

Spirituality neglected

First of all, a big thank you to Matthieu Dupas, who had the felicitous idea (at least for me, since it got me working, though for you perhaps it's too early to say...) of inviting me here today. A big thanks also to the University of Michigan and to those who, along with Matthieu, have worked on putting this event together.

WHEN, WHEN, WHEN ... SPIRITUALITY IS THERE WHEN ...

I When, in 1964, responding to a journalist from *Playboy* magazine, Jean Genet declares that homosexuality, which had been imposed on him just like the color of his eyes, is a blessing, what is he about? Is this psychology, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, psychoanalysis? Is it history or literary criticism? No. This phrase participates in no academic discipline that currently exists. His phrase is decidedly spiritual. It picks up on an as-yet unidentified spirituality that is nevertheless encoded in the word “queer,” from that period on also in use in France, even though, admittedly, “blessing” does not carry exactly the sense that Christianity has given to the term. For Genet, and in this talk, the word encompasses an erotics (condemned by Christian pastoral doctrine) and a spirituality. In fact, there is no need to distinguish the two.

II When, in 1903, Daniel Paul Schreber, a famous case of supposed paranoia, claims to bring to humanity new truths on the tenuous relationship of God to humans and the universe, what is he about? The only response is the same: the notion and its development in the course of a decade-long book project are both erotic and spiritual. Like Antonin Artaud, who also knew the inside of a psychiatric hospital, Schreber could say: “Leave us sick people alone!”—a wish that psychopathology, psychiatry, and the highly medicalized form of psychoanalysis aim to repel. It is not in reading as a psychologist or as a psychiatrist that we see that very few people have distinguished as carefully, as Schreber the theologian has, various forms of enjoyment: *Wollust*, pleasure, *Seligkeit*, bliss, and *Genuß*, enjoyment [*jouissance*].

Spanish has two terms for *Genuß*: *goce* and *gozo*, which offers a great opportunity to point out what may constitute the negative effects of the neglect of spirituality. For if religious writers routinely use the term *gozo* (closer to "bliss"), hispanophones translating Lacan no less systematically use *goce* (more "sexual"). Then again, such a generalization does not always hold and can even suggest intellectual dishonesty as when, in the case of St. Teresa of Avila, we write *goce*, seeing as she only ever uses the term *gozo* to refer to the eroticism that runs through her. Thus, in neglecting spirituality, psychoanalysis loses an opportunity to learn, that is to allow its position to be changed with regard to what it claims to know.

III When, in 1968, Pier Paolo Pasolini sets Paul (the father's name in *Teorema*) in the desert, screaming, naked as a worm, and writes how he did not know until then "how simply divine his member could be," what is he about? The only answer is the same one we gave in response to the Genet and Schreber examples. We could say the same for the closed fist of the girl in Pasolini's film: rather than psychiatrically analyze the gesture as catatonic, it would be far more just and heuristic to accept it as a sign of her desire to hold onto a trace of her sexual relationship with the host or, more precisely, the sex of the host.

IV When, in a recent French stage production, Roberto Castellucci inflicted his audience for an hour to the image of a father who could no longer control his sphincter and completed his presentation by filling the room with the corresponding odor, all in front of a huge face of Christ by the Renaissance artist Antonello da Messina, what was going on? We can only call this anal eroticism. Here again, we have evidence of a spirituality other than Christian. Catholicism, to be sure, was not wrong in seeing the danger in the production; in fact, a group of adherents thought it worthwhile to spray spectators with used oil as they entered the theater.

V When, during the Renaissance, Andrea Palladio looked to the logic of ancient Greek and Roman constructions in building the Villa Rotonda, what was he about? He was looking for architectural inspiration, certainly, but he was just as interested in exploring the Platonic convergence of mathematics and beauty. Palladio could not be called a philosopher, at least not in the academic sense of the word. His was a spiritual

questioning. That villa, like the others he built, was explicitly intended as a place of "asceticism" for its sponsor.

