Against Flourishing:

Wellbeing as biopolitics, and the psychoanalytic alternative

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Abstract

This article critically analyzes what is at stake in the recent translation of the term 'happiness' into the inter-related terms 'well-being' and 'flourishing' within Happiness Studies. Focussing on the work of Martin Seligman, the article argues that the category of 'flourishing' in particular highlights Happiness Studies and positive psychology as a new, neoliberal interpretation of utilitarianism. This is supported with reference to Michel Foucault's late lectures at the Collège de France on the connections between neoliberalism and the direct political administration of life that he termed 'biopolitics', a concept which explains the interweaving of health and happiness in today's dominant therapeutic cultures. Finally, the article attempts to outline a radical alternative to the biopolitical notion of 'flourishing' by appealing to psychoanalysis, specifically Lacanian psychoanalysis - its critique of consumer happiness, but also its clinical commitment to working transformatively with unhappiness.

Keywords: happiness studies; Martin Seligman; Michel Foucault; biopolitics; Jacques Lacan; psychoanalysis

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I.   Introduction

In what follows, I want to explore the political implications of a recent shift within Happiness Studies and positive psychology that has seen a move away from the notion of happiness per se – notoriously difficult to measure and plagued by subjectivism – and towards notions of 'wellbeing' and more specifically of 'flourishing'. My general claim is that these notions translate the fundamentally utilitarian project of Happiness Studies into those aspects of neoliberal governmentality best described using Michel Foucault's concept of 'biopolitics'. By focussing on the 'art of government' that "brought life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations" (Foucault, 1998, p.143), Foucault allows us to see what is at stake, politically and ethically, in this translation of wellbeing and flourishing across various discursive registers and institutional spaces. His late lectures at the Collège de France between 1978 and 1979, which explored "liberalism as the general framework of biopolitics" (Foucault, 2010, p.22), can highlight for us the ways in which Happiness Studies and the wellbeing agenda shape health-related discourses and practices today.

However, this is only one half of what I want to achieve. The other is to propose a radical alternative to this ubiquitous therapeutic culture. My other claim, therefore, is that psychoanalysis, and specifically Lacanian psychoanalysis, offers a way of working both within and against the dominant therapeutic frameworks intrinsic to contemporary biopolitics. Lacan's re-reading of Freud, and particularly his engagement with ethics in his seventh seminar, demonstrates that psychoanalysis can articulate a critique of hegemonic conceptions of happiness: it is in this seminar that Lacan presciently observes that "happiness has become a political matter" (Lacan, 2008, p.358). But crucially, *Seminar VII* also demonstrates that psychoanalysis can work transformatively *with* the unhappiness lodged in the symptom that brings someone into analysis in the first place. Through the work of analysis, the structure of the subject's desire becomes discernible but remains stubbornly *un*translatable into dominant therapeutic idioms, including those of 'flourishing' and 'wellbeing'. Contra Foucault's hasty incorporation of psychoanalysis into the pre-history of biopolitics then (Foucault, 1998), I will argue that Lacanian psychoanalytic theory and clinical practice suggests a starkly different politics of health from that embedded within Happiness Studies.

II.   From Happiness to Flourishing

As a relatively new discipline, Happiness Studies likes to cite a story of origin that fulfils a double function, appealing on the one hand to a dubious trope of Eastern wisdom, and on the other to a putatively caring version of welfare economics.[1] That story suggests that although happiness has been a central question in European moral and political philosophy since the ancient Greeks, *modern* happiness research really begins in the East, specifically in Bhutan in 1972. It was then that King Jigme Wangchuck declared that in governing his country he would draw not on the cold capitalist rationality of the profit-motive, but on the ancient wisdom inscribed within Buddhist spiritual values: he would seek to improve not Gross Domestic Product, but Gross Domestic *Happiness*. His advisers then set about developing a survey mechanism by which to measure Bhutanese life-satisfaction so that all governmental policies could thenceforth contribute to increasing 'GDH'. With its image of enlightened rulers in far-flung kingdoms caring for their newfound flock in ways 'we' in the West must learn from, this foundation myth has done sterling discursive work for Happiness Studies. Various countries from the UK to the US, from Italy to Germany and Japan, now administer 'Wellbeing' Indexes that inform their policies on a range of issues including health, education and welfare. Just as significantly, many influential Non-Governmental-Organisations and thinktanks, such as the UK's *New Economics Foundation*[2] and the *Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development*,[3] now endorse the yardstick of GNH, and utilize happiness research methods in their consultancy and lobbying work.

In truth however, rather than a gift from our enlightened brothers and sisters in Bhutan, modern happiness research is much better viewed as a technologically enhanced neoliberal re-booting of Jeremy Bentham's utilitarian philosophy (Bentham, 1970). This philosophy was formulated very much in the 'West' - indeed, squarely within the furnace of European industrialization and urbanization and in partial dialogue with the new political discourse of the 'right to happiness' associated with the American and French revolutions. Just as Bentham responded to the enormous upheavals imposed by primitive capitalism and bourgeois liberalism with a new mode of governmental reason centring on a 'felicific calculus', so contemporary Happiness Studies needs to be understood against the backdrop of late capitalism and the psychosocial disturbances attendant upon economic and cultural globalization. In fact, a closer look at the Bhutanese example itself confirms this link between happiness as a metric of governance, and violent socioeconomic change: it was also King Wangchuck who pushed through the modernising reforms which, as well as moving his country toward constitutional monarchy and full-blown democracy, also opened its economy up to the global market in goods, services and labour. As elsewhere, Bhutan's experience of breakneck modernization introduced major class and cultural upheavals which the appeal to ancient Buddhist values could only paper over. The country currently faces chronic underemployment and corruption and its incumbent prime minister has expressed serious doubts about the Gross National Happiness concept.[4] A similar story is currently unfolding in mainland China, where politicians have been jumping on the happiness bandwagon as they pursue the oxymoron of Communist capitalism.[5]

One of the key ways in which modern happiness research has updated Bentham's vision of utilitarianism is by integrating it with the qualitative and quantitative research methods of mainstream psychology, now considerably

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[1] See Bok, 2010 for just one example

[2] See http://www.happyplanetindex.org/about/ [accessed 30/08/13]

[3] See http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/about/better-life-initiative/ [accessed 30/08/13]

[4] See http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-23545641 [accessed 30/08/13]

