

The Act: Kantian Ethical, Nietzsche's Jesus and Creation

The ending of the tale *Don Juan* is an apt depiction of the ethical act (as drive), explicit in imagery. Throughout the story, messengers from Heaven appear one after the other, offering Juan - the serial seducer - a chance to repent. Answer to which is, of course, a firm refusal. His refusal to subject provokes what Zupancic calls "a hystericization of the Beyond, of the Other, God."¹ Heaven that requires a recognition from Juan (the Slave) as the Master, falls from its position, a "hysterical outburst"² follows - *Rolls of thunder, flashes of lightning. The earth opens up and swallows him up. Flames rise from the pit into which he has vanished*³.

Interesting is the structure, the affirmation of a radical contingency, (the symptom, the drive), the disapproving gaze of the Other, which is made explicit imagery as action, (thunder, lighting, fire pits, and impending death). And most importantly, the structure of Juan's affirmation - a just because, an even so, a so what. This attitude manifests as a seeming nonchalance throughout the story, whenever Juan is proved to the existence of a God, "a statue that moves and talks, the apparition of a woman that changes its form and becomes Time, etc."⁴. Even he acknowledges the fact, as his phrase goes: two and two make four and two fours an eight.

This famous statement is usually taken as the clearest possible expression of his atheism and cynicism. Yet in the Cartesian universe – which is undoubtedly also Don Juan's universe – to say that we believe that two and two make four is as good as saying that we **believe in the existence of God.**⁵

To put it short, the ethical act is structured as follows: to affirm a radical contingency inspite the gaze of the Other. Not against the gaze, not because of it, inspite. One ought not to mistake this with an apathy, an indifference to the gaze, like that of a stoic charlatan. To recognize, locate, to have the gaze felt, yet the act as indifferent to the gaze. And perhaps to enjoy the *jouissance* left after.

This structure appears to share properties with the Nietzschean creative act, that is the creation of values, and even more so: the act of Jesus as characterized and admired by Nietzsche in the *Antichrist*.

Nietzsche's Jesus: An Admiration of the Ethical Act

A certain ironic point has to be noted. The Ethical Act as an interpretation through Kant by Lacan, and now Zupancic, is claimed to be the structure of the admiration towards Jesus. However, in the same book, Nietzsche chastises Kant, even calling him a “catastrophic spider”⁶. However, the manner of the Nietzschean critique lands him closer to the later Lacanian interpretation.

One more word against Kant as a moralist. A virtue must be our own **invention**, our most necessary self-expression and self-defense: any other kind of virtue is merely a danger. [...] a virtue that is prompted solely by a feeling of respect for the concept of 'virtue,' as Kant would have it, is harmful. 'Virtue,' 'duty,' the 'good in itself,' the good which is **impersonal and universally valid**—chimeras and expressions of decline, of the final exhaustion of life, of the Chinese phase of Königsberg.⁷

At first, it reads to be an advocacy of “invention”, the creation of new values. That is to be expected. Then, we encounter an attack aimed at the *impersonal and universal* nature of Kantian duty. Immediately, it is not so clear why Nietzsche is closer to Lacan. But let's situate the impersonal here. For Kant, before Lacan, the legitimacy of moral duty is sourced from an Idea. It isn't the affirming of the subjective symptom unconditionally as in Lacan, it is the enacting of a duty, for its own sake, but the duty as sourced from the Idea. This is evident in the parable of the gallows, where Kant “cheats”, “by disguising the true stakes and the true impact of this (ethical) choice”⁸.

Suppose that someone says his lust is irresistible when the desired object and opportunity are present. Ask him whether he would not control his passions if, in front of the house where he has this opportunity, a gallows were erected on which he would be hanged immediately after gratifying his lust. We do not have to guess very long what his answer may be. But ask him whether he thinks it would be possible for him to overcome his love of life, however great it may be, if his sovereign threatened him with the same sudden death unless he made a false deposition against an honorable man

whom the ruler wished to destroy under a plausible pretext. Whether he would or not he would perhaps not venture to say; but that it would be possible for him he would certainly admit without hesitation. He judges, therefore, that he has done something because he knows that he ought.⁹

The moral good and duty are aligned here, Kant himself unable to completely go through the consequences of his thought. In this sense, Nietzsche's psychologizing of Kant proves correct, even approved of by Lacan, as the latter criticizes Kant "for introducing a consummately pathological motive, hidden behind the façade of a pure moral duty."¹⁰ Nietzschean use of "impersonal" hits at this precise point, the impersonality of pure moral duty, a (public = universal) moral good.