It would be easy to multiply such examples, which would only further emphasize the urgency of the following question: what has made it possible, if not necessary, that spirituality be so overlooked—especially in academia where, I know at least in France, there is no department of comparative spirituality studies? What do we fear, often without even knowing it? Furthermore, what have we deprived ourselves of? How might this neglect blind us to solutions to problems that matter today?

These questions compel me to try to tell you how I have come to detect such a neglect of spirituality and to accept it no longer. Of course, we can only note it and describe it by first extricating ourselves from it at least a little bit. How do we do that?

THE IMPACT OF MICHEL FOUCAULT

It's to Michel Foucault in particular that I owe my extrication. Jacques Lacan, for his part, considered the subject with great distrust. In fact, rejection would be more accurate, and this is by the way one of the critical areas where my friend David Halperin converges with Lacan. In this way, Lacan did not stand alone. He can be seen as a member of a tradition that includes, to stick to Europe, the names of Martin Heidegger, Georges Canguilhem, Gerard Granel and many others...including Foucault's. In 1991, Granel was the first to propose that psychoanalysis separate itself from the *psuché*; that is, that psychoanalysts rename their discipline "analysis." For Freud himself, the question was not absolutely set, since he often used the term *Seele*, soul—a fact that his French translators took several decades to admit.

In 2007, well after Granel's proposal, I went a step further by inverting the first three letters of the word "psychoanalysis" to create "spychoanalysis," which I posed in relation to spirituality. I was responding, in a different moment, to a different proposal, this time from Foucault:

You will find in these forms of knowledge [*Marxism, psychoanalysis*] issues, questions, and requirements that—it seems to me, taking a historical look at a few millennia (at least one or two)—are very old. These are the very fundamental questions of *epimeleia heautou* and therefore, spirituality as a condition of access to the truth. What happened, of course, is that *neither the one nor the other of these two forms of knowledge has, clearly and courageously,*

considered this point of view very explicitly [my emphasis]. We have tried to hide the conditions of spirituality unique to these forms of knowledge within a number of social forms.

Foucault gave this talk on January 6, 1982, and it was published in 2001. In what he says here, we have a definition of spirituality that psychoanalysis could embrace—or, at least, we can say it would be highly desirable that psychoanalysis consider such a definition.

In the same talk, Foucault describes a "pressure" that spans virtually the whole philosophy of the 19TH century: a philosophy that tried to rethink the structures of spirituality within a tradition which, from Cartesianism onwards, had worked to free itself from such structures. This tension, if not contradiction, was no less insistent in Christianity where the conflict, Foucault notes, is not between theology and science but between theology and spirituality. It is the same in psychoanalysis, except for Lacan, whose doctrine accepts being perpetually caught between poem and matheme without any synthesis (*Aufhebung*) to relieve the dilemma.

Let us also not forget that Freud, explorer of the depths of the psyche in the name of science, in his last book, *Moses and Monotheism*, wrote a history of the spirit (*Geist*), not a history of the psyche. Nor that Descartes, the founder of that modernity which attempts in vain to appropriate if not to exclude spirituality, publishes *Meditations*, a book entirely consistent with the mode of the ancient philosophers Foucault invokes in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*. Remarkably, even today, Descartes does not have a decent tomb in France; instead, his bones are split between two different churches in Paris (head here, body there). Unless we consider the opposite—spirituality taking here the upper hand—that they incur the fate reserved for the remnants of some saints. Must we also refer to the mysticism of the founder of analytic philosophy, Wittgenstein?

We can grasp what is at stake by distinguishing several of Foucault's modes or regimes of knowledge:

1) the mode known as science, which requires no transformation of the subject for its development;

2) the mode called "false science" that requires a conversion of the subject to be accessible and promises eventual enlightenment;

3) that of Marxism and psychoanalysis which has to do with "what the subject should be so as to have access to the truth." According to Foucault, since Freud, only Lacan has "wanted to refocus psychoanalysis on this particular question of the relationship between truth and subject."

