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[Third Reich, Science and Psychoanalysis](#)

By [Yaron Gilat | Petah-Tikva, Israel](#) | February 2nd, 2022 | [LRO 327](#)

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LACANIAN REVIEW ONLINE

Third Reich, Science and Psychoanalysis

Thursday, January 27th 2022, marked the International Holocaust Remembrance Day, a date decided upon by The United Nations General Assembly in accordance with the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau. The Nazi project of extermination of the Jewish population across Europe and other parts of the world was the culmination of a program executed by a regime, which at the beginning, under scientific presumptions, also performed heinous, murderous crimes against mentally ill and physically debilitated human beings, not necessarily Jews.

Moreover, a well-documented history conveys the manner in which Hitler's Third Reich destroyed the psychoanalytic movement – the so called “Jewish science” – which by then had already developed into an operative institutional presence in Berlin and Vienna [1]. Ever since the end of WWII, much has been discussed and argued, and quite rightfully so, concerning psychoanalysis' dependence upon a democratic state establishment. However, the gloomy rapport between the Third Reich and psychoanalysis is not to be narrowed exclusively to the anti-democratic character of this administration or to its anti-Semitic tendencies. In order to observe the fate of psychoanalysis in anti-democratic states one does not need Nazi Germany; one can settle with what happened to psychoanalysis in Argentina under the military junta or in soviet Russia. The Nazi project was different, distinctive in its disruption of equilibrium between religion and science. This was a dictatorship unlike any other, that on the one hand aimed at obliterating all religious institutes and annihilating their political and social power, and on the other hand considered science as an ideological constituent. One could argue they elevated science to the level of religion.

Indeed, it was not an overall rule of science, but it was a regime which harnessed science to its needs. Nazi science was praised; from racial theory, going through eugenics, social Darwinism, medicine (including psychiatry), physics, chemistry, engineering and even

architecture, it was considered supreme and it justified various operations and endeavors, including the disgraceful and the outrageous. It promised to send the German nation into its confident bright future. This was a culture that pushed science to the utmost extreme; to the point of becoming perverted science or pseudo-science. The peak of this trail was Auschwitz, which in several key aspects was a brutal, inhumane and atrocious “scientific” project.

The Jewish holocaust, the Shoah, holds no lesson for us. It is a desperately meaningless historical event. And its meaninglessness is exactly what makes it so horrific. It has no inherent, historical, metaphysical or transcendental sense, and no lesson can be drawn from it. However, lessons can be drawn from the conditions and circumstances which preceded it. Putting science to the fore, while eliminating all religions, as well as major portions of arts and humanities, is the royal road to barbarism, the assured path to atrocities and mayhem.

In Seminar XI, “The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis” [2], Jacques Lacan located psychoanalysis amid science and religion, being not exactly either one or the other. Psychoanalysis draws from these two discourses. It depends upon them and has no independent existence of its own, but all the while it functions as an opposition. Not in order to replace them, not in order to gain power over them, but in order to perforate them, to make holes while treating their real by the symbolic [3]. And because of a sexual non-rapport between science and psychoanalysis, there can be no integration between them.

In the end of this seminar [4], shortly after he asserts that “re-enacting the most monstrous and supposedly superseded forms of the holocaust, is the drama of Nazism”, Lacan warns us from succumbing to the dark god, from offering an object of sacrifice to obscure gods. In Nazism, abolishing religion may have represented the abolishment of the symbolic Name-of-the-Father, and the result was a return of the Father-Führer from the real. But furthermore, might not the obscure dark gods include also the gods of science, which when worshiped to the utmost, demand a human object of sacrifice? Certainly, psychoanalysts must always be watchful, aware and on guard. Science is good, but it must not be the one and only good available.

1. Sokolowsky, L. *Psychoanalysis Under Nazi Occupation – The Origins, Impact and Influence of the Berlin Institute*. Routledge, October 2021.

2. Lacan, J. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis (Book XI)*. J.-A. Miller (Ed.), Alan Sheridan (Trans.). W. W. Norton & Company, April 1998. p. 7. : See [Seminar XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts: 1963-1964 : beginning 15th January 1964 : Jacques Lacan](#) or [here](#) <http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=1145> : Seminar XI : 15th January 1964

3. Ibid, p. 6. Seminar XI : 15th January 1964 : p6 of Alan Sheridan’s translation

4. Ibid, p. 275.

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Refeences

See [Seminar XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts: 1963-1964 : beginning 15th January 1964 : Jacques Lacan](#) or [here http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=1145](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=1145)

Jacques Lacan located psychoanalysis amid science and religion, being not exactly either one or the other.