[5] See http://articles.latimes.com/2011/may/16/world/la-fg-china-happiness-20110516 [accessed 30/08/13]

extended by digital technologies. Thus, where Bentham still envisioned a clear separation between the governing and the governed, equipping the former with a rational maxim for the top-down management of the latter and giving the state a central welfare function, today's happiness researchers utilize internet-based psychological tests to plumb the mood of the, ideally, *self*-governing neoliberal subject who increasingly manages her own health. Respondents to online life-satisfaction surveys and telephone or email-based 'experience sampling' now produce massive data-sets upon which largely *private* providers of health and welfare provision base their activities.[6] In this and many other ways, psychology's concern with measurement has helped utilitarianism move from the residual paternalism of Bentham's vision of political economy – his famous 'greatest good for the greatest number' - to a much more individualised and individualistic interpretation of happiness as something akin to customer satisfaction. With government itself reconceptualised as a service-provider, psychology more generally has come to underwrite the 'customer feedback' mechanism that passes today for democracy.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the example of 'positive psychology'. This movement has been pioneered in the work of former president of the American Psychological Association and outspoken advocate of Happiness Studies (especially as a tool in the service of government, business, and indeed the US army), Martin Seligman. Already known for his cognitive behavioural work on 'learned optimism', Seligman published a book in 2002 that enacted another translation, this time between empirical experimental psychology and pop psychology. Indeed, as the tell-tale second-person pronoun of its title implies, *Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfilment* (Seligman, 2003) arguably tipped over into the nebulous realm of self-help literature, making heavy weather of its scientific rigour and credibility for precisely this reason.

Seligman offered two inter-connected claims in the book. Firstly, positive psychology could provide the long sought-after measure of happiness and subjective wellbeing of which Bentham had only dreamt, primarily through advances in psychometric testing and digitization. Secondly, positive psychology could revolutionise psychology itself by breaking with the long-dominant 'disease model' bequeathed by nineteenth century psychiatry and the related focus on mental illness and pathology. Released from a myopic attention to dysfunction and suffering alone, the new psychology could focus instead on the much more uplifting values of life, thriving, fulfilment and satisfaction at the level of individuals, families, communities and (why not?) entire nations. Typically for happiness research as a whole then, *Authentic Happiness* was based on life-satisfaction surveys as well as self-reflexive psychological tests for establishing what Seligman calls 'signature strengths and virtues'. The hard-copy book was supported by online versions of the same tests: taking the tests as the book unfolded was meant to demonstrate the reader's rising levels of 'positive emotion', and returning to them online enabled regular self-assessment. Located at the nexus of academic and popular psychology as well as of broader self-help culture, and plugged in to online techniques of self-improvement and corresponding social media, *Authentic Happiness* earned for its author, and for the field of Happiness Studies generally, a high and at times excitable media profile. This success has led to its enthusiastic uptake in the corridors of political power over the last five years or so, from Obama's Whitehouse[7] to Cameron's Downing Street,[8] from Sarkozy's time in the Élysée Palace[9] to the United

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[6] For example, the private American healthcare company *Healthways*, in collaboration with the polsters *Gallup*, administers an ambitious daily wellbeing index. See http://www.well-beingindex.com/ [accessed 30/08/13]

[7] Obama appointed prominent Happiness Studies researcher Alan Kreuger as chair of the White House Council of Economic Advisors in the summer of 2012.

[8] Cameron launched the UK's Wellbeing Index in October 2011.

Nations General Assembly, where, in 2010, sixty eight countries signed up to a motion encouraging them "to pursue the elaboration of additional measures that better capture the importance of the pursuit of happiness and well-being in development with a view to guiding their public policies".[10]

It is all the more remarkable, therefore, to find Seligman, in a book published the year after this UN resolution, loudly recanting on the theory of happiness that had served him so well for a decade. In *Flourish: A New Understanding of Happiness and Well-Being – and How to Achieve Them* (Seligman, 2011), he criticizes his former focus on happiness, arguing that it was too narrow, too open to hedonic interpretations, too prone to subjective bias, and insufficiently amenable to empirical measurement to truly serve as a target for government policy, corporate management, or indeed individual self-improvement. Had Seligman caught the blues? In fact, this seeming auto-critique of Happiness Studies should be seen as a sign of its growing status, rather than of its faltering confidence (something from which, almost by definition, it does not suffer). Tellingly, Seligman positions himself in *Flourish* as a victim rather than a beneficiary or catalyst of the culture of the 'yellow smiley face'. He claims, somewhat disingenuously, to have always detested the word 'happiness' for its superficial overtones, and to have included it so prominently in the title of his former bestseller only at the insistence of his then publisher (Seligman, 2011, p.9). By the end of the Noughties therefore, like many others in the discipline he has done so much to create, Seligman preferred the term 'wellbeing' to that of happiness.

What is at stake in this translation of happiness into the terms of wellbeing? On one level, it is clearly an attempt to address the problem of subjective bias and mood-transience built into the two key research methods of Happiness Studies: life-satisfaction surveys and experience sampling. If the utilitarian 'gold standard' of an accurate and scientific happiness *metric* remains the fulcrum of the field's claim to policy relevance, the unreliability of reported happiness constitutes a serious threat to its legitimacy. But because, in Seligman's own words, it "cannot exist just in your own head" (*ibid.*, p.25), wellbeing allows happiness research to step outside the domain of psychological surveys and self-reporting into the much more empirically credible arena of the sociology of health and medicine. This echoes shifts within utilitarian philosophical debates over the last decade or so away from subjective pleasure-based understandings of wellbeing, toward objective desire-based understandings (see Bykvist, 2010).[11] Wellbeing even implies a physiological and hence a measurable, rather than a psychological and hence at least a partially intangible, foundation for subjective welfare. As Barbara Ehrenreich has argued, the alleged connection between positive emotion and immunological resilience, between the happy mind and the healthy body, is the "holy grail" of the positive thinking movement (Ehrenreich, 2010, p.165). In short, the term wellbeing

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[9] In 2008 Sarkozy commissioned former Chief Economist at the World Bank and vocal critic of globalization, Joseph Stiglitz, to produce a report exploring the limits of GDP as a statistical measure and to consider the merits of indicators of 'well-being'. See http://www.stiglitz-sen-fitoussi.fr/documents/rapport_anglais.pdf

[10] For the full UN resolution, see http://internationalhappinessandwellbeingday.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Happiness-Resolution.pdf [accessed 30/08/13]

[11] It is important to point out that though distinguished from bodily pleasure, utilitarian desire has nothing to do with the psychoanalytic concept of desire, being conceived along the lines of a 'want' or a 'goal'. Thus, someone who has survived a car crash can be in extreme physical pain, yet feel 'happy' in realising his desire of continuing his life to pursue the goals that make existence meaningful for him. This is obviously unrelated to, indeed anathema to, any concept of the unconscious.