Definition: we speak of "spirituality" whenever the subject must transform in order to have access to truth, in order for the subject's truth *to make itself known* (that is, both to become knowledge and to become known by others). Of course, by saying this, we approach the domain of false science; we're flirting with the cultish. Fortunately, Foucault, in exploring the ancient philosophical schools as places of certain knowledge, but also as therapeutic places, has offered to psychoanalysis another genealogical anchor point.

Is not the negligence of spirituality due to the fear it arouses? Let us not forget that psychoanalysis has flourished and developed in parallel with spiritualism. These two modes of knowledge were established at the same time, expanded into a movement around the same time, and had their first international congresses at the same moment. If the spiritualist claims to speak with the dead, *horresco referens*, is it not the fear of association that made the analyst so timid around dead people, who inhabit us all, as they did Hamlet?

As you will already know, Foucault does not shrink from the word "subject" which, to others, carries the sulfurous stink of a misplaced spirituality. They would prefer to speak of individuals, ignoring that it is Paul who first referred to us that way by positing the unconditioned existence of an individual self (Nietzsche notes this in his *Posthumous Fragments*). Such an individual, such a soul, such an *ego*, if not "transcendental," is nevertheless "transcendent" because it is devoid of any condition. Through its use of statistics, the new North American (and now global) psychiatry has no other foundation than the individual, and certain other disciplines (and all the polls, so useful in politics) are built on this same foundation. An individual, *indivisible*, non-split, that is what each of us is in this system (a situation which gives rise, by the way, to diminishing eroticism).

And yet divided we all are, as soon as we speak, because we do not ever quite know what we are saying (even I, right now), because we say too much or too little, because we misspeak, because we fool ourselves in a caricature of the slip, the enigma of the dream, the discomfort of the symptom. We never say what we mean, Flaubert complains, while regretting that with his words he cannot move the stars. Unlike in music, it is falsehood that prevails when one plays the instrument that is language. We talk hopelessly wrong. During his stay in France, Wagner mocked the poetry, which he found lacking in musicality.

There is no possibility of *epimeleia heautou*, of "care of the self" as a divided subject. Here we can see a point of contact between Foucault and Lacan: both have in common the concept of subjectification, though they develop it differently.

SPIRITUALITY OF THE EROTIC, EROTIC SPIRITUALITY

You might then think: would we not find, in the idea of care of the self, the Pauline and even the "modern" individual? Or, if you are a psychologist, you might find one of the tricks of narcissism (for psychologists, narcissism is not good!)? That is not the case, however; because we get nowhere by going from self to self, we must pass by way of the other. This is what Foucault did successfully (see the letters of Seneca to Lucilius) with Pierre Hadot (the first translator of Wittgenstein into French). Lacan is just as clear on this point: otherness, considered a necessary departure when the self cannot care for itself, becomes a place (the "place of the Other"), while the movement, the path, the transformation that takes place receives the name "subjectification."

If the variety of modes of "subjectification" requires many different types of objects, a certain object is left out of the concept of subjectification, namely that of so-called objectivity. Kierkegaard said it very well:

Let the scholarly investigator labour with tireless zeal, let him even shorten his life in the enthusiastic service of science; let the speculative thinker spare neither time nor diligence; they are still not infinitely, personally, impassionedly interested. On the contrary, they would even rather be so. Their observations are to be objective, disinterested. (*Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, trans. Alastair Hannay, Cambridge UP, 2009, p.20.)

Seen from the point of view of the erotic, even being disinterested looks like the manifestation of a certain interest. In order to uncover what such objectivity would leave

hidden, we could recall the mathematician Kurt Gödel's mania for refrigerators, or the suicide of Alan Turing, the inventor of computer science. [1]

Freud made a significant discovery in the field of the erotic that was so unexpected, so strange, so disturbing that I doubt even today it has managed to inhabit our minds and inscribe itself on our bodies. Arnold Davidson has recently developed it: I am talking about the concept of the drive, inseparable from that of libido. What about it? Namely, that the paradoxical game between pleasure and orgasm (the first aimed at reducing tensions, the second at discharging them) does not take place just anywhere, but only where the body has openings: mouth, anus, ears, and also, without paradox, the genitals (not just female) and the eyes (where the eyelids can open and close the hole). Each of these holes corresponds to a certain erotic object: breast, excrement, voice, phallus, look. In addition, it is the same energy of desire, the same *libido* that is at work and can be worn here and there. In other words, how you eat, shit, hear, fuck, and look are linked. There is something akin to a market based on a single libidinal economy at work in various ways (one might almost say according to various styles). Freud speaks of "libidinal investments." Here and there, some parts of the body can "gain" or "lose" investments that might serve to satisfy elsewhere.

