



THE UNBEARABLE BURDEN OF THE OBVIOUS

**Part III, A: The Janus-faced Nature of
Adorno and Derrida**



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Part III: The Janus-faced Nature of Adorno and Derrida

By The Id (Aka Leo Feyaerts)

The Ego is the Id. (T. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, Frankfurt am Main, 1951, Part One, § 39, p. 106: *Ich ist Es*). The *Es* is the Freudian unconscious. "The Id" is not different from other "the Ids" and therefore indifferent. Therefore "the Id"-author is completely indifferent to what other "the Ids" think of "the Id's" books. What is in those writings can happen to every "the Id" in the same way and every "the Id" is able to set these occurrences out with the same indifferent talent. No, these are not clerical errors; this is high wisdom. Contemporary wisdom. The wisdom of "the Id". Whether this wisdom makes sense is up to the other "the Ids" to decide in reading this book.

Dedicated to "the Id" to which the Id is infinitely grateful. Hopefully, "the Id" is not insulted.

"The Ids" and events described in this book are fictional. Every similarity between them and other "the Ids", alive or dead, is based on pure coincidence. It has never been the intention of "the Id" to damage any other "the Id" in "the Id's" innate way.

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Now that the pointlessness of the indifferent, contemporary thinking has been somewhat revealed:

Dedicated to Prof. dr. Dr. Lode Wils.

The characters and events described in this book are fictional. Every similarity with other persons, alive or dead, is based on pure coincidence. It has never been the intention of the author to harm someone personally.

(This is a joke.)

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(This is a serious communication.)

Writer: Leo Feyaerts

Translated from Dutch by Leo Feyaerts

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"The obvious always seems obsolete, especially in an age when it is obvious to deny the obvious by saying that the obvious is not obvious because nothing is obvious. Leaving aside this statement, that is obvious."

(Leo Feyaerts)

Preface

This is Carlo's essay, announced in his autobiography and written between the beginning of November 1967 and 25 February 1968. His critique of leftist thought does not go beyond structuralism and Derrida's semiotics (*De la grammatologie*, 1967). He was not familiar with Derrida's deconstructive system. *Positions*, Paris, Minuit, 1972, pp. 41-42 and *Hors livre, préfaces of La Dissémination*, Paris, Seuil, 1972, pp. 4-6, which explain it, were published later. I have therefore taken the liberty of supplementing his text with comments on the subject. In order to make the text easier to read, I do not mention these additions. This does not detract from the exposition, for in the short period of our friendship we greatly influenced each other's thinking, and my thinking subsequently remained an extension of his. Readers who do not like contemplative texts are better off not reading this book. Why punish yourself and waste your money? To the others, I wish much courage in dispelling their illusions.

To get to know his way of thinking, first this conversation. He had already put the gist of it down on paper in early November, but only later did he begin to work it out in detail. Our conversation took place around 15 November 1967, a few days after his discussion with Marcusean Van den Borre, a member of the Student Union (in Dutch: *Studentenvakbond* or SVB).

"All art must be critical," said the leftist, to which Carlo replied: "The artist must be nothing but an artist." And: "Every artist automatically expresses the society in which he finds himself, either critically or affirmatively, according to his needs." The lightning bolt he mentions in Chapter I is the inspiration that struck him a few weeks earlier, the sudden realisation that every human being is driven by an inherent antinomical need: the simultaneous need to distinguish (= sadism) and to reconcile the contradictions (= conformism). It was his habit to reconstruct

conversations he found witty or interesting. Very clever of him and a fantastic memory exercise. After reading one of these reconstructions, I began to imitate him. Hence this account.

On that cold, drizzly evening we were sitting at the first round table on the left in Ambiorix, the pub of the Limburg student associations at the front of Leuven's *Oude Markt* (Old Market) near the *Kiekenstraat*. This pub still exists and the façade still looks the same. On the first floor, a grey semi-circular arch in natural stone spans the entrance door and the two windows, flanked on either side by a wide grey stone pilaster with an ionic capital. Baroque. I don't know if the two pilasters are original, but thanks to them the first floor harmonises with the authentic upper floors.

There were few people in the bar, all strangers except for Etienne, the owner. The students we had come to see were singing in the Thier during a Limburg Guild Cantus, a celebration we had overlooked. Why hadn't they gathered above us on the second floor, in the room specially set up for such occasions? There was not even enough room for the entire *Hengst* (= stallion) Hesbania, the students' club from Haspengouw (Hesbaye), and the Limburg Guild counted four more.

We had plenty of time, so we amused ourselves with one-liners, until Carlo suddenly lashed out at the Student Union for misusing the "Leuven Flemish" campaigns ("*Leuven Vlaams*"¹) to peddle Marxist ideas.

"It still bothers you, doesn't it," I said, laughing, "your clash with Van den Borre."

"Yes... And no, I don't like him. But it's not personal either."

"Why do these lefties bother you so much? There are reasonable people among them, aren't there?"

He thought for a moment.