facilitates a move within Happiness Studies toward *bodies as sites of measurable productivity* and *populations as patterns of predictable mass behavior*, and away from the flawed perceptions of mere individuals - even if the ultimate goal remains the individual whose right to 'pursue happiness' has, at least in the American context, been constitutionally guaranteed since 1776. With the expansiveness granted by the concept of wellbeing, relatively uncontroversial hard data on longevity, average salaries, divorce rates and indicators of physical health - of the kind that have long been collected by the World Health Organization - can then be translated into evidence that supports claims as to the 'universal' causality of human happiness. To give just two examples: firstly, happiness research frequently places a transparently bourgeois and heteronormative emphasis on high-income and (implicitly opposite-sex) marriage as 'objective' determinants of life-satisfaction; secondly, cross-cultural comparative happiness research consistently prioritizes suspiciously liberal western values of democracy and freedom, as if all cultures at bottom shared the American dream (see Diener et al, 2010). This indicates the potential value of a postcolonial critique of the role of discourses of 'happiness' in neo-liberal/neo-colonial globalization, including their continuity with the European brand of 'universalism' that legitimized imperial domination (see Watters, 2011). More pertinently for my purposes here however, the signifying scope of the concept of wellbeing also connects happiness directly to *health*, entangling but also transforming both terms and their corresponding practices in a manner that facilitates what Thomas Szaz has aptly called the 'medicalization of everyday life' (see Szaz, 2007).

What then, does Seligman's secondary qualification of wellbeing as *flourishing* add to this pervasive discourse? If it had a genuine philosophical genealogy, the concept of flourishing would emerge from Aristotelian virtue ethics, sharing as it does a family resemblance with the notion of *arete*, sometimes translated as 'excellence', which Aristotle elaborated in his *Nicomachean Ethics* (Aristotle: 2006). Unlike today's tendency to interpret happiness as inextricably linked to 'fun', *arete* refers to the rational maximization and realization of one's life potential. At least for Aristotle, such potential was not viewed as infinite, malleable or subjectively determined, but corresponded more to the place allotted one by nature and/or the gods. It could only really be assessed at the end of a life and implied mental discipline more than 'fun' per se. But Seligman is philosophically and culturally very distant from Aristotle's world. In his hands 'flourishing' - the bumper-sticker version of which might read 'Be all you can be!' – takes on a distinctly neoliberal hue.

To his previous theory of happiness therefore, he adds in *Flourish* the dimensions of 'self-esteem', 'optimism', 'resilience', 'vitality', 'self-determination' and 'positive relationships', insisting that many of these cannot be measured by taking the individual's perspective alone. His Signature Strengths Test explicitly valorizes, through their encoding as strengths, a strange mixture of pseudo-military resilience ('Valor and Bravery'), managerial confidence ('Industry' and 'Leadership'), and political quietism ('Citizenship', 'Gratitude' and 'Religiousness'). He is candid that his move away from happiness and towards flourishing was prompted by "a poster child for positive psychology" who, as well as running her own successful hedge-fund at age 32, spotted holes in his theory of happiness, namely that it "omits success and mastery. People try to achieve just for winning's sake" (Seligman, 2010, p.10). In response to this shibboleth of competitive individualism, Seligman duly adds 'achievement' as a new dimension of 'flourishing', arguably opening the gates to normative understandings of value and productivity that can often be the source of, rather than solution to, unhappiness.

Though certainly not an economist, Seligman does not shy away from extending 'flourishing' into a revised political economy of happiness (though one Bentham would not have recognized). He refers to the combination of wealth-generation and wellbeing, to which we should all apparently be aspiring, as the "New Prosperity" (*ibid*., p.237). Against the backdrop of the global credit crunch of 2008, one could be forgiven for finding this 'new prosperity' somewhat lacking compared to its forerunner. Yet in direct response to Ehrenreich's critique of the links between positive thinking, consumer confidence, and the financial meltdown (see chapter 7 of Ehrenreich, 2010),

Seligman contents himself with an unsophisticated declaration of the opposite position: "the claim that optimism caused the meltdown is pure twaddle. The opposite is the case […] Viral pessimism caused the economic meltdown" (*ibid*., p.235). As an explanation of irresponsible lending in the subprime mortgage market and of the ramifying complexity of financial derivatives, this leaves a great deal to be desired. Yet it does uphold the neoliberal fantasy arguably inherent to finance capital itself: namely, that value is speculative and thus ultimately psychological all the way down, rather that rooted in exploitative forms of material labor and their corresponding social relations (see Harvey, 2011). It follows from Seligman's 'analysis' of the economic crisis that viral optimism is the antidote to viral pessimism: positive thinking creates positive emotion which in turn creates an 'upspiral' of increased investment, bank-to-bank lending, and capital liquidity. GDP is effectively swallowed into GDH here, in a reading of 'immaterial labor' very different from that championed by Italian autonomist Marxism.[12]

That Seligman seems to have a constitutive blind-spot regarding the connections between his vision of flourishing and class privilege is suggested by his reaction to seeing his life-savings temporarily dwindle during the recession. Despite initial anxiety, he concludes that even if his investments lost 40% of their value "my own well-being and that of my family would not be much reduced" (Seligman, 2011, p.232). He even envisions, almost yearningly, what this forced down-sizing would look like: "cooking together, reading plays as a family, learning massage rather than purchasing massage, evenings by the fire in the winter, and making clothes together" (*ibid*.). This saccharine scene is clearly *not* the perspective of someone on the breadline. The 'problem' he tries to make the best of here is already a function of extreme privilege, assuming as it does sufficient surplus capital to purchase shares in the stock exchange. Ironically, he ameliorates any remaining anxiety about the worst-case scenario with an appeal to the welfare state: "no one would starve, medical care would be intact, and education would still be free" (*ibid*.). A brief glance at 'Austerity Britain' should have disabused him of this comforting illusion: the use of food banks in the UK has increased by 200% following vicious cuts in welfare spending;[13] NHS Doctors have proposed charging as much as £150 simply to make routine appointments;[14] and since 2012 universities have been allowed to increase tuition fees to levels that are predicted to result in average student debts of up to £53, 000, a prohibitively terrifying prospect for working class families.[15]

Seligman ends *Flourish* by making the absurd and baseless prediction that by "2051, 51 percent of the world will be flourishing" (Seligman, 2011, p.240). Perhaps he honestly believes that his own 'viral optimism' can make this so. But what is clear is that his vision of the new 'pursuit of flourishing' seems open primarily to those who will be in a position to pay for it themselves. Can we really see flourishing in isolation from economic globalization and the legacy of Thatcherism and Reagonomics?