Lacan went beyond Freud by noting that these objects and the investments attached to them do not belong to the subject; they are not "its own." If I eat greedily because, knowingly or not, I am inhabited by the fear of being eaten (there is a proverb that goes "eat, because you do not know who will eat you"), that fear did not originate with me. If I have trouble letting go of my speech because, knowingly or not, I see it as an excrement, I am likewise not the source of this anal overload of my voice. Neither am I the origin of my preference for a certain kind of sex, while other sexual practices, though not absolutely excluded, at least hold less interest. In all this I am not the master, I do not pull the strings. Lacan called the place where this kind of thing is resolved or goes wrong the big Other.

But how? Not because of or despite the meaning of words, but rather more materially through the games by which words shape the mazes the libidinal investments must navigate. Words have established and continue to establish links between them that

can be undone; meaning in this sense is nothing more than a consequence of contiguity or consonance between words. What are these relations or links between words? They are, well ... spiritual, and the best proof is that it is often a witty remark that undoes them and, in so doing, reconfigures our libidinal investments.

Thus we see how, by considering psychoanalysis as a spiritual exercise, we are closer to what psychoanalysis has brought to the study of the erotic.

CONTEMPORARY OVERVIEW

In *Solar*, a novel by Ian McEwan, the hero Michael Beard is a Nobel Prize-winning physicist who, after his eminent election, leads a shabby existence both professionally—where he just sits on committees, gives the same talks over and over, and contributes to a project in his laboratory he has no interest in—and personally, as his fifth marriage is beginning to disintegrate.

His erotic life consists of some affairs, including one with a certain Melissa that is relatively stable though episodic. One day, he arrives at her house for a brief visit during which, of course, they will sleep together—that is, fuck, to say it in a way more consistent with the text. But then they start talking, they get a little drunk and, surprise, she announces that she is pregnant with his child. He doesn't take it well; he points out that he will be seventy when the kid is only ten. He finds it only slightly reassuring when Melissa tells him that she doesn't want anything from him (she works, she makes money), that she does not expect anything from him, that he might just as well not get involved, and that he nevertheless will remain the man in her life. They still head to the bedroom where he undresses her, lays her down on the bed, and expertly caresses her before undressing himself no less skillfully. He soon realizes, mid-foreplay...that she is speaking to him. What else could she be talking to him about but the child she already loves? She loves him too, of course, and hopes that he will love the baby: "Say you will, please say you will..." She drags a "yes" out of him because he thinks it would be "indecent not to comply," even while not judging it really a lie. The scene is therefore set for the following passage:

He wished she had not reminded him of her pregnancy. After many uncountable minutes, the moment was approaching when sexual etiquette required that he time himself, get in step with

the shrieking downhill dash to her final orgasm, and he knew he was not ready and might not make it.

Then follows a tipping point that signals that Melissa, in this "fateful" event, is not what I call the god of castration, that is the partner who in this case would make Michael overwhelmingly aroused. So he resorts to imagining other women (this passage immediately follows in the text).

And so, in those closing seconds, he entered a familiar empty theater, sat in the stalls, and auditioned some women he knew, bringing them onstage in merging sequence at the impossible speed of thought. They appeared in experimental attitudes, in different tableaux that magically involved himself. He summoned and dismissed the girl from Milan, then an Iranian biophysicist, and then Patrice, an old standby. But at last he settled on the right choice, the immigration officer with the withered arm [*he has not slept with her—it is the paralyzed arm that is important here*]. He let her step out coolly from behind her station, and there they stood, fucking against her desk in front of five hundred bored passengers ready with their passports. To Beard, sex in public among indifferent lookers-on was a fantasy of unaccountable appeal, and it worked. He made it just in time. (Ian McEwan, *Solar*, Anchor, 2011, pp.211-12.)