"Imagine your left-wing neighbour constantly rubbing your nose in his sacred truth that all your thoughts and feelings are not your thoughts and feelings, but those of

¹ The Flemish students and the majority of the Flemish professors at the Catholic University of Leuven demanded that the university administration (i.e. the Belgian bishops) comply with the language law that had been passed by parliament in 1962 and entered into force in 1963. The francophone bishops, supported by the francophone wings of all the major parties (the Catholic, Socialist and Liberal parties), stubbornly refused to move the francophone wing of the university to the francophone side of the language boundary established by the language law. The law also stipulated that the language of administration and education in the Flemish and Walloon regions had to be the official language of that region (the Brussels region was considered bilingual), but made a typical Belgian exception for the French-speaking wing of KU Leuven. This exception caused great indignation among many Flemings, because it gave the French-speaking wing the opportunity to deliberately continue the systematic Frenchification of the Flemish-speaking area around Leuven, thus undermining the language law. Note: Flemish is a variant of Dutch.

the class or structure to which you belong - in other words, that you are utterly worthless as a person. And then your other neighbour to the left, whose name is Derrida and who has just moved into a new building that he designed himself, adds that it doesn't matter what you feel, think and say, because everything you feel, think and say is never more than the product of your hidden assumptions and in that sense is always subjective. Therefore, what is not said in a text is more important, essential and authentic than what is said in it. Nice. For himself. What he thinks is missing, he can then fill in as he pleases, the missing motives and facts, for example... Because it is sadistic to want to destroy a way of thinking that has developed over more than two thousand years, even if his intention, like Plato's, is to reconcile all contradictions. He wants to eliminate all ethnocentrism, he says himself in the first sentence of *De la grammatologie*. But in attempting to do so, he immediately creates a new black-and-white opposition, this time between Western ethnocentrism, the only form of ethnocentrism that he believes really matters, and his own "liberating" beliefs. And all this while he supposedly wants to eliminate all black-and-white contradictions by reducing every statement about anything to an undecidable formula...²

Really impressive...

Everything you feel, think and do is, according to him, epistemically and morally undecidable - or indifferent³ - which amounts to the same thing - and is equivalent by virtue of its indifference. For if everything is undecidable, then nothing matters, including universal undecidability, because the complete absence of real differences - and thus the ubiquity of total indifference⁴ - makes all thoughts and feelings equivalent in terms of their veracity and moral content...

But since he's only a human being who, like everyone else, lives in a certain time and in a certain society, one can rightly ask him what hidden presuppositions have led him to this judgement, what hidden needs have led him to pronounce this sadistic judgement on his Western predecessors and thinkers who speak or write from a different need than his supposedly critical one...

Well, that need is always the same, you know. The need to distinguish between oneself and one's peers, and between oneself and one's opponents. And at the same time the need to form a new conformist group in which all contradictions are

² J. Derrida, *La voix et le phénomène*, Paris, Épiméthée, 1967, pp. 113-116.

³ Late Middle English (in the sense "having no partiality for or against"): Via Old French from Latin *indifferent* - "not making any difference", from in- "not" + different- "differing".

⁴ Late Middle English (in the sense "being neither good nor bad"): from Latin *indifferentia*, from in- "not" + different- "differing, deferring" (from the verb *differre*).

reconciled. You know, the general human antinomy I've talked about several times."

"Yes, haha, I know that only too well, haha. It makes sense, yes, you are right. I've said that several times."⁵

"Okay, thank you. But what I'm trying to say is this. The Left always thinks from the same presuppositions, which is that human beings are such that everyone's equality is an attainable ideal, and the Right always fights this human view from its own presuppositions. So in essence they are both doing the same thing out of exactly the same need, out of exactly the same antinomical need. They both have the need to make distinctions and to reconcile contradictions, but each with a different view of human nature in mind. The challenge, then, is to find out for yourself what man is like, what his nature is, by deducing it from his language and his actions. Preferably without contradicting yourself all the time...

Yes, but my view of human nature is not a leftist view. And so the Left will dismiss it after a few sentences as biased right-wing and refuse to think about it any more...

But anyway...

Because for the Left, anyone who emphasises the personal and social identity of human beings, and anyone who rejects the ideal of the equality of all, belongs to the Right, regardless of the reasons and grounds of those so-called Rightists for this rejection. Agreed?"

"Agreed."

"And then the Left sees it as its moral duty to lecture you because everything you feel, think and do is hate speech, while in the same breath they add that you must feel, think and live their way in order to feel, think and live as a good person, and that otherwise you must be silenced, imprisoned or murdered in order to purge society of all evil. How do you respond to such arrogant, self-contradictory hypocrites? Well, that's what the Left has been preaching to you and me since Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Karl Marx. For more than 200 years. And we just nod our heads and shut up. What do you think about it yourself?"

"That it sucks, indeed. But your alternative, can you substantiate it so thoroughly that it can convince others?"

"Some might, but certainly not, because I don't promise a perfect reconciliation of all contradictions and opposites in an earthly paradise. Nor can they use my ideas

⁵ To understand how much he struggled with his views before this conversation, people should read his autobiography, chapter "Doubts, Quran and pertinent comments on my inconsistencies". Those who are not interested in it because it criticises the Qur'an can read on here without any difficulty.

to approve or justify sadistic excesses."

"Can they do that with Derrida's?"

"Yes. If he considers Plato's dualism and his theory of forms to be present in all Western thought, and if he wants to destroy this Platonic legacy in one fell swoop and replace it with his own system, supposedly free of all dualism and all distinction, then he sees himself in a very discriminating way as a messiah, as a white saviour who comes to bring an earthly paradise to a black, depraved world... Yes, Staf, mate, I came up with my idea precisely because I wondered how it was possible for all those left-wing messiahs like Karl Marx, Adorno, Marcuse, Foucault and Derrida to contradict each other and themselves with dry eyes and such an unshakable conviction of their rightness. It was even Adorno himself who put me on the right track with his *Minima Moralia*. Do you know that book?"

