the subject to fill the constitutive gap of her identity: “Where the [object] *a* that signals a relation to being is only imagined, jouissance as a visible mode of enjoyment that distinguishes self from other, and racial group from racial group, functions as an index of being” (p. 362). As he continues, “this object as a missing remnant of the self [,] found in the other of the same race, constitutes [. . .] a fundamental essentialism inherent in race” (p. 363). He goes on to interpret the American Symbolic as follows: the past of slavery “produces race as a cross-temporal mode of access to the jouissance of being” (p. 364). This means that, according to George, what lies beneath the distinctions on grounds of race is the past of slavery which promises access to the lost jouissance. However, George does not essentialize all this. He, instead, evokes Lacan’s declaration that once the subject traverses her desire, that is, once she ceases accusing the Other of stealing the lost enjoyment, she experiences the drive and frees herself from the illusion of the Other. George explains that this is so because the drive is the undirected libido: not directed toward the Other who has supposedly stolen the lost enjoyment from the self. However, the statement that the subject can traverse the phantasy was expressed only once by Lacan [25] (p. 1); also, Lacan did not unpack his enigmatic formulation that when the subject’s relation to the *object a* is mapped out, then the fundamental phantasy becomes the drive [25]. That Lacan did not unpack this point might explain why much Lacanian scholarship has emphasized not the process of traversing the phantasy (therapeutic), but the theft of enjoyment (diagnostic) in its reading of the “Self–Other” relationship.

Finally, Yannis Stavrakakis [26] explains incrimination of Otherness on grounds of the lost jouissance and ends up ontologizing such incrimination. In this framework, Stavrakakis blames chiefly national identity for being unavoidably incriminatory of an Otherness. Let me present at length a quote which is representative and revealing of his approach:

Nationalist propagandas are based on the assumption that the desire of each generation is to try to heal this (metaphoric) castration and restore the lost full enjoyment. The evil 'Other' who prevents the nation from getting it back varies in different historical circumstances. It may be a foreign occupation, the Jews who 'always plot to rule the world', some dark powers and their local sympathisers 'who want to enslave our proud nation', the immigrants 'who steal our jobs', etc. The enemy may be different, but the logic is usually the same. The source of all evil for our community is someone out there—even if it is one of us, an internal enemy, the 'traitor'. Someone who is using all his powers to prevent our nation from realising its potential, from fulfilling its destiny, from getting back its lost enjoyment. (p. 199)

Stavrakakis suggests that this impasse of incrimination might be overcome if we “inject passion into the radicalization of democracy and the reinvigoration of political discourse instead of channelling it into racist and nationalist aggression or reducing politics to the unattractive spectacle of the neutral administration of unavoidable necessities” (p. 226, emphasis added). However, once identity is taken as inherently incriminatory of an Other, there is nothing to guarantee that the identity proposed by Stavrakakis (i.e., the one of the radical Democrat) will not be exclusivist and incriminatory of other identities, let us say, for example, incriminatory of the identity of the neoliberals or of ultra left anarchists, and so on [27].

Be that as it may, accepting that the incrimination of an Otherness constitutes an unavoidable element of identity does not necessarily result in problematic relationships between the (collective) Self and (collective) Other. In particular, as I have shown elsewhere [27], if an Otherness must be found and blamed for the lost jouissance, this Otherness does not unavoidably involve a present and personalized Other. It might involve past Others (historical figures whose political actions were dreadful for humanity) or vices in the Aristotelian sense: vices “of the body-politic rather than of individual character” [6] (p. 5). In general, socio-political pathologies might demand more complex and less personalized causal explanations.

5. Ethics, Lacan, and Education

Thus far, I have presented Lacan's views on ethics. I have also outlined how some of the literature in postmodern philosophy has employed fundamental Lacanian concepts to gain a better insight into the Self–Other relation and the incrimination of Otherness, and that it has ended up ontologizing scapegoating and thus essentializing evil. In what follows, I will present how some educational–philosophical scholarship has transferred Lacanian theory to the field of pedagogical ethics. I will do so in order to show that this scholarship has left unanswered questions regarding whether the Lacanian subject is inherently unethical; due to this omission, it faces the risk of utilizing a tool (Lacanian theory), which contradicts the purpose (ethics) for which this tool is employed in the first place.