This appeal to fantasy recalls Lacan: "Fantasy tailors pleasure to desire." And we believed it, not having seen, as we see clearly here, that there can only be a sex act when fantasy does not intervene. This is the lesson that Ian McEwan spells out for the reader in *Solar*—and which leads me to speak of the erotic instead of sexuality.

Melissa, poor thing, though there is no reason to assume she is innocent herself, does not see nor could she know of her lover's fantasy "escape." She is unaware that she is not alone in bed with him. She lies there blithely satisfied because, during sex, she got what she wanted from him: his declaration of love for her unborn child, eventually accompanied by their joint orgasm. Swooning, she says: "You're my darling. Thank you. I love you, Michael, I love you. You dear, dear man."

There is no better way to describe a misunderstanding between lovers or the nonsense often associated with love.

You could call it making love without spirit. We emerge from it haunted not by the classical *post coitum*, but rather by a sadness for which the only recourse becomes to ingest antidepressants immediately—that is, at least, what many French people do, contrary to their reputation for inventing the French kiss.

THE EROTIC AND THE SPIRITUAL: A COMMON CHALLENGE TODAY

It may sound incongruous that an event which marked these two registers (if that is how we can identify and distinguish them) at the end of the 19TH century can make news today. And it is also strange that the death of God (because that's what I'm talking about), openly debated from the late 19TH century until today, would have anything to do with the current configuration of the erotic.

The proclamation that God is dead comes about in the West right when Freud is inventing psychoanalysis. First, let us remember the year *The Gay Science* is published: that is, 1882. Second, we could mark that day thirteen years later, in 1895, when Freud interprets the dream known as "Irma's injection," or the publication the same year of *Studies in Hysteria*.

Leave it to the "center of gravity" (Lacan) of the proclamation of the death of God, namely Nietzsche, to grasp that that death would have a lasting impact on the erotic as well as the spiritual. What does Nietzsche actually say?

It is not strictly speaking Nietzsche who announces the death of God, but rather a character of his creation: the Madman, the Fool, *der tolle Mensch*. Speaking to the crowd and challenging them as Diogenes the Cynic did in other times and places, the Madman lights a lantern at midday in order to highlight the oddity of his first public words: "I seek God! I seek God!," adding: "God is dead! God remains dead! And it is we who have killed him!"

One who proclaims the death of God is not an atheist; God can only be killed if it has existed. What, then, is the point? First of all, that man is no longer a "creature of God." "Creature," in French, can also designate a woman, or even a courtesan. The death of God, then, deprives man of the great eschatological narratives that structure in different ways the three monotheistic religions and offered everyone the opportunity to write themselves into a sacred story, but one largely written already: a "program" as we would say today, to which we could only consent. Though living for a time in this world, humankind was nevertheless not essentially of this world; the real story, the truth of our story lay on the other side of a secular narrative seen as incapable of giving meaning to

our lives on its own. Rather, our true life was promised us somewhere else; it was already elsewhere and was already regulated by this elsewhere.

This is not without consequence for the erotic, as you know; I do not need to itemize the effects. But back to Nietzsche: what consequences does he draw from the death of God? It gives rise to a change: the divine couple of the Father and Son is replaced by that of Dionysus and Ariadne. The link holding the erotic together is no longer the same: it was previously, as Hölderlin poetically pointed out, the *absence* of the Father that characterized the relation of Father to Son (the abandonment of Christ on the cross) and therefore of the Father to all of us daughters and sons. Now it is, on the contrary, *penetration* that characterizes the new link, although, at the same time, it is not so simple, since Dionysus—erotic god *par excellence*, the god dedicated to women—also has feminine traits.