"No."

"Doesn't matter... Anyway, it's thanks to you that I read it. You mentioned Marx and I read some of his works, but I had already finished *Minima Moralia*. So it is he who made me think and showed me the way. He is the one who struck me with lightning. I've already put some of my views down on paper, about one hundred and twenty pages so far, but of course I can't just quote them off the top of my head."

"One hundred and twenty already! In just one weekend!?"

"No, I was already working on it before the argument with Van den Borre, but since then I have been working on it constantly, when I am sober or at the d'Haeseleers'. But the style is still terrible: unreadable and full of grammatical errors. So it still needs a lot of polishing. But in the meantime it has become as clear to me as the moon and the stars on a cloudless, freezing night that I can explain human behaviour much better than the Left. All I have to do now is make sure they don't have a leg to stand on."

"Any idea how you're going to do that?"

"Yes, because it is now perfectly clear to me that they are contradicting themselves and why."

"You're going to write a whole book about it, aren't you?"

"At least an essay."

"And get it published?"

"Yes, with this publishing house where my mother is a proofreader."

I sat there looking at him for a while.

"But she's francophone."

"Bilingual. If she likes it, we'll translate it."

"Boy, you're getting into something. I know how hard it hits you every time someone rejects you, how hurt you're always. Is it wise to do that?"

"Someone has to tell the people, someone has to tear off the masks of these sophists and formulate an alternative to their nonsense, otherwise we are heading for a destruction of democracy like that of the Greek city-states in Hellenistic times."

"Truckloads of hate and filth, that's what you're going to get. And if they find the slightest flaw in your argument, they will laugh at you, right in your face."

"Then so be it."

"Brave."

"I'm not so sure. Any criticism is sadomasochistic."

"Again, sadism as the source of all thought and feeling?"

"Half of it. You know that. You agreed with it. And also with the fact that everyone needs conformism. But now let's stick to the sadomasochism of all criticism."

"Okay. That in itself is quite something. How am I supposed to look at it?"

"Have you ever scolded a driver for almost running you over?"

"Yes."

"And laughed hard when someone said something stupid?"

"Yes... But then you're giving a very wide interpretation to the term sadism."

"We should. It's not just about the pleasure people get from hurting someone, or the blind violence when someone beats someone up, alone or in a group, or when they destroy something, about vandalism so, but about everyone's tendency to hurt others, in any way, to bring them down, to despise them, to belittle them, to smear their reputation, or whatever you want to call it."

"Um... Freud can pack his bags if you look at it that way... But what about this masochism?"

"If you criticise someone, you can be pretty sure - as you say yourself - that there will be a reaction from the person you are criticising, a reaction that you will not like, to say the least: a long face, objections to your statement, attempts to ridicule you, anger from the other person if they are unable to formulate an adequate response, for example because they are simply wrong, and then perhaps swearing and threatening and possibly even physically attacking you. Plenty of choices, then, and none that leave you untouched."

"Um... Okay."

"But that's not all."

"What else?"

"Something that requires you to keep a close eye on your own sadism."

"How?"

"Any criticism is destruction. You agree with that, don't you?"

"Yes, but you can always replace what you destroy with something better, can't you?"

"Haha, you can indeed, yes, but you don't have to. When you destroy something, even on a whim, you are destroying something that is valuable to another person. That's sadism."

"Yes, okay, so what?"

"The harsher and more thorough your criticism, the more sadistic it is."

"Okay, but..."

"Why would you want to destroy something that has no meaning to you in any way? The greater the importance you attach to something, the harsher and more thorough your criticism, and the harsher and more thorough your sadism."

"Yes-s-s..."

"So every criticism is simultaneously an intense attachment to and a destructive turning against."

"Can't you be clearer? Say exactly what you mean."

"You won't criticise something that doesn't interest you in any way. Unless you're a nitpicker. But even then, you think the person you're criticising is worth belittling and destroying their dignity as a human being."

"Umm... Yes... So what?"

"If you want to destroy something, a scientific theory, an ideology, a dignity, a moral rule, a society, you have to be particularly attached to these things by hating them before you can make it your life's goal to destroy them at all costs. So, Staf, if you, like the Left, make it your life's work to destroy the existing society, you are at the same time destroying your own life's work, the destruction of that society."

"OK, I see what you mean. But you can have other purposes in life besides that, can't you? The arts, or a family, or a girlfriend?"

He laughed, "Any 'but' is criticism."

Then seriously again, "It is indeed possible. It just depends on how you were brought up and what models you imitate, consciously or unconsciously. But I think that after a successful revolution there is only one way for practical critics like our leftist messiahs to make sense of their existence, and that is to continue to destroy. They have spent their whole lives so focused on every facet of the society they want to destroy that they will continue to recognise the characteristics of that society in all sorts of behaviours and attitudes to life after their revolution. These

will then be "counter-revolutionary" and must also be destroyed. And so it goes on until the man in the street, Candide, has had enough and has his executioners executed while selling his soul to the man who restores peace, Napoleon for example. That's how every revolution eats its own children...

But that is not what I wanted to say...

There is a certain joy in life that is lost when you have made the meaning of your existence entirely dependent on the achievement of a single goal, a single obsession, such as winning the Tour de France, and when you have achieved that goal. It is, as the English say, better to travel hopefully than to arrive. Besides, the only way to win the Tour is to demote your opponents. So there is a sadistic element to this victory, as there is in any competition."

"Is that a bad thing?"