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[12] Thinkers in the Italian autonomous tradition such as Toni Negri, Christian Marazzi and Franco 'Bifo' Berardi argue that late capitalism has shifted towards an 'immaterial' or cognitive form of labour in which value is extracted from the production of affect, ideas, and information. Where they see this as preparatory to a re-socialization of capital thanks to what Negri calls the 'multitude', and Berardi the 'cognitariat', the combination of Happiness Studies and neoliberal 'welfare' economics (which Bruno-Fey has referred to as 'happynomics') seems to imply hyper-capitalist, rather than anti-capitalist effects.

[13] See http://www.theguardian.com/society/2013/jul/11/food-bank-rise-welfare-changes [accessed 30/08/13]

[14] See http://www.express.co.uk/news/health/417591/Doctors-want-you-to-pay-150-for-an-appointment
[accessed 30/08/13]

[15] See http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-14488312 [accessed 30/08/13]

III. Flourishing as Neoliberal Biopolitics

It is at this point that Michel Foucault's concept of 'biopolitics' can help us to understand the seemingly seamless translation of the discourses of 'wellbeing' and 'flourishing' into myriad aspects of contemporary life. Biopolitics emerged as a theme in the last of Foucault's 1975-1976 Collège de France lectures, gathered under the title 'Society Must be Defended' (Foucault, 2003). It also appears, briefly, at the end of the first volume of his *History of Sexuality*, published as *La Volonté de savoir* also in 1976 (Foucault, 1998). It is only in the 1978-1979 Collège de France lectures however, that he comes to situate 'The Birth of Biopolitics' in relation to its accompanying political framework of liberalism and then neoliberalism.

In fact, the concept of 'biopower' or 'biopolitics' is formulated as part of Foucault's broader attempt to locate, historically and conceptually, a transition that occurred in Europe around the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries between two models of sovereignty. On the one hand, there was the older model based on monarchical absolutism as exemplified in the king or queen's power to "take life or let live" (Foucault, 1998, p.136). This model had already been partially displaced in the late eighteenth century by an "anatomo-politics of the human body" (Foucault, 1998, p.139 and Foucault, 2003, p.243) which, thanks to industrialization and intensifying European imperial competition, had begun to concern itself with rendering populations disciplined for work, and economically productive. On the other hand however, Foucault maps the emergence of a distinct "biopolitics of the population" or even "of the human race" (*ibid*.) which is a "matter of taking control of life and the biological processes of man-as-species" (Foucault, 2003, pp.246-247). The key distinction between the two types of sovereignty therefore is that while disciplinary modes wielded the power of death over life, biopolitical modes assume the power to directly measure, produce, control, and regulate life itself.

For this reason, it is health and the health sciences that assume a pre-eminent discursive position in the era of biopolitics (see Bunton and Petersen, 1997). For if biopolitics aims to shape and manage life for economically productive ends, then health becomes the ideal (utilitarian) measure of its success. This is evidenced by the vast expansion of the conceptual and practical scope of the notion of 'health' in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, encompassing as it came to everything from epidemics and sanitation to diet, leisure pursuits and sexual conduct. Now, in the twenty first century, the elasticity of 'health' has enabled biopolitical forms of regulation to enter the very pores of contemporary selfhood, especially when discursively linked with happiness. While the anti-psychiatry movement (with which Foucault was associated) already recognised in the 1960s the *disciplinary* power behind the psychiatric label 'madness', today we should isolate in the much broader category of 'mental health', deployed well beyond the psychiatric institution, an intensification of these biopolitical modes of social control that colonise our sense of self.

That these developments are inextricably linked to neoliberalism is convincingly argued in Foucault's 'Birth of Biopolitics' lectures (Foucault, 2010). He first distinguishes there between two understandings of the idea of freedom within classical political economy, before going on to explore the actualization of one of them in two concrete examples of neoliberalism - German and American. If freedom in a certain revolutionary tradition has been conceived as a 'natural possession' endowing the subject with the right to overthrow the tyrant or despot (the Lockean right of resistance for example), in a later tradition, which Foucault rightly identifies as utilitarian and Anglo-American, freedom has been differently conceptualised as "the independence of the governed with regard to the government" (Foucault, 2010, p.42). In this latter tradition, the free-market becomes the site of the exercise of this freedom as well as being the supposed mechanism of distributive justice. Thus, if classical liberalism aimed to limit the power of the state, neoliberalism has succeeded in figuring this limitation as one specifically vis-à-vis its capacity to intervene in the planning, regulation or steering of the market mechanism. When the state interferes,

claim neoliberals, it disrupts the *market's* delivery of human happiness and wellbeing.[16] The state in the old Weberian sense is no longer the seat of power as such, but one component in a more complex and fluid *dispositif* of techologies of governmentality that would include private 'providers'. As Foucault presciently observes, this neoliberal *dispositif* "takes on the task of continuously and effectively taking charge of individuals and their well-being, wealth, and work, their way of being, behaving and even dying" (Foucault, 2010, p.63). It is obvious, then, that we should view Happiness Studies as an outgrowth of this neoliberal tradition that takes wellbeing as its object, precisely as it wrests that object from the hands of the 'nanny state' in order to monetize it. Neoliberalism could be said to translate Benthamite utilitarian welfarism out of the Keynesian welfare state of the mid 20th Century and into a competitive health and happiness market emerging in the 21st.

In line with this economic rather than pastoral perspective on welfare, the two historical examples of neoliberalism that Foucault explores both demonstrate a drive toward "privatized social policy" (*ibid*., p.145) that manifests itself most clearly in the area of health. Thus, post-war German ordo-liberalism of the kind proposed by Wilhelm Röpke and Alexander Rüstow sought to 'free' the citizen to pursue his own health and wellbeing, not by underwriting public healthcare provision as the Keynesians would suggest, but by facilitating the market conditions that would enable the citizen to afford to insure *himself* against his own health risks. But German ordo-liberalism, situating itself between socialist economic planning and full-blown *laissez-faire* monetarism, retained a strong role for the state in the management of this new 'social market economy'. It was really American neoliberalism that obliterated any remnant of classical liberal paternalism, moving decisively towards market fundamentalism. It did so by extending economic modes of reasoning to traditionally non-economic dimensions of life, such that nothing, from birth to death and everything in between, could any longer escape the grid of fiscal intelligibility. Beyond the particular economic ideology developed through the Chicago School by figures like Friedrich von Hayek and Milton Friedman then, Foucault sees American neoliberalism as "a general style of thought, analysis and imagination" (*ibid*., p.219). It is "a whole way of being and thinking […] a type of relation between the governors and the governed much more than it is a technique of governors with regard to the governed" (*ibid*., p.218).