To begin with, Jan Jagodzinski [28] approaches ethical pedagogy from the perspective of how teachers respond to the student's demand for love. In particular, according to Jagodzinski, “the student's love for the teacher is initiated when she [the student] perceives in the teacher something that she [the student] doesn't have” (p. 90), something that “would make the student complete and whole”; in Lacanian terms, this something is the object *petit a* (p. 90). This means that the student falls in love “with the way the teacher ‘gets off’ on her jouissance which comes through the teacher's bodily comportment, voice, and gaze as performative style” (p. 90). Then, the student demands the teacher's love, which is expressed through the demand for knowledge. The ethical obligation of the teacher is to displace elsewhere this “love”, that is, “to the ‘love’ of the subject (the discipline), the love of literature, the love of art, or the love of teaching itself” (p. 90). To achieve this, the teacher should insist that “there is nothing in himself or herself that is worthy of love” (p. 90). Although Jagodzinski's approach sheds light on a possibly proper way for the teacher to address the student's demand for love, his account does not discuss the following issues. Are teachers eager and able to handle thus the student's demand for love? They

may be eager to do so when they are aware of these issues and convinced of their validity; yet, they might not be able to do so because of their structure of personality. This is the case, if, for instance, that personality is narcissistic. This point leads us to another important Lacanian relevance to ethical pedagogy: How teachers' identifications and emotional investments might affect ethics in education.

Mick Markham [23], in particular, has examined how teachers' threatened egos may affect reflective teaching at the ethical–political level (for more on reflective teaching, see Donald Schön [29] and Virginia Richardson [30]). The starting point of Markham's approach is that the Lacanian subject is one of split and lack. According to Lacanian theory, "human beings are split, from the beginning, between a felt lack of control and a seen unity" (p. 64). During early infancy, humans do not have a sense of their body as a whole and are fascinated by their united image in the mirror. Lacan names this fundamental experience of the infant as "the mirror stage" (For the sake of accuracy, let me mention that the subject is split for reasons related to language and desire (a point which I have already explained yet is irrelevant here (and thus I do not further unpack it) since Markham's approach does not rest upon it)). Once the subject is divided and not unified, "the illusion of unity, in which a human being is always looking forward to self-mastery, entails a constant danger of sliding back again into the chaos from which he started" [31] (p. 15). This means that "each time our egos are destabilized, mirror-stage relationships return" [23] (p. 65).

All this, Markham suggests, may help us gain better insight into the relationship between teachers and students and into reflective teaching at the ethical–political level. For instance, if the identity of teachers depends on controlling their students, then mirror-stage, antagonistic relationships return each time students challenge that control and thus destabilize teachers' identities [23] (p. 67). Furthermore, pedagogy that takes the teacher as the bearer of the truth, which is to be transmitted to students, instead of being constructed in and through dialogue, blocks reflective teaching and reinforces mirror-stage relationships (p. 68). This is so because such a pedagogy facilitates teachers' self-understanding as "masters of the truth"; as such, they are in antagonistic relationships with everyone who does not agree with their truth. In addition, the competition among teachers leaves no space for openness to new ideas and self-reflection, for "if teachers construct their identities in terms of competition, others' new ideas and experiments will threaten that identity" (p. 68). Finally, Markham views reflective teaching from the perspective of transference. Transference describes one's projective identifications of their familiar adult figures (father, mother, etc.) with another person; transference in teaching has been widely discussed by the relevant literature. Markham draws on this scholarship and argues that "teachers must think carefully about how they handle transference in their classrooms" (p. 69), that is, how they handle the situation wherein they idealize or vilify their students due to projections. All in all, Markham examines reflective teaching through a Lacanian lens in order to present the limitations of reflective teaching at the ethical–political level.

Peter Taubman [32] draws on the Lacanian notion of *jouissance* (which, as I have already presented, concerns the oceanic enjoyment that the subject experiences before the letter, and it also describes the enjoyment derived from symptoms) to shed light on students' resistance and transgression). In particular, Taubman critiques resistance theory and, more specifically, Steven Schultz [33], for interpreting resistance and transgression of preschool children as "a nascent political activism" [32] (p. 39). Taubman holds that resistance theory came under criticism as construing students' (mis)behaviour too simplistically. As he explains, "resistance theory is not particularly helpful, because it does not take into account the complexity of subjectivity and desire, nor does it offer [. . .] alternative ways of responding to and understanding life in the classroom" (p. 40). What Taubman suggests is reading resistance and transgression in terms of the Lacanian *jouissance*: *jouissance* "resists, subverts, and eludes control or domestication" (p. 41). This means that *jouissance* explains the transgression of the law not as an activist action, but as the enjoyment stemming from such transgression; this assertion is supported by Lacan's position that the subject enjoys their symptoms and the transgression of the law when she does so

(or, that without transgression there is no access to *jouissance* [13], and that the subject is always happy at the level of drive). All this leads Taubman to conclude that *jouissance* “offers us an alternative way to understand, to appreciate, and to engage with one another” (p. 41).