Lacan's reading hinges on the destruction object=X, the thing-in-itself, the Other as generated on a fissure, a lack. An in-itself moral good is non-existent, as iterated by Zupancic's question "*Whose good?*"¹¹, this becomes evident in Lacan's push of the Kantian ethical conception to its maximal extent. A conflict between the ethical and the moral good. That "is possible that someone would make it his duty to tell the murderer the truth; paradoxical as it may sound, this could be an ethical act"¹².

Must I go toward my duty of truth insofar as it preserves the authentic place of my jouissance, even if it is empty? Or must I resign myself to this lie which, by making me substitute forcefully the good for the principle of my jouissance, commands me to blow alternately hot and cold?¹³

I would go as far as to claim, the Lacanian interpretation is part of a temporal chain that starts with Nietzsche. That is Kant -> Nietzsche -> Freud -> Lacan, then Kant again. Here the idea is to distinguish from Kant as Kant and Lacan's Kant, more Kant than Kant himself, a protruding push of maximality. Lacan's Kant is closer in structure to the Nietzschean admiration of Jesus.

That holy anarchist who summoned the people at the bottom, the outcasts and 'sinners,' the chandalas within Judaism, to opposition against the dominant order—using language, if the Gospels were to be trusted, which would lead to Siberia today too—was a political criminal insofar as political criminals were possible at all in an absurdly unpolitical community. This brought him to the cross: the proof for this is the

inscription on the cross. **He died for his guilt.** Evidence is lacking, however often it has been claimed, that he died for the guilt of others.¹⁴

Two things to notice here. First, the owning one's act, to die for one's guilt (*jouissance*). Then, a rejection of any claim that Jesus died for the guilt of others (the public moral good). Isn't this notion of responsibility similar to Župancic invoking Žizek, "Sorry, I know it was unpleasant, but I couldn't help it – the moral law imposed that act on me as my unconditional duty!"¹⁵? In fact, to invert the previous point on Lacan's Kant, Kant after Kant, Nietzsche as Lacan before Lacan, as he critiques Kant on the grounds of the ethical act, against the moral good.

What could destroy us more quickly than working, thinking, and feeling without any inner necessity, without any deeply personal choice, without pleasure—as an automaton of 'duty'?¹⁶

We have established the ethical act of Jesus, that is Nietzsche's characterization of it as such. But what value does it embody? What virtue, like the seduction of Don Juan, always overtaking its goal, can we map it to? For Jesus, that would be the virtue of non-resistance. Now, it's surprising why Nietzsche would admire non-resistance. Note, it isn't a complete admiration, for he still doesn't consider Jesus as a radical creator. He is considered a free spirit, but with reservations, "using the expression somewhat tolerantly, one could call Jesus a 'free spirit'"¹⁷.

We must also separate non-resistance and the Christian "non-resistance" of resentment. The latter, the self-lauding virtuousness of non-resistance comes from impotence, it's a self-deceiving tool to cope with the lack of power. Non-resistance as moral appeal, an appeal to the legal-pragmatic, an appeal to the big Other, when one has no claws. Perhaps the pacifist Gandhian quote, which I so often refer to in such matters, offers the most clarity.

It is better to be violent, if there is violence in our hearts, than to put on the cloak of non-violence to cover impotence. Violence is any day preferable to impotence.

Jesus, on the other hand, as Nietzsche writes, embodies a not-reactive non-resistance *par excellence*. Here, non-resistance is not another dictum to be followed, a ticket, an entry to the kingdom of heaven. "The "kingdom of heaven" is a state of the heart"¹⁸, it becomes being, an act, "a new way of life, not a new faith."¹⁹. A striking similarity to the (Lacanized) Kant, that

ethical *jouissance* isn't a perversion, that you are not a mere instrument of the Other, "I was merely following the moral law". An embodiment of the symptom, so much so that any why can only be answered with silence, the Kierkegaardian leap, Münchhausen can only bridge the gap - Just cause. Is this not how Jesus embodies non-resistance?

This practice is his legacy to mankind: his behavior before the judges, before the catchpoles, before the accusers and all kinds of slander and scorn—his behavior on the cross. He does not resist, he does not defend his right, he takes no step which might ward off the worst; on the contrary, he provokes it. And he begs, he suffers, he loves with those, in those, who do him evil. Not to resist, not to be angry, not to hold responsible—but to resist not even the evil one—to love him.²⁰

As mentioned, one cannot simply ignore the fact that even this admiration comes with a cost, it is a tolerant admiration. There are comparisons throughout the book, Christianity against Buddhism. Nietzsche shows a relatively favorable admiration towards Buddhism, even a sympathetic tone, "I hope that my condemnation of Christianity has not involved me in any injustice to a related religion"²¹. The lack of a true world, an admission of suffering, a realization of the nature of peace: that only a lack of suffering, thus a lack of desire, can cement it. This is important, as Jesus is directly compared to the Buddhistic.