It is this 360 degree extension of economic logic to traditionally non-economic dimensions of life, right up to the reinscription of both felt selfhood and the legitimate remit of the state, which helps us to understand Happiness Studies, the concept of flourishing, and the kind of subject they interpolate. Foucault found at the core of American neoliberalism a subject conceived according to the theory of 'human capital', that is, as a nodal point in an overall input-output system. According to Human Capital Theory, any investment of time and money in building an individual's skills and capacities - whether technical, emotional or cognitive – must increase the aggregate output in an economically measurable way. Foucault immediately recognised the consequence that "all the problems of healthcare and public hygiene must [..] be rethought as elements which or may not improve human capital" (*ibid*., p.230). Beyond the mere absence of illness, health becomes an investment in a productive population. This focus on humans as input/output devices, amenable to training and (self)improvement, clearly opens the way to an alliance between neoliberalism and behavioural psychology, of which managerialism might be seen as one particularly pervasive consequence (see Fitzsimons, 2011).

This way of thinking is literally spelled out in Seligman's *Flourish*, where he writes that "positive emotion does much more than just feel pleasant: it is a neon sign that growth is under way, that *psychological capital is accumulating*" (Seligman, 2011, p.66). Could we not argue that the term 'psychological capital' also casts a neon

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[16] This is why an important element of neoliberal ideology is an anti-totalitarian rhetoric that caricatures socialist states and planned economies as systematically producing human misery instead of market-based happiness.

light on positive psychology's close affinity with human capital theory? After all, the term 'psychological capital' refers to the traits such as 'optimism', 'flexibility' and 'mental toughness' said to be conducive to economic productivity, often measured in reduced days taken as sick leave. As David Harvey observes in *Spaces of Hope*, "sickness is defined under capitalism broadly as inability to work" (Harvey, 2000, p.106). Psychological capital has recently been brought under the more encompassing heading of 'resilience', a term that, as several commentators have noted (see Neocleous, 2013 and Chandler, 2013), now pulls together an array of claims, from adaptation in corporate organizational cultures to risk management in security studies, from back-to-work schemes in occupational health to infrastructural capacity-building in transnational development.[17]

Seligman's own work in this area has lead to his participation in the US Army's Comprehensive Soldier Fitness Programme.[18] The psychometric 'Global Assessment Tool' test he has developed not only enables the measurement and monitoring of the wellbeing of millions of soldiers, whether on active duty or as reservists, but also provides the data for tailored training in supplementary resilience techniques. In keeping with human capital theory, it is claimed that the input of this resilience training leads to the 'added value' output of psychologically robust soldiers whose wellbeing is relatively immunized against the ravages of war. Furthermore, citing the pseudo-Nietzschean aphorism that 'what doesn't kill me only makes me stronger', Seligman claims that resilience training can turn Post-Traumatic-Stress Disorder (for which the US army is paying out millions of dollars in compensation) into Post-Traumatic *Growth*. Rather like the venture capitalists and practitioners of 'disaster capitalism' then (see Klein, 2008), Seligman seems to see only opportunity in crisis, be it economic, political or psychological.

According to Seligman, one of the senior military officials with whom he collaborated enthused that "If resilience training works, it will be a model for civilian medicine" (Seligman, 2011, p.128). In truth, this had already taken place: the language of 'human', 'psychological' and 'mental capital' has been insidiously shaping debate and policy on public healthcare provision for several years. To cite just one example, a 2008 report funded by the UK government's *Department for Business, Innovation and Skills* - not, you will note, its *Department of Health* - explicitly re-defines wellbeing as 'mental capital', with the author's breezily asserting that "The idea of 'capital' naturally sparks associations with finance capital and it is both challenging and natural to think of the mind in this way".[19] Natural? This translation of welfare into forms of fungible capital is playing a pivotal role in the dismantling of the National Health Service in the UK, subjecting it to cost-benefit analyses that ultimately only benefit the neoliberal state, and its goal of "privatized social policy" (Foucault, 2010, p.145). It certainly does not benefit the poorest in society who suffer the worst health problems, and can least afford them.

IV.   Lacan on the 'Bourgeois Dream' of Happiness

If Foucault's concept of biopolitics has proved useful in outlining the problem, I would now like to turn to psychoanalysis as a (partial, provisional) solution. This involves a break with Foucault's own critique of psychoanalysis. When he first outlines the notion of biopolitics in volume one of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault also reformulates a critique of psychoanalysis that had appeared long before in *Madness and Civilization*. In that

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[17] You can see my related blog post on this at http://blogs.nottingham.ac.uk/criticalmoment/2013/07/25/the-psychology-of-resilience/ [accessed 30/08/13]

[18] See http://csf2.army.mil/index.html [accessed 30/08/13]

[19] See http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/foresight/docs/mental-capital/mentalcapitalwellbeingexecsum.pdf [accessed 30/08/13]

work, Freud's invention was recognised as restoring a voice to the mad following their silencing during the 'Great Confinement' towards the end of the Eighteenth Century, but it was also castigated for forcing the mad person to speak in the language of psychoanalysis itself, and for the associated coercive power of the psychoanalyst. In *The Will to Knowledge* - which post-dates his approving preface to Deleuze and Guattari's 1972 *Anti-Oedipus*, and seems indebted to some of that work's arguments - Foucault identifies psychoanalysis as an essential component of the development of biopolitics itself: the 'repressive hypothesis' supposedly definitive of Freudianism both concealed and facilitated the positive production of the discourse on sex and sexuality intrinsic to biopolitical control (Foucault, 1998). With regard to an institutionalization, a psychologization and a biologization of Freud and Freudianism that is dominant in the Anglophone world and the United States in particular, Foucault's criticisms remain insightful and important to this day. However, they neglect the fact that psychoanalysis cannot be reduced to those tendencies, that it also exists outside mainstream institutionalised spaces (now more than ever), and that it has its own rich theoretical resources by which to mount critiques of the very things he pinpointed so well. Above all, Foucault's criticisms of psychoanalysis do not engage with the work of his contemporary, Jacques Lacan, who had long been developing an imminent critique of what he called the 'other psychoanalysis'.