Let's follow Nietzsche a moment. The relationship of Dionysus and Ariadne has two characteristics. This relationship is linguistic, as Ariadne's small, labyrinthine ears interest Dionysus, who himself possesses ears that are too large. At the same time, their relationship is torturous, as Bacchus and Ariadne sing at the end of *Ariadne auf Naxos* by Richard Strauss and Hugo von Hofmannsthal:

BACCHUS

I need you more than anything else!
Now I am other than I was,
I need you more than anything else!

ARIANE

Let my suffering not be in vain,
Let Ariadne be with you, with you!

BACCHUS

Your suffering makes me rich,
Now my limbs move in god-like joy!
And may the eternal stars die
Before you die in my arms^[2]!

So a new man and a new woman are to come, and we cannot yet know their nature, since we have yet to finish with the dead god; his ghost still haunts our minds, bodies and hearts.

Our time is still that which Nietzsche predicted:

God is dead: but as the human race is constituted, there will perhaps be caves for millenniums yet, in which people will show his shadow—And we—we have still to overcome his shadow! — §108 (tr. Walter Kaufmann, 1974)

We could also turn to André Malraux and his famous prophecy. It is known in two forms: "The 21ST century will be religious or it will not be," or "The 21ST century will be spiritual or it will not be." The difference is not small. However, when questioned by the journal *Preuves* in 1955, Malraux stated that "the central issue for the end of the century will be the problem of religion—*religion in a form as different from what we know as Christianity was to the ancient religions* [my emphasis]." The same year, he told the Danish newspaper *Dagliga Nyhiter*

For fifty years, psychology has been reintroducing man to his demons. This is the serious price of psychoanalysis. I think that the task of the next century, faced with the most terrifying threat mankind has ever known, will be to reintroduce the gods.

You will have gathered by now that my goal is to assign another task to psychoanalysis than that of reintroducing demons into the human psyche via psychology. To subscribe to psychoanalysis, no longer as a sector of psychology but as part of the field of spirituality or rather, spiritualities—to place it on the same side as religion (Lacan, November 13, 1973) while avoiding making it a new religion itself—would allow us to revisit afresh concepts such as the big Other, the Name of the Father, the phallus, etc., concepts that still reek of the religious, despite Lacan's efforts to purge this fatal odor.

For psychoanalysis, issues of gender, truth, and language also remain marked by the presence of ghosts of God. Where have we gone wrong? The problem lies, as Granel has noted, in the reduction of all kinds of presence to statements of representation. This is the operation of psychology—behavioral, psychoanalytic, or otherwise. Psychology denies that language is not solely made of representations, does not mimetically represent reality, as people have thought since Aristotle. Only the sophists thought and acted otherwise. Lacan, who allowed himself to dwell in their community, breaks with this Aristotelian paradigm by inventing his own, consisting of three dimensions: the symbolic, the imaginary and the real. This three-part structure put Lacan's model dangerously close to Christianity. But doesn't this proximity provide us a suitable

position from which to finish with the god of the trinity and to make way for the new eroticism that Nietzsche predicted from the brink of madness?

These are huge considerations, also strange...crazy maybe. But so is, according to Lacan (here no longer Freudian at all), no less than all of sexuality! Isn't sexuality nothing more than a defense against the inexistence of the Other, and of God as well?[3] It is only with a movement both spiritual and erotic that we will dispense with the ghosts of God and allow for an eroticism that only a few visionaries, such as President Schreber, have glimpsed. Because madness can instruct, as long as we are in a position to hear what it teaches.

[1] To say nothing here of the madness of Alexander Grothendieck or John Nash (cf. Cédric Villani, *Théorème vivant*, Paris, Grasset, 2012, p. 78). These detours into madness reflect the erotic at work in mathematics—that which another famous mathematician André Weil describes: "Every mathematician worthy of the name has felt, even if only a few times, the state of lucid exaltation in which one thought succeeds another as if by magic...Contrary to sexual pleasure, this feeling can last for several hours or even several days" (quoted in Villani, p. 134).

[2] Translation ?

[3] Jacques Lacan, *The Logic of Fantasy*, 25 January 1967.