"It's not a moral issue. At least not at first. It is about the nature of human beings. If you really take offence at something, that obstacle becomes an obsession, and so you want to destroy that obstacle."

"Why do you drink so much? Is it for that same reason?"

"Yes," he grinned, "I get annoyed with myself, and not just a little."

Then again, warmly, "But I'm trying to change that."

"How?"

"Through you, through your friendship. It gives me the chance to discover myself. It forces me to."

"Let's have a drink to that."

We finished our beers and ordered more. Etienne served them.

"To my sadism!"

"And that of all humanity!"

Immediately Etienne protested, "But not to mine, uh-uh. I'm not a sadist."

"You see, he's already making a distinction! The sadist!"

"And puts himself above his clients!"

"And risks losing his clientele, the masochist!"

"Hahaha."

"The dirty exploiter! He discriminates!"

"Carlo, you swear, dirty sadist!"

"Hahahahahaha."

"Mentally deranged."

"Haaaa, he's doing it again! Sadism again!"

"Hahahaaa, and now we're sadists again!"

"Yes! Hahahaaa!"

We both laughed out loud, Etienne took off and the beer was soon empty. To get my mate back on track, I said, "So it doesn't matter how fleeting your displeasure is. So if you insult or curse someone, even if it is in silence and for no more than a split second, you are already a sadist?"

"Of course you are linking it to Flemish nationalism again... But yes, that's how it is. It's just that sadism is in you, it's in you."

"So everyone is a sadist? Including me?"

"Yes, we are all sadists. When you say "this difference or this distinction is not allowed", what you are really saying is "there is a difference or there is a distinction" - because otherwise it is not possible to talk meaningfully about differences - "but I don't like that", and then you just call these differences "contrasts" or "interpretations", as Derrida does. Interpretations poisoned by the hidden presuppositions of the speaking Westerner. Meanwhile, however, he himself makes a new, rock-hard distinction between himself and the people he criticises...

But the fact that languages are different is, I think, quite obvious, as is the sense of belonging on the basis of a common language. The question then becomes: is it valuable for different languages to exist? Even some leftists admit that it is valuable. But then, of course, you have to take the differences between cultures for granted, and they don't, especially when it comes to the different degrees of sadism that different cultures find meaningful and obvious...

But, as you say yourself, you can also enjoy things that are not value judgements, not judgements about others...

And you can curb your sadism, but then you have to know yourself very well.

That's it...

And the more fleeting your comments or contempt, the less importance you attach to the victim you are ridiculing or to the situation you are criticising... But the longer something about another person sticks in your mind, something you don't like for one reason or another, and the longer you attack him or his views, the more important he is to you and the more important his views are to you."

"But how can that be? If every criticism is sado-masochistic, and if everyone sometimes criticises other people in a questionable way, killing their own obsessions in the process, then surely everyone is always and everywhere a sado-masochist?"

"Yes."

"But what about the self-criticism you need to know yourself? Surely that is also sado-masochistic?"

"Yes. In a way it is. Together with you, I am destroying the image in me of the saintly, unhappy Carlo, always the victim of circumstances. This is an image I am very attached to. So together we are destroying something in me that is false, that is not authentic, and in the meantime I am hurting myself to please both of us. Because if I don't correct myself, we will inevitably fight and our friendship will be over. So the sadism I apply to myself, painful as it is, is the joy of my life. In that sense it's masochistic. Sadomasochistic, actually."

"OK. I get it. So this applies to everyone?"

"Yes. As a possibility. Most of us can't handle the pain, so we always blame others. Then we can take out our sadism on 'society' and 'others' by criticising them. That's how it works. But I can deal with myself much better now. And with you too. That's our gain."

"I get a lot of flowers thrown at me here, along with the pot and the soil, but okay... But there has to be a limit somewhere, right?"

"I don't think so. People are always judging, implicitly or explicitly. All you have to do is say 'I'm good, and so are you, because you're the same as me' and you're basically saying 'and that third one isn't, because he's different'. That's human nature, to judge in that way, to make value judgments about others and yourself in that way."

"And it's all because of language?"

"No. It is human nature expressed in language. Every language is perfectly adapted to human nature, it expresses it perfectly. It cannot be otherwise. Creation always expresses the qualities of the creator. Language always makes distinctions and therefore always causes separation. If man did not have a need for it, he would never have invented language. Moreover, the ability to acquire language is inherited in everyone. So without heredity, no need for distinction and no ability to acquire a language that makes distinctions. And so no need for sadism or anything else, but also no need for friendship."

"Can we ever form an image of ourselves and others that is completely correct and pure?"

"No. I don't think the inner conflict ever ends. It's a struggle. But one that you grow through."

"Let's drink to that. Bottoms up!"

Needless to say, we lost the plot after that third Stella. But I remember asking him another question, and what he said.

"So your criticism of the guys at the SVB is also sadomasochistic?"

"Yes, until I have thoroughly dealt with their contradictions. Then we'll go back to

business as usual."

We paid our bill to Etienne and crossed the Old Market to "Bacchus", the pub of our own student club, to get on with business as usual. And you can be sure that our Marcusean leftists, who claim that everyone is equal and should give free rein to their libido and death drive *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*⁶, were quite critical of our agenda.

Staf Van der Auwera, 30 November 1999.

⁶ Beyond good and evil.