Seminar XI : 15th January 1964 : p6-7 of Alan Sheridan's translation :

This definition of praxis, then, is very extensive. We are not going to set out in search of our psycho-analysis, like Diogenes in search of man, in the various, very diversified fields of praxis. Rather we shall take our psycho-analysis with us, and it will direct us at once towards some fairly well located, specifiable points of praxis.

Without even introducing by any kind of transition the two terms between which I wish to hold the question—and not at all in an ironic way—I posit first that, if I am here, in such a large auditorium, in such a place, and with such an audience, it is to ask myself whether is a science, and to examine the question with you.

The other reference, the religious one, I already mentioned a little while ago, specifying that I am speaking of religion in the true sense of the term—not of a desiccated, methodologized religion, pushed back into the distant past of a primitive form of thought, but of religion as we see it practised in a still living, very vital way. Psycho-analysis, whether or not it is worthy of being included in one of these two registers, may even enlighten us as to what we should understand by science, and even by religion.

I would like at once to avoid a misunderstanding. In any case, someone will say, psycho-analysis is a form of research. Well, allow me to say quite clearly—in particular to the public authorities for whom this search has seemed, for some time now, to serve as a shibboleth for any number of things—that I am a bit suspicious of this term research. Personally, I have never regarded myself as a researcher. As Picasso once said, to the shocked surprise of those around him—I do not seek, I find.

Indeed, there are in the field of so-called scientific research two domains that can quite easily be recognized, that in which one seeks, and that in which one finds.

Psychoanalysis draws from these two discourses. It depends upon them and has no independent existence of its own, but all the while it functions as an opposition. Not in order to replace them, not in order to gain power over them, but in order to perforate them, to make holes while treating their real by the symbolic

Seminar XI : 15th January 1964 : p6 of Alan Sheridan's translation :

What is a praxis? I doubt whether this term may be regarded as inappropriate to psycho-analysis. It is the broadest term to designate a concerted human action, whatever it may be, which places man in a position to treat the real by the symbolic. The fact that in doing so he encounters the imaginary to a greater or lesser degree is only of secondary importance here.

This definition of praxis, then, is very extensive. We are not going to set out in search of our psycho-analysis, like Diogenes in search of man, in the various, very diversified fields of praxis. Rather we shall take our psycho-analysis with us, and it will direct us at once towards some fairly well located, specifiable points of praxis.

In the end of this seminar [4], shortly after he asserts that “re-enacting the most monstrous and supposedly superseded forms of the holocaust, is the drama of Nazism”, Lacan warns us from succumbing to the dark god, from offering an object of sacrifice to obscure gods.

Seminar XI : : p274-275 of Alan Sheridan's translation

There is something profoundly masked in the critique of the history that we have experienced. This, re-enacting the most monstrous and supposedly superseded forms of the holocaust, is the drama of Nazism.

I would hold that no meaning given to history, based on Hegelian—Marxist premises, is capable of accounting for this resurgence—which only goes to show that the offering to obscure gods of an object of sacrifice is something to which few subjects can resist succumbing, as if under some monstrous spell.

Ignorance, indifference, an averting of the eyes may explain beneath what veil this mystery still remains hidden. But for whoever is capable of turning a courageous gaze towards this phenomenon—and, once again, there are certainly few who do not succumb to the fascination of the sacrifice in itself—the sacrifice signifies that, in the object of our desires, we try to find evidence for the presence of the desire of this Other that I call here the dark God.

It is the external meaning of the sacrifice, to which no one can resist, unless animated by that faith, so difficult to sustain, which, perhaps, one man alone has been able to formulate in a plausible way—namely, Spinoza, with his *Amor intellectualis Del*.

What, quite wrongly, has been thought of in Spinoza as pantheism is simply the reduction of the field of God to the universality of the signifier, which produces a serene, exceptional detachment from human desire. In so far as Spinoza says—desire is the essence of man, and in so far as he institutes this desire in the radical dependence of the universality of the divine attributes, which is possible only through the function of the signifier, in so far as he does this, he obtains that unique position by which the philosopher—and it is no accident that it is a Jew detached from his tradition who embodies it—may be confused with a transcendent love.

This position is not tenable for us.

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