Elsewhere, Taubman [34] approaches pedagogical ethics through the lens of Lacan’s concept of desire. In Taubman’s view, ethics is about acknowledging and taking responsibility for the desire that lies beneath one’s actions and decisions. Thus, the Lacanian imperative “enjoy”, or “follow your desire”, in ethical pedagogy offered by Taubman is translated into “acknowledge and take responsibility for your desire”. To illustrate his argument, Taubman gives the following examples. A school administrator’s actions are unethical when she punishes some students without taking responsibility for her desire, namely, when she claims that she was doing her duty and denies the pleasure in punishing the students. Similarly, a teacher acts unethically (not taking responsibility for her desire) when, for example, she fails to acknowledge that the reason for refusing to participate in a strike about war is her belief that politics and academics are separate fields; instead of acknowledging this, she claims that she did not participate in order to guard the building. Self-acknowledgement of one’s desire and psychic investment are, according to Taubman, crucial aspects of pedagogical ethics (Taubman draws a connection between all this and Badiou’s theorization of the truth of the event. However, how it does so will not be discussed here for reasons of space and focus).

Finally, Matthew Clarke and Alex Moore [35] understand ethics in education as a subversion of the limits of our understanding of teachers’ identities and of what counts as good teaching. Their approach does not concern deciphering the desire that lies beneath teachers’ actions and decisions (as Taubman’s approach [34] does); it focuses, instead, on what is beyond the symbolic: what is beyond the established hegemony regarding teacher professional standards and beyond the homogenization of the teachers’ identity. Although Clarke and Moore admit that teacher professional standards render teaching and its assessment “more transparent, predictable, and efficient” (p. 489), they critique it for reducing and narrowing teachers’ work and what counts as good teaching to the provisions of the professional standards. In terms of the Lacanian Real, Imaginary, and Symbolic (which constitute, according to Lacan, the three registers of human subjectivity), teacher professional standards belong to the realm of the Symbolic, since they name and present the skills and competencies that count as comprising effective teaching [35]. As such, teacher professional standards remain “locked within a hegemonic and reproductive version of the symbolic, where creativity and critique are reduced to a matter of selection from among established practices and received traditions” (p. 494). In Clarke and Moore’s approach, ethical pedagogy is about expanding teachers’ potential and teaching practices beyond the predominant symbolic meaning that excludes the Imaginary and the Real.

The relevant literature presented above has employed Lacanian theory to shed light on ethics and education in the following ways: how teachers should respond to students’ demand for love [28], how antagonistic relationships (stemming from the “mirror stage”) limit reflective teaching at the ethical-political level [23], and how we may better understand misbehaviour (that is, resistance and transgression of the law) through the lens of *jouissance* [32]. Also, pedagogical ethics has been read in terms of the Lacanian desire and turned out to mean teachers’ taking responsibility for their desire [34]. Finally, ethical pedagogy has been understood as what lies beyond the Symbolic/predominant meaning regarding teachers’ professional standards [35].

The question of whether the Lacanian subject is inherently unethical has not yet been examined by educational philosophers who have otherwise, and admittedly meaningfully, connected the work of Lacan with ethics. As I have shown, the discussion has been limited to understanding ethical and pedagogical issues in Lacanian terms. However, addressing the question of whether the Lacanian subject is intrinsically unethical is essential for combining Lacan’s theory with education and ethics for the following reason: if the Lacanian

subject is inherently unethical, employing Lacanian theory for the purpose of promoting ethics in and through education is a self-contradictory task, perhaps even a paradox.

6. Conclusions

In this article, I have outlined some fundamental principles of Lacan's psychoanalysis (i.e., *jouissance*, desire, and lack), how they help us understand Lacan's critique of Aristotelian and Kantian ethics, and how they have been construed by contemporary political philosophy. I have also presented how Lacanian theory has been transferred to the field of ethical pedagogy by some of the relevant literature. As has become obvious, some of the literature that has drawn on fundamental Lacanian concepts has not taken into consideration, let alone addressed, the fact that Lacan's theory leaves space for an ontological accommodation of evil—something that becomes evident also by the above-mentioned construal of Lacan's ethics by some postmodern political philosophers. In this article, I have pointed out the omission of considering or addressing the Lacanian ethical question of evil in the relevant scholarship. In doing so, I have shown (or at least so I hope) that this gap in the relevant literature should be filled because drawing on Lacanian theory in favour of ethical pedagogy requires tackling whether Lacan's theory essentializes the subject as inherently unethical. On the one hand, by omitting such a head-on consideration of this issue, educational philosophy ends up making self-contradictory and paradoxical moves. On the other hand, if it will show that Lacan's theory leaves some space for the ethical subject, then it will provide the field of pedagogical ethics with an important theoretical tool which is not limited to diagnostic modalities but extends also into therapeutic modalities without falling into an over-simplified and "one-way" transfer of a major theory into educational–philosophical debates [1] and without succumbing to medicalizing patterns of what counts as therapeutic [6].

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