Chapter I: Species-being versus Antinomy

Preface

Antwerp, February 25, 1968

Hello Mother,

In this essay I try to find a way out of the "nature-nurture" debate that has been going on since Plato. Most of it was written in the d'Haeseleers' villa, after reading Marx, Adorno, Fromm and Marcuse, and the latest work by Derrida⁷. Nobody should be smarter than me, you know, not even my best friend Staf Van der Auwera. Not a very nice way of behaving towards a friend. And equally unattractive is my manic tendency to always want to have my say on every hype, preferably with some expertise. There are plenty of bookshops in Leuven, and what I can't find there, I'm sure I'll find in Brussels or Antwerp. And I am not short of money, as you know only too well.⁸

Poor d'Haeseleers! They thought I was writing about something I needed to get my degree. How they spoiled me! As if dying wasn't hard enough for them. After they died at the end of January, I tried to continue working on my essay in Leuven, but I couldn't. Like last year, the demonstrations were in full swing and the Flemish professors expressed their solidarity with us Flemish students and assured us that we would not be judged on our participation in July. However, I really wanted to finish this essay and I am in a time crunch because of my switch to Modern History. To avoid being constantly distracted by the noise of the street and friends ringing the doorbell, I rented a room in the Balansstraat in Antwerp South at the beginning of this month. It is not far from home, but you will understand that I could not concentrate there because of the tensions between you and father.

⁷ At the end of 1967, this was *De la grammatologie*. (Staf Van der Auwera, 1999.)

⁸ Why this is so is explained in his autobiography. In this introduction he seems to be settling a score with his mother, but this is only a pretence. In fact, he was deeply disappointed when his sister told him in mid-December that their mother had a lover. After his parents' divorce, he had wanted to move in with her, but he believed that the man in question was G.v.d.W., whom he could not stand. A few weeks after his conversation with his sister, his mother confided in him the true identity of this man. (Staf Van der Auwera, 1999.)

How did I come to philosophize about left-wing thinking?

Before I answer that question, I will first define what the terms "leftist", "left-wing" and "the Left", and "rightist", "right-wing" and "the Right" mean in my vocabulary. *I call "leftist" (or "left-wing") anyone who believes that the equality of all human beings is desirable and/or necessary and/or achievable, and who believes that human beings are inherently capable of a shared experience of that equality, and I call "rightist" (or "right-wing") anyone who, for whatever reason, disagrees with this leftist view of human nature.*

As Staf and I had agreed in early October, I had reconstructed our conversation about the Koran and the causes of violence in general. A few days before I started this essay, he had returned it to me, fully corrected and completed, and left it to me to turn it into a readable dialogue. If you're interested, it's in that other folder, along with my life sketch. I will give it to you when your divorce is final.

Well, as I sat in my room and thought about that discussion with my friend, and about all the mutual hatred and jealousy that your would-be writers display every week in our music room, and about the mutual attacks of all kinds of people and groups in Leuven, I noticed something in their behaviour and statements that struck me like lightning. And when I reread Adorno's *Minima Moralia*, the same lightning struck me again. Perhaps others have expressed my views on human nature and its implications more clearly, but I don't care, because they came to me without their help and assistance.

But before you start belittling my insights or throwing them in the dustbin, saying that it is inappropriate for someone who lives immoderately to pass judgement on people who can control themselves, first this: I could dismiss any criticism as cowardly, cynical and pretentious with the famous quote from someone whose name I have forgotten: "I am like a signpost. It too does not go where it points." But then I avoid myself and I am sick and tired of all the deception. So now I am taking a different approach to my motives, one that is probably much closer to the truth.

Someone who is always afraid of thunderstorms and therefore always pays close attention to the weather is undoubtedly much more sensitive to atmospheric changes than someone who does not care. Similarly, I think my anxiety disorder makes me more aware of threatening situations than others. I have noticed this on several occasions when I have been out at night with the *Geelse*⁹.

Moreover, I never appreciated the excesses of the *jeunesse dorée*, despite the

⁹ Leuven student club whose members were mostly from the Mol-Geel region.

opportunities I was given to participate in it. All I had to do was accept the invitations of Bob Verbruggen, to name just one of the snooty clique you know all too well, given your dislike of them. Their self-congratulation and their carefully cultivated ironic tone, which they think is pointed and witty but which only shows their contempt for anyone who does not fit into their lifestyle, disgusts me. Once, at their insistence, I smoked hash and dreamed the most beautiful dreams I will probably ever dream. But to add another addiction when I already have to deal with alcohol every day? No, my mind is already sufficiently "expanded"; it doesn't need any more "expansion".

And I am not a man like Alcibiades either, mother. I am not a high-born, gifted bastard whose sole aim is to manipulate his countrymen, while having no qualms about betraying and destroying them when, in his opinion, these actions promote his individual fulfilment. I first met this moral deserter in high school, when I had to read Thucydides' "*Peloponnesian War*", the passage with the discussion between the Athenians and the Melians about the right and wrong of the fittest. Fascinated, I read the whole book.

And in the end, every time someone disagrees with another person, they are passing judgement on them (by implying "you are wrong"), regardless of the tone in which that judgement is made, and regardless of whether they manage to properly explain and substantiate their own position. So should everyone just shut up in the hope of coming across as modest and diplomatic? Or as stupid, dull and underdeveloped according to the sadistic needs of another equally self-righteous pedant on the sidelines?

By sadism I mean the need to put whoever in a negative light for whatever reason, or to harm them in any way, in any situation, in the name of whatever. The explanations that the perpetrator or a third party may devise beforehand or formulate afterwards to justify a sadistic act carried out are irrelevant. Neither is the brevity of the sadistic need and its expression. The pleasure derived from satisfying this need and performing the resulting acts (= making sadistic statements and performing sadistic acts) is of course also sadistic.