I want to argue that Lacan's seventh seminar in particular, *L'ethique de la psychanalyse*, held from 1959 to 1960 at the *Hôpital Saint Anne* in Paris, offers an invaluable resource for developing a critique of contemporary Happiness Studies. Not only does Lacan engage very carefully there with the *eudaimonic* theme within Western philosophy, including discussions of Aristotle, Bentham and Kant, but, as the seminar progresses, he moves toward a quite explicit politicization of then-emergent conceptions of happiness, and a related recognition of the dangers of something like positive psychology and happiness studies. In this, as in so many other areas, Lacan takes his lead from Freud but teases out and rigorously formalizes the implications that Freud left ambiguous. Freud certainly addressed the issue of happiness consistently and gave it a central place in his work. In his first recognisably (albeit co-written) psychoanalytic publication, *Studies in Hysteria* of 1895, he famously kept his therapeutic ambitions to the modest level of restoring "hysterical misery to common unhappiness" (Freud and Breuer, 1991, p.393), reflecting a belief in the constitutively tragic dimension of human life that would never leave him. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* of 1920, this assumption is formulated even more starkly as the 'death-drive', said to be at work behind repetitive yet destructive forms of behaviour. By *Civilization and its Discontents* - a 1929 polemic that places this death-drive at the very heart of the psychic conditions of modernity, and which Freud initially titled *Das Unglück der Kultur*, or 'The Unhappiness of Civilization' - happiness is identified both as what humans intuitively seek, and as what they are least suited to obtaining: "unhappiness" he therefore argues, "is much less difficult to experience" (Freud, 2002, p.15). Indeed, the centrality of the super-ego in Freud's later understanding of modern civilization foreshadowed the ways in which the social injunction to be happy could itself induce unhappiness.

It is too easy to ascribe Freud's seemingly bleak vision of the human condition to a kind of existentialism *avant la lettre*, as if psychoanalysis simply channelled the 'spirit' of German Christian idealism or prefigured Sartrean 'authenticity'. Yet Freud's position was grounded less in philosophy or theology, for both of which fields he professed no great aptitude, and more in careful clinical experience and observation. In a later paper on analytic technique entitled 'Analysis Terminable and Interminable', Freud identified the 'rock of castration' on which psychoanalysis would always flounder, but also insisted that this was "not a matter of a pessimistic or an optimistic theory of life" (Freud, 1970, p.261). Rather, it was a matter of an ethical stance regarding in what psychoanalytic 'cure' could honestly be said to consist, drawing on over a quarter of a century of its therapeutic practice. Everything in Freud's experience of analysis, of himself and others, counselled him *not* to promise his patients happiness - though in one way or another, he acknowledged that that was almost invariably what they demanded.

The theme of happiness and its opposite is certainly not absent from the Freudian corpus then. It took Lacan, however, to situate Freud's innovation in relation to the much longer tradition of philosophical ethics, and specifically, to show what a rupture it constituted with regard to millennia of moral philosophy, from Stoicism all

the way to Kantian transcendentalism. Given the appeal to Aristotelian virtue ethics I have already noted in the combined discourses of flourishing and wellbeing, it is worth sketching Lacan's critique of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* in *Seminar VII*. Four points are I think decisive.

Firstly, Aristotle inherits from Stoicism a foundational separation between appetitive desire and moral reason, between the passions and rationality (which Christianity would subsequently re-elaborate through practices of asceticism): "A whole large field of what constitutes for us [as analysts] the sphere of sexual desires is simply classed by Aristotle in the realm of monstrous anomalies – he uses the term 'bestiality' with reference to them" (Lacan, 2008, p.6). For Aristotle, moral reasoning only begins once this bestial dimension is overcome.

Secondly, with desire supposedly bracketed out, moral reason is conceived by Aristotle as the compass that orients a disciplining of the body and psyche in good habits, character-building techniques, and practices of self-improvement, which in combination help the individual to adapt to his or her rightful place within a purposive reality. Virtue becomes a consciously willed conditioning of comportment, always in subservience to the single sovereign good. If ethics is understood in this way, as a kind hyper-rational and desireless self-discipline, psychoanalysis has, and moreover *must* have, nothing to offer to: "in truth one cannot say that we [analysts] ever intervene in the field of any virtue" (*ibid.*, p.12), primarily because "the very essence of the unconscious is defined in a register different from the one which Aristotle emphasizes in the *Ethics*" (*ibid.*, p.13). For almost two thousand years, moral philosophy proceeded largely under this Stoic diremption between the passions and moral reason. Moreover, following Descartes, it tended towards a conflation of consciousness and reason that displaced the field of sexuality, especially as *unconscious*, from that of the ethics of the good life (see Cottingham, 1998). Because of the weight of this philosophical legacy, *Seminar VII* is at pains to suggest that the unconscious must not be considered virtuous in the Aristotelian tradition, but it by no means follows that it is unethical. On the contrary, ethics must be completely reconceived on its basis.

Thirdly then, if Aristotle's philosophical discourse centres on the notion of truth - the rationally arrived at truth of the sovereign good - it has something in common with psychoanalysis, which is likewise oriented toward truth. Yet *it is not the same truth that is at stake*: where philosophical truth is universal and conscious, psychoanalytic truth is singular and a product of the unconscious.

> This truth that we are seeking in a concrete experience is not that of a superior law. If the truth we are seeking is a truth that frees, it is a truth that we will look for in a hiding place in our subject. It is a particular truth […] The Wunsch does not have the character of a universal law but, on the contrary, of the most particular of laws – even if it is universal that this particularity is to be found in every human being (Lacan, 2008, p.27)

This is a very important distinction. If the collision of neoliberal managerialism, self-help culture and the happiness industry is enabled by a common vision of the subject as in fact an object defined by its responsiveness to external techniques and environmental conditioning in predictable and therefore universalisable ways, psychoanalysis, by contrast, exposes the properly subjective particularity of desire, and thus what we might call - in deliberate contravention of the aspirations of hedonic utilitarianism – *ungovernable* specificity. As I will go on to suggest, it is this focus on the radical singularity of unconscious desire that provides Lacanian psychoanalysis with an ethics that defends it against the prevailing politics of happiness.

Fourthly, this ethics of singularity enables Lacan to undertake in *Seminar VII* a move similar to the Marxist one which exposes the particular socioeconomic conditions behind philosophy's 'universal' claims. Of Aristotle

therefore, Lacan observes that "his ethics is localized, I would almost say limited to a social type, to a privileged representative of leisure" (*ibid*.). Rather as Seligman can afford to view the credit crunch as an opportunity to downsize then, Aristotelian virtue ethics implies a degree of leisure time which was nevertheless, like the great Athenian experiment in direct democracy, covertly enabled by slave labour. Could we not refer this problematic back to the connections I have shown between neoliberalism and happiness studies on the one hand, and the widely documented expansion of the gap between the rich and the poor on the other, between the rhetoric of the inclusive 'global village' and the economic reality of the north/south divide?