It is plain what was finished with the death on the cross: a new, an entirely original basis for a Buddhistic peace movement, for an actual, not merely promised, happiness on earth.²²

With this equivalence, we can enquire into the cost. That is both Jesus and the Buddhistic, as passive, as nihilistic, as decadence. That is a grouped opposition, Christianity vs (Jesus and the Buddhistic), are surrounded by this shared judgment.

Both belong together as nihilistic religions—they are religions of decadence—but they differ most remarkably.²³

Creation and the Judgment of the Other

What is the motivation for Creation? To bring into existence that which has not been hitherto. As mentioned in *The Stirner Affair*, it is an overtaking, to draw a quasi-parallel imagery between that of Don Juan.

Creation of new values overtakes the standstill, for the creator could never be pious.

What existed hitherto – that composed the pious. However, the new value, that which had not existed hitherto, can only be non-pious.²⁴

The Other requires a subjection from the individual. It constitutes a two-element relationship, the individual and the Other, a relation of the Other's desire expressed and met. The ethical act surpasses this problem, allows for non-subjection, through this excess of "subjection" which overcomes it. The symptom developed, as it has no other way to emerge, through the Other is recognized, it is unconditionally pursued. In this unconditional identification, much like that of Jesus and non-resistance, the subject forms. The two-fold relationship is destroyed, and while Zupancic uses the term universal, I think this, if anything, refers to a singular, in the Deleuzian sense.

The subject is not the agent of the universal, but its *agens*. This does not mean simply that the universal is always 'subjectively mediated', that the Law is always 'subjective' (partial, selective, or prejudicial); it does not point towards a certain definition of the universal but, rather, towards a definition of the subject: it means that the subject is nothing other than this moment of universalization, of the constitution or determination of the Law.²⁵

The Creative act overtakes this subjection after creation, what happens to the penultimate moment? What non-creative act leads to this creation, what powers, lines, allow for the forceful emergence? The Distancing Act.

The Inward movement of the Polemic, of the Why, the questions of Socrates and Pyrrho. Combined with the Outward movement, of that 'negative' property of creation, what that has not existed hitherto.²⁶

It is the dance, two forces. An unconditional skepticism, skepticism of the skeptics, suspension as the ground itself (?) - more to be studied - combined with a spatio-temporal mapping, a trace-mapping, of all concepts and values that have existed hitherto. To act: to question (to the n-th time), devour all that has been incrementally, sometimes in leaps. This takes the form of an ethical act, an excess of the value that the Other desires we subjugate ourselves to, just not too much.

In our era of humanist education (for lack of a better word), asking questions is actively encouraged. But there's an implicit limit. What if one questions the obvious, the unquestionable? Why is rape morally bad? Why is pedophilia morally bad? Why is anything morally bad? This structure of a two-particular + a categorial questioning is important. For the first two particulars, even the most claimed-to-be amoral anarchists, will concede upon. Even if it is considered silly and juvenile, the line of questioning, one must ask it regardless: why. A similar line of questioning in ontology led us from identity to becoming - trace.

Zizek's description of transgender folks, the experience of being trans - that one retroactively feels that one could not have been otherwise. It is the gap leapt, the Real exposed, the logic of the symptom. To locate it better, his description of love as an event operates in illuminating a nearby space.

You are not in love, you just make one night stands maybe here and there. You meet every evening with friends. You drink. You go to blah, blah. Then all of a sudden in a totally contingent way let's say you stumble on the street, somebody helps you to stand up. It's a young girl or boy blah, blah. And, of course, it's the love of your life. A totally contingent encounter but the result can be that your whole life changes.²⁷

Why bring this up? In creation, what happens is a will-ing of this trauma. That is trauma as a loose term for force, not exactly clinical trauma but not dissimilar to it as well. A creator wills this force, upon themselves, what trace they have been up until then, which includes the spatio-temporal locating of concepts, into a new one. That is, creation carries the same force as the symptom, except there is a will-ing of it, a will-ing until the precise boiling point of emergence.

Clinically, the ethical act precedes creation and after creation too - the (not the same) ethical act including creation, it is a trace, it must face the disapproving gaze of the Other. A serious study

would be the physiological properties, practices, to sustain acting and affirming in sight of the Gaze: can we liberate “nervous system regulation”? The breath, for instance. These are all questions, each illumination contains more questions and possible creations to elaborate upon. What is the rigor, the skeptic questions, of the description of creation, boiling point and all? What suspended grounds shall I have to invent to leap through questions, through more creations?

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