§ 1. Wovon man am besten sprechen kann, darüber darf man nicht schweigen

1.1. Attributing predictive value to ancient myths is a form of wishful thinking

The meaning I give to the concept of sadism differs from Freud's, but this should not be a problem because I have a good reason for it. The meaning he gives to the concept of sadism (the enjoyment of the suffering of others) is too limited for what I want to clarify. And it is too one-sided because it is a priori directed against bourgeois society. On the other hand, his concept of "Eros", if not equated with "libido", is useful in the sense of "lust for life" in the broadest sense of the word. However, the scope of his concept of "Thanatos" (the death instinct), which according to him is the second basic instinct of man, is debatable. One could translate "Thanatos" as sadism in the sense that I ascribe to this term, but one should not largely separate the death instinct from aggression against oneself and others, as Marcuse does¹⁰ by attributing to it an all-conciliatory function, as in the

¹⁰ The Frankfurt School has its origins in the *Institut für Sozialforschung* (Institute for Social Research) at the University of Frankfurt. The Institute was founded in 1924 by Felix Weil and was directed by Max Horkheimer from 1931. The *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* was founded in 1932 as the official organ of the Institute. It was in this journal that the members of the Institute formulated their ideas and debated what would later be called 'critical theory'. This could be described as an unorthodox continuation of Marxism combined with other disciplines, including Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis. Members of the institute included Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Erich Fromm, Friedrich Pollock and Walter Benjamin.

- "Ah, the Frankfurt School, totally outdated," I can already hear some people saying. By what right? Does the state intervene less in the economy in 1999 than it did between 1924 and 1975, or more? Moreover, if the current figurehead of the left, Derrida, is allowed to begin his critique of Western thought with a critique of the thought of Plato (c. 427-347 BC) without his followers feeling compelled to make derogatory remarks about it, why should Carlo not be allowed to begin his essay with reflections on the ideas of the Frankfurt School? At the time he wrote his essay, these views were infecting all Western universities and, through these institutions, all Western society. An original idea deserves attention, especially if you claim to take thinking about human beings seriously. Rather than disdainfully shrugging your shoulders at his choice, you would do better to allow the meaning and scope of what he communicates to penetrate your mind. Perhaps then you will experience the same uncomfortable catharsis as the prisoners in Plato's cave when they were freed from their familiar shadows and felt the first rays of sunlight sting their eyes.

following quote: "...moreover, the objective of the death instinct is not destruction *per se* but the elimination of the need for destruction."¹¹

What a great excuse for every persecutor, murderer, serial killer, mass murderer and sexually motivated murder! Incidentally, the latter commits his crime while being driven to do so by his libido (Eros). *And note that Marcuse uses the term "death instinct" not in the sense of "self-destruction", but of "destruction".*

Earlier in the same book, Marcuse writes the following about the nirvana principle he had discovered in a work by Freud¹²: "If the instinct's basic objective is not the termination of life but of pain - the absence of tension - then paradoxically, in terms of the instinct, the conflict between life and death is the more reduced, the closer life approximates the state of gratification. Pleasure principle and Nirvana principle then converge. At the same time, Eros (...) would be strengthened, and the strengthened Eros would, as it were, absorb the objective of the death instinct."¹³

As in the mind of a sexually motivated murderer while committing his crime?
"If" ...

Even if we assume that Freud is right when he says that man always strives for reconciliation between the death instinct and the will to live by avoiding the tensions caused by both (see his quotation), can we rightly conclude from his observation of the existence of this striving that this striving automatically leads to the complete extinction of these fundamental instincts, i.e. that their extinction is an achievable ideal? Man may feel the instinctive need for tranquillity and thus avoid the tensions caused by both the death drive and the will to live, but this does

- The quotations are from Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, Boston, 1955, pp. 234-235 and p. 271. Because Carlo relies on his mother's erudition, he does not cite his source here. I will therefore do so for him by quoting from Martin Jay's *A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research 1923-1950*, Heinemann, London, 1976, pp. 110-111. Having checked the accuracy of Jay's references, I have corrected some of them. It is unfortunate that Carlo's early death prevented him from consulting this man's book. Jay was an admirer of the Frankfurt School, and reading his book would have saved my friend the trouble of much other literature. (Staf Van der Auwera, 1999.)

¹¹ H. Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, Boston, 1955, p. 271.

¹² S. Freud, *Jenseits des Lustprinzips*, VI.: "Daß wir als die herrschende Tendenz des Seelenlebens, vielleicht des Nervenlebens überhaupt, das Streben nach Herabsetzung, Konstanterhaltung, Aufhebung der inneren Reizspannung erkannten (das Nirwanaprinzip nach einem Ausdruck von Barbara Low), wie es im Lustprinzip zum Ausdruck kommt, das ist ja eines unserer stärksten Motive, an die Existenz von Todestrieben zu glauben."

"That we recognized as the prevailing tendency of psychic life, perhaps of nervous life in general, the pursuit of decreasing, the maintenance of constancy, the abolition of inner tension (the Nirvana principle after an expression of Barbara Low), as expressed in the pleasure principle, that is one our strongest motives to believe in the existence of death drive."