In fact, *Seminar VII* is concerned less with mounting a consistent critique of Aristotle and more with mapping the various ways in which we have left him behind. Specifically, Lacan is concerned with those fundamental shifts that, contra their constitutive Stoic displacement, have now placed pleasure and desire at the centre of moral debates in the modern era. He seems to share with Foucault an interest in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, though from a different angle: while Foucault is motivated by a concern with changing forms of sovereignty and social control, Lacan is interested in the related 'decline of the master signifier', by which he means the dwindling purchase of feudal, paternal authority. If a certain figure of the 'master' organised the moral co-ordinates of the pre-modern world around divine or royal power, his sudden 'decline' corresponds to the symbolic 'beheading' of this master during the French Revolution.

Precisely because of this spectacular decline of the master signifier, the field of ethics is thrown wide open in the period surrounding the French Revolution and the emergence of modern democracy. This led to the historical coincidence of two seemingly antithetical ethical systems: Kantian moral philosophy on the one hand, and the Marquis de Sade's radical libertinism on the other. Lacan's audacious juxtaposition and indeed interweaving of Kant and Sade in *Seminar VII*, elaborated more fully in a subsequent *écrit* (Lacan, 2006), has been the subject of a great deal of theoretical attention as much in a search for a politics as for an ethics of the 'real' (Zupančič, 2000; Žižek, 1989). Within the seminar itself however, one of its key functions is to dramatize the profound challenge that psychoanalysis poses to moral philosophy. Claiming, as Lacan does, that Sade 'completes' Kant effectively deconstructs the traditional antinomy between pleasure and reason on which even the inventor of transcendental critique bases the a priori conditions of morality. For in the *Second Critique*, Kant inherits more or less wholesale the Aristotelian antipathy for desire, referring to it and the entire realm of interests with the revealing term 'pathological', before basing the extreme, almost formalistic rationality of his Categorical Imperative on its overcoming. But – and this is Lacan's main, provocative point – Sade too, uncompromising in his pursuit of sensual pleasure *against* dominant moral codes in both thought and deed, articulates his libertine philosophy through a maxim that rigorously adheres to the rational form of Kantian universality. Significantly, this maxim is stated, amongst the more typically Sadean repetitive tableaux of lewdness and debauchery that make up *Philosophie dans la boudoire*, within a long mock-Jacobinist pamphlet entitled 'One more push, Frenchmen, if you want to be revolutionaries'. In a way in which we still have perhaps not come to terms with, Sade presents us with radical democracy as a kind of infinite hedonism.

However, it is precisely here that it is crucial to differentiate the Sade Lacan outlines in *Seminar VII* from that of many other Twentieth Century French intellectuals, from Andre Bréton to Georges Bataille, from Gaston Bachelard to Pierre Klossowski. Influenced by the Surrealist's pseudo-psychoanalytic celebration of sexuality, these thinkers tended to present the Marquis as a 'hero of transgression' who was ahead of his time in his challenge to staid, increasingly bourgeois morality. Related tendencies can be detected in the Freudo-Marxism of the Frankfurt School exemplified by Herbert Marcuse and Wilhelm Reich. These avant-gardistes and critical theorists were forerunners of, and participants in, the drive to 'liberate desire' from repressive bourgeois culture. Yet despite having initial radical dimensions, this liberation of desire in fact came to serve very well the interests of advanced capitalism and its commodification of enjoyment. Lacan does not follow that line of thinking at all. Indeed, he opens

Seminar VII by stating in no uncertain terms that the more desire has supposedly been liberated, "the more we have, in fact, witnessed a growth in the incidence of genuine pathologies" (Lacan, 2008, p.4).

Just as important in Lacan's juxtaposition of Kant and Sade then, is the inverse argument; that if Kant secretly needs Sade as the superegoic kernel of his moral philosophy, Sade also needs Kantian universalism to give his transgressions the structure which they presuppose in order to *be* transgressions. Lacan's structural approach to perversion ensures that, though polymorphously perverse in essence, desire is *not* to be understood as the kind of unfettered libidinal freedom which early psychoanalysis seemed to promise in its opposition to social repression, which some radical thinkers such as Marcuse turned into a liberatory anti-capitalist political theory, yet which neoliberalism and consumerism subsequently adapted and adopted *as its own hedonistic credo*. As Slavoj Žižek has pointed out many times, far from repressing us, the contemporary super-ego enjoins us to enjoy, relentlessly and to ever-greater degrees.

It was already for this reason that the early sessions of *Seminar VII* patiently follow the logic of the 'beyond' of the pleasure principle discernible in Freud's strictly speaking pre-psychoanalytic *Project for a Scientific Psychology* from 1895, but later explicitly crystallized in the notion of the death-drive. Far from being a natural biological instinct that we could indulge fully if only social repression were lifted, psychoanalytic pleasure involves a desire for an object that is *constitutively* rather than contingently lost. Moreover, reality from a psychoanalytic perspective is not an objectively external realm where empirical objects meet our instinctual needs or do not, but a kind of compensatory fantasy projection in which we seek *symbolic* objects that we hope (hopelessly) might make good this primordial loss: as Lacan succinctly puts it, "we make reality out of pleasure" (Lacan, 2008, p.278). Although Bentham did place pleasure at the centre of political and moral calculations, and although flourishing has recently given a neo-Aristotelian biopolitical spin on Bentham's argument, Lacan's psychoanalytic re-reading of pleasure as symbolic desire in *Seminar VII* directly challenges both, for human desire is simply not organised around the pleasurable satisfaction of bodily needs or the rational pursuit of universally shared goals. If desire is "always desire in the second degree, desire of desire" (Lacan, 2008, p.17), and thus oriented around virtual rather than actual objects, the 'objective-list' approach to utilitarianism ('x, y and z objects are good because they produce pleasurable effects') resembles, as Lacan colourfully puts it, "a kind of catalogue that in many ways might be compared to a second-hand clothes store" (*ibid*.). Is this not what the happiness industry often colludes in doing: selling lifestyle templates tailored to social types that nowhere exist?

V.   Alternatives: Working with (Un)Happiness

Because of these reflections on the difference between pleasure as the satisfaction of an instinctual urge on the one hand, and the symbolic structure of properly human desire on the other, Lacan is inevitably drawn to discuss the relationship between psychoanalytic ethics in the clinical setting and happiness as formative of notions of 'cure' in the closing sessions of *Seminar VII*.