¹³ H. Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, Boston, 1955, pp. 234-235.

not mean that perfect tranquillity, nirvana, is an attainable goal. The constant desire to escape tension creates constant tension. The constant effort of the will to achieve Nirvana by denying the world and the self creates tension. Both denial of the world and affirmation of the world are acts of the will. Every intentional act is caused by tension and creates tension. Buddhism contradicts itself. *If it is true that all desire causes suffering, then so does the desire to attain the state of Nirvana.*

Moreover, even if people manage to feel relaxed through meditation or complete resignation, sooner or later they are forced to end this state of inner relaxation in order to feed themselves and satisfy other bodily needs. Then they must again force themselves to turn away from everyday reality and regain their concentration to achieve the state of inner peace. Those who wish to attain perfect, eternal peace must commit suicide, for example by going on a hunger strike.

Another question one might rightly ask of Marcuse's optimism about the reconciliation of opposites (e.g. right-wrong, good-evil; true-false) and contradictions in nirvana through man's surrender to his death instinct is this: Does the death instinct need an "objective" that consists of more than its satisfaction in itself? Is it not merely an intrinsic need or desire without more? Doesn't Marcuse himself say that Thanatos is present in everyone precisely because the death instinct is part of everyone's being (or nature)? And does he not then contradict himself by claiming that this constant need can be thoroughly and permanently satisfied by achieving an "objective" (nirvana, the absence of any tension) that far exceeds the immediate satisfaction of this need?

To achieve this immediate satisfaction, Thanatos needs a target, a victim or a group of victims. Each time the death drive of individuals and groups will seek and find that victim or victims to satisfy itself. Once the sadistic act is done or the sadistic words are spoken, so that a person's sadism is temporarily satisfied, his need for sadism remains, for this need is inherent in human beings. The fact that it temporarily decreases in intensity because one actually succeeds in killing another human being, or because one commits mass murder against a certain community, does not mean that the death instinct of the person or persons concerned is thereby completely and permanently extinguished (= nirvana). While the murderer and the murderess think back with pleasure and satisfaction on how they have satisfied their sadism, their death drive is only waiting for a new opportunity to harm or slaughter "others", e.g. women/other women, the weak and the non-conformists. The latter did, for example, the Aztecs and Assyrians, the Romans, the Huns, the

medieval knights and mercenary armies, and last but not least, Stalin and the Party that oppressed the Baltic States after the Second World War.

If there is a (constant) "conflict between life and death" in every human being, so that there is a (constant) tension in every human being, the absorption of the death instinct in the "strengthened" Eros in Nirvana can never be achieved, and thus the "objective" attributed to the death instinct by Marcuse can never be achieved. So why speculate about this objective? *To divert everyone's attention from what is essential?*

The "objective" of the death instinct (the avoidance of tension) is supposed by Marcuse to be "absorbed" by the strengthened Eros in Nirvana, which would result in the complete extinction of both the death instinct and Eros. If both were incompletely extinguished, the state of nirvana would not be achieved. In Nirvana, both are one precisely because they are completely extinguished (= the reconciliation of opposites). And this state is said to have been attained because both the death instinct, which is a lust (the lust to destroy), and the sexual instinct (libido), however much they both incite to killing, have been given free rein while incarnated in a person who is unhampered by any external moral objections or impediments as far as the satisfaction of both instincts is concerned. Is this possible? Can the death instinct be fully and permanently satisfied (completely extinguished) after it has been given *unfettered freedom* to commit sexually motivated murder with impunity (a murder prompted by the libido, which, because it gives pleasure, belongs to the Eros instinct), or while the morally uninhibited person yearns to murder? Can people experience perfect satisfaction or perfect peace (nirvana) without feeling the slightest need to relive the lust they experienced while raping women and children and murdering opponents during race riots, class struggle, persecution, revolution or war?

Of course, a person can repent and curb his sadism. But if Thanatos remains in the brains of murderers and rapists after the actual rape, murder or manslaughter as a lustful memory that is a desire for repetition, there can be no complete extinction of all psychic tension by reaching the state of Nirvana: The rapist wants to rape again and the butcher wants to butcher again. Especially if they have the opportunity to commit these acts with impunity. For example, during Marxist permanent revolution or in situations of permanent anarchy (= complete lawlessness in the absence of any law enforcement), e.g. during plague epidemics and in cases of civil war or war.

But even when the perpetrators no longer have the chance to satisfy their sadism

with impunity, they usually remain under the spell of their life-threatening desires. After all, they are part of human nature, because the instincts that drive people to have these desires are inherent in human nature, even according to Marcuse, however much he tries to downplay and justify these instincts by presenting Nirvana as their ultimate objective.

Therefore, the actual existence of these desires and the instincts that underlie them should be recognised by psychologists, psychiatrists and judges during the course of a criminal case and after the sentence has been pronounced, regardless of whether the accused or convicted person and their lawyers have made non-binding expressions of remorse. Potential repeat offenders should not be given another chance to unleash their Thanatos on that part of humanity that holds its sadism in check.

Recognising the presence of these instincts in potential repeat offenders and protecting that part of society that keeps its sadism in check is impossible if the so-called professionals who protect society are animated only by a quasi-tolerant empathy for the sadistic behaviour and ditto fantasies of their patients or clients. Nor can these professionals fulfil their duty to protect society if they are under the discriminatory (and thus sadistic) illusion that they alone can perfect humanity in a messianic or godman-like way by transforming the perpetrator into a "new man", but meanwhile neglect or ignore the victim (see III, B, Chapter IV, § 4).

Only a cold-blooded narcissist can remain completely stoically impassive while destroying people or witnessing their destruction. And even such a person undoubtedly thinks back with pleasure on how he raped and murdered his victims and how it felt to do so.

Incidentally, people do not need any mental disorder at all to experience pleasure and lust without guilt while destroying others or witnessing their destruction. All they need is the firm conviction that their cause is indisputably the only right one, that they and they alone are truly pursuing "the one true greater good". Then all victims are inevitably just collateral damage. In Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, Pilar demonstrates this when she nostalgically describes an anarchist purge carried out in the early months of the Spanish Civil War by the gang of which she herself was a member.

Besides, why do so many balanced people like the Iliad, pornography, porno films and war films? And don't forget that every human being has a memory that can recall and enjoy erotic and sadistic scenes and experiences.

But how is it possible that man, despite his inherent sadism, which can never be permanently satisfied, can live more or less in peace with himself and others? I shall return to this question in a moment.

In addition to dissociating the death instinct from the illusion that it can be completely extinguished in nirvana, it must also be dissociated from the "phallic instinct" of "oppressive, patriarchal capitalist society" (Frankfurt School) and from any reference to the myths of Oedipus and Electra and the Oedipus complex as the unconscious driving force behind all possible and real uprisings of the socio-economically dependent against the "patricentric-acquisitive"¹⁴ monopoly capitalists.

Why?

In *Eros and Civilization*¹⁵, Herbert Marcuse writes that Freud's most challenging and suggestive hypotheses are the most true and valuable: the death instinct, the primal horde and the killing of the primal father [= by some Oedipus in an animal skin]. This archaic heritage has meaning, says Marcuse, because of its symbolic value: "We use Freud's anthropological speculation only in this sense: *for its symbolic value* [emphasis by Marcuse]. The archaic events that the hypothesis stipulates may forever be beyond the realm of anthropological verification; the alleged consequences of these events are historical facts, and their interpretation in the light of Freud's hypothesis lends them a neglected significance which points to the historical future."

Very convenient of him, this way of presenting things.

But if I assume that Oedipus neither murdered his father nor had sexual intercourse with his mother in the context of a lawful marriage, but that he and his tribesmen systematically beheaded and cannibalised the entire neighbouring tribe, then this mythical representation may also forever be beyond the reach of anthropological verification, but nevertheless, I have as much right as Marcuse to claim that my myth has symbolic value "in the light of Freud's speculation", "because the alleged consequences of these [archaic] events are historical facts whose significance, when interpreted in the light of Freud's hypothesis, points to the historical future". Or which refer to events of the recent and not so recent past, such as the historical facts of the massacres and rapes by the troops led by Mahmud of Ghazni and Tamerlane, the massacres in the two world wars, the deaths in the concentration

¹⁴ The derogatory and therefore sadistic adjective coined by Erich Fromm, a man otherwise gentle. Referring to Fromm, Marcuse uses this adjective in *Eros and Civilization*, Boston, 1955, p. 241.

¹⁵ Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, Boston, 1955, p. 60.

camps of the bourgeois, liberal, capitalist British (Second Boer War, 1899-1902), in the camps of the fascists who advocated a corporate society, in those of the *Blut-und-Boden* Nazis, in the camps of the neo-Shinto Japanese and in the modern "gulag" of the Bolsheviks, as well as the genocide of the Armenians by fanatically nationalist Islamic Turks, and so on. You can see immediately that committing mass murder is neither a purely capitalist, bourgeois, right-wing or Christian pastime, nor a privilege of Western whites.¹⁶ *What all the above-mentioned perpetrators of mass murder have in common, however, is that they committed their mass murders in order to achieve a "greater good".*

I don't accept the possible objection of the Left that my imagination has no right to create a myth, since the same Left accepts as an argument the myths created by the imagination of others. Such an objection would discriminate against me in a completely arbitrary way, especially since Marcuse himself says that "the archaic events stipulated by [Freud's] hypothesis may forever be beyond the reach of anthropological verification". Just like the events in my own myths. I don't see why the unconscious Eros and Thanatos that prompt me to mythologise should be any less valuable than the unconscious Eros and Thanatos of some anonymous prehistoric person who probably drank too much or smoked hashish and thought he was communicating with ghosts or gods. Like me, he was probably a rich young man, the youngest of a chieftain, not very physically strong, but with enough free time to mythologise while the other tribesmen went out hunting or gathering food (similar context).

Oops! I have once again given "all power to the imagination"! I have created another myth!

And indeed, the archaic events underlying this new myth are probably also forever "beyond the reach of anthropological verification", but like any myth, when interpreted in the light of Freud's hypothesis, it has symbolic value because its alleged consequences are historical facts pointing to the future. If the characters and facts in the myths are really archetypes, they always refer to all the people and circumstances in all the cultures throughout history that bear a resemblance to the

¹⁶ This is not a pleonasm. On Sakhalin, the Kuril Islands, and Hokkaido (Japan) lives a minority of whites, the Ainu, who were expelled and discriminated against by the actual Japanese, a mixed people of later invaders. I need hardly point out that neither the Ainu nor the Japanese were tainted by Judeo-Christian asceticism, which the Left believes to be the cause of hatred of Jews and Christians, nor by Western capitalism and ethnocentrism, which the Left believes to be the cause of all evil in the world. The Japanese were found to be particularly capable of hatred without Judeo-Christian asceticism, capitalism and Western ethnocentrism and continued to exhibit this mentality and behavior *after* they imported *Zen Buddhism with its denial of self and pursuit of nirvana* (12th century AD).