If, as he puts it, "happiness has become a political matter" (*ibid*., p.358), it is partly because happiness is intimately tied up with modernity and the 'decline in the master signifier': it is no coincidence, notes Lacan, that it was the fiery Jacobin Saint-Just who declared that "happiness is a new idea in Europe". Where once a divine or royal Other could confer happiness in the form of piety or dutifulness, the modern era encourages a clamorous and contentless *demand* for happiness precisely because the democratic Other offers happiness as a pseudo-contractual right to be exercised via consumption for its own sake: where once, for better or for worse, we all 'knew our place', now we rush to find our place because we have to make it for ourselves. In such a context, especially one characterised by the American dream in which all things are supposedly possible through effort, dedication - and,

now, positive thinking - unhappiness is redoubled by being explicable largely as a personal failing. More fundamentally than any moral deficiency at the level of entrepreneurial effort though, today's unhappiness is figured as a pathological inability to enjoy the dizzying array of satisfactions offered on the market's shelves. However, Lacan is alive to the fact that the very insistence of the modern demand for happiness (and perhaps in our time, we would say the very existence of the multi-billion dollar happiness industry) implies both the ultimately *un*satisfying nature of customer 'satisfaction', and the symbolic underpinnings of demand itself, which always imply a surplus or excess: "It is precisely to the extent that the demand always under- or overshoots itself that, because it articulates itself through the signifier, it always demands something else" (*ibid*., p.361). Happiness may be everywhere promised, but we would not have to demand it so loudly if we actually possessed it anywhere, however briefly.

It is because of this telling excess inherent to the symbolic demand for happiness that the psychoanalyst, who encounters it in the specific form of a demand for analysis and some kind of 'cure', is by no means in a position to simply dismiss it as deluded or naïve. The suffering individual who enters analysis may ask for the most normative and ideologically overdetermined version of health and happiness imaginable, but the analyst must initially work *with* that ready-to-hand solution, since it both conceals and reveals the unconscious question at the core of their symptom. But this is something of a therapeutic tightrope, for even as the analyst must work with the analysand's implicit model of health and happiness, of flourishing even, she must simultaneously avoid setting herself up as the one who can finally meet the demand for happiness (no matter how satisfying to her ego such a self-positioning might be). Such a claim is characteristic of self-help culture and, to the extent that they merge with that culture, positive psychology and the happiness movement as well. It is always *this* book that will change your life, always *this* self-reinforcing mantra that will get you that promotion, always *this* motivational speaker that will finally organise your chaotic life. If the positive thinking movement trades on extending the perpetual promise of happiness to individuals, Happiness Studies is arguably doing the same thing to governments, NGOs and corporations as they seek to marketize health and happiness. For Lacan by contrast, this promise is precisely unethical in being both normative, and structurally impossible:

> [The] aspiration to happiness will always imply a place where miracles happen, a promise, a mirage of original genius or an opening up of freedom, or if we caricature it, the possession of all women for a man and of an ideal man for a woman. To make oneself the guarantor of the possibility that a subject will in some way be able to find happiness even in analysis is a form of fraud (*ibid*., p.373)

The specifically psychoanalytic understanding of ethics that Lacan develops in this seminar boils down to the idea that "from an analytic point of view the only thing of which one can be guilty is of having given ground relative to one's desire" (*ibid*., p.392). Precisely because of the dominance of hedonistic values inscribed in consumer culture, this Lacanian dictum is often misread as an endorsement of pleasure-seeking individualism or, indeed, of polymorphous perversity and unrestricted libidinal expression. Such a reading only coincides with hegemonic discourses of happiness that promise the world. But this interpretation forgets the central notion of psychoanalysis: the unconscious. When Lacan defines ethics as an unyielding fidelity to desire he means desire as unconscious, and the unconscious not as a reservoir of biological instincts but as 'structured like a language'. He therefore means staying as close as possible to the 'logic of the signifier' which articulates desire. One can see this from two perspectives, that of the analysand and that of the analyst.

For the analysand to refuse to yield relative to his or her own desire means, in the analytic setting, observing Freud's 'fundamental rule' whereby free association leads you where it will, embarrassment or anxiety notwithstanding. It also relates to what Lacan tended to call, *not* the psychoanalytic 'cure', but more precisely 'the

end of analysis'. Because of his distance form utilitarianism and its quantification of utility, the end of analysis is not the same as the *aim* of analysis for Lacan: whereas the aim might well include some form of therapeutic relief from the problems which constituted the initial complaint, the *end* of analysis for Lacan is a fundamentally logical concept. It suggests a process of signifying elaboration, with an internal 'rationality' quite distinct from the hopes and wishes of either the analyst or the analysand, a process which has run its course in the manner of a computer programme. Crucially, for Lacan the end of the analysis is the possible starting point for the analysand to become an analyst in his or her own turn: thanks to the long and complex analytic work, the analysand is able, to use a later formulation from Lacan's twenty third seminar (Lacan, 2005), to 'identify with his *sinthome*'. Here, Lacan uses an archaic etymology to distinguish the symptom as addressed to the symbolic Other (and hence operating as some kind of request or demand that cannot but tarry with normative understandings of 'happiness', 'health' and the 'good' etc.), from the *sinthome* as a much more singular, creative and non-normative relationship to the symbolic order that the analysand, as a desiring subject, has invented from the Other's signifiers without addressing it to anyone. To move from suffering from the symptom to identifying with the *sinthome* implies giving up on the imaginary demand for happiness and its (impossible) promise as maintained by consumer culture, and reconciling oneself instead to the 'real' of one's extremely idiosyncratic mode of enjoyment. As 'real' the idiosyncratic *sinthome* is not amenable to expression through words, to abstraction through any form of codification, to circulation as a social or indeed economic currency - in other words, to *translation* of any kind. Whereas flourishing translates across disciplines and institutions so easily as to increasingly constitute a form of 'common sense', the *sinthome* makes an ethic out of *untranslatability*, though without reifying the ineffable or the 'irrational'.

All of this implies, then, a suspension of normative models of cure and indeed happiness as a therapeutic goal in psychoanalysis, in favour of a more difficult but genuinely transformative search for *truth*. It also implies that psychoanalytic ethics have to provide a clinical compass for the analyst herself, to the extent that she too can lapse into fantasies of conformist happiness precisely as she attempts to embody and enact the therapeutic ideal:

> At every moment we need to know what our effective relationship is to the desire to do good, to the desire to cure. We have to deal with that as if it were something that is likely to lead us astray, and in many cases to do so instantly. I will even add that one might be paradoxical or trenchant and designate our desire as a non-desire to cure. Such a phrase is meaningful only insofar as it constitutes a warning against the common approaches to the good that offer themselves with a seeming naturalness, against the benevolent fraud of wanting-to-do-one's-best-for-the-subject (*ibid*., p.270)

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