

bataille and the erotics of the real

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Bataille was a key figure in twentieth-century Paris, closely associated with initial French Nietzscheanism and connected to Lacan, the “French Freud.” Bataille’s work can be viewed as a synthesis of the Dionysian wisdom of Nietzsche and the mindfulness of the sexual real made possible by Freud.¹ This article considers how the *ethics* of desire and “the real” emerging from Lacan’s clinic is augmented by the *erotics* of the real in Bataille’s “taboo-transgression” relation definitively formulated across his 1957 *Eroticism*²—following his earlier 1949 treatments in *The Accursed Share*,³ and 1930s encounter with the anthropology of Marcel Mauss.⁴ Assisting this is Lacan’s 1959-60 *Ethics Seminar VII* statement that an ethics must go “more deeply into the notion of the real”—rather than “the ideal,” as per the “superficial opinion” of Western moralism.⁵ Then there is Nietzsche’s 1886 *Beyond Good and Evil* declaration that with “intrepid Oedipus eyes” we ought to examine *human* nature as we have “the rest of nature,” “to translate man back into nature,” such that with “Odysseus ears” we are “deaf to the siren songs” of another world accessible as a puritan soul.⁶

Invoked between Lacan and Nietzsche is a *real* ethics, of the real—as opposed to an imaginary ethics, *caught* in the imaginary. What Bataille enables is focus on how taboo structures of morality can be *transgressed* in a complimentary erotic process that *returns* to the rest of nature—to the *real* of nature as *jouissance*⁷—and how pre-Platonic cultures developed sacred rituals for its structured affirmation.

I argue that an ethics of the real—of *drives* beyond usual pleasures—restores *openness* to the originary erotics observable in pre-Platonic Greeks. By tracing a *loss* of eroticism through the subsequent Platonic, Christian, and Modern Science epochs that Nietzsche’s revaluations of the Good centre on, emerging is an extended genealogical understanding of why the brothels of Paris, for instance, become for Bataille true churches again.⁸

1. PRE-HISTORIC TRANSITION FROM ANIMAL TO HUMAN ... TO TRAGIC

This section illuminates Bataille’s taboo-transgression relation in terms of Lacan’s episteme of the real, symbolic, and imaginary—clarifying the latter with the nature-to-culture, or *animal-to-human* and back-again dynamic that in Bataille entails transgression. Then Nietzsche is invoked for how the tragic-age of the Greeks masters this *correlative* process of taboo-*and*-transgression through a religious-erotic later lost with Plato and Christianity.

In *Eroticism and Accursed Share*, Bataille depicts our Palaeolithic “transition from animal to human” (E, 30) as occurring through *taboos* on aspects of nature pertaining to sex and death, equating these with “violence” (E, 40). He notes that by taboo we build “the rational world” but there remains “an undercurrent of violence”; for “Nature herself is violent”—especially for the “rational being” that “tries to obey” but “succumbs to stirrings within” insufficiently brought “to heel” (E, 40). For Bataille it is via “negation of nature” (AS, II:61), our “No’ to nature” (E, 61)—as “the animal that does not just accept the facts of nature” but “contradicts them” (E, 214)—that we first transition from animal to human, creating a culture *out* of nature. Bataille registers such negations not only on licentiousness and murder but on dejecta, nudity, corpses, and blood (E, 54)—humanising a world of work founded on respect for taboos, awareness of mortality, and concomitant developments of tools for controlling and understanding nature through a lengthening “chain of cause and effect” (E, 44).⁹

This new world, said by Bataille to “cut” us “off from violence which tended in the opposite direction” (E, 45), is the *symbolic* register of Lacan. This is the register of *language* used to communicate law, morality, knowledge, and reason made possible by space created by taboo, to found an *order of things* that every newborn repeats our species entry into.¹⁰ “Besides,” Bataille remarks, “what are children if not animals becoming human” (AS, II:65)—where Freud also notes how “something quite similar occurred” in “the individual’s existence” and “the

prehistoric epoch of the species as a whole,” at “the beginnings of morality, religion and social order”¹¹—recapitulating how for Bataille “these interminable millennia correspond with man’s slow shaking-off of his original animal nature,” how “he emerged from it by working, by understanding his own mortality and by moving imperceptibly from unashamed sexuality to sexuality with shame, which gave birth to eroticism” (E, 31).

With this erotic we come to the brute fact of instinctual existence that “what comes under the effect of repression returns [...] in symptoms and a host of other phenomena,” as Lacan put it¹²—for “they are its expected complement,” Bataille adds, “just as explosion follows upon compression,” where “compression is not subservient to the explosion, far from it; it gives it increased force” (E, 65). Here we discover *transgression*, which, as complementarity with taboo, Bataille attributes to the “oral teaching” of Mauss, whose printed work bore it out “only in a small number of significant sentences” (E, 65). Bataille notes how impetus for transgression comes from the object of taboo gaining an *erotic* hue as desire dams up, making it the paradoxical object of anguish and awe that lifts primitive mind onto the religious plane.

This plane is the *imaginary* register, linked to the *post*-symbolic sense of the real in Lacan often contracted simply as “the real” given its strikingness, as indicated by his *Seminar XVII* remark on “shame”: “You know from me that this means the real.”¹³ This shame if not “anxiety, signal of the real,”¹⁴ suggests prior operation of taboo *on* the real, and with Bataille we can clarify that the real here, as object of anxious-erotic shame, is not just nature but us *returning* to it—or *it* returning to us—having been uprooted but remaining “still uprooted” as “the first uprooting is not obliterated” (AS, II:90), rendering the nature returning *transfigured* in the imaginary into something “poetic and divine though animal” (E, 153).¹⁵

Bataille’s warning is to “not be misled by the appearance of a return by man to nature” (AS, II:90). He describes it as “the natural world mingled with the divine” through “the human world, shaped by a denial of animality or nature, denying itself, though not returning to what it had rejected in the first place” (E, 85). Later he adds: “the sacred world is nothing but the natural world persisting insofar as it cannot be entirely reduced to the order laid down by work”—“it transcends” (E, 114-5). And here we get another illumination of the *post*-symbolic sense of the real in Lacan, what Bataille calls “the concrete totality of the real” in his own search for “terminological exactness” (AS, II:117)—to include the real’s returning of the

metaphorising affects in the mind's sacred-sublime imaginary, which is how for Bataille "our animal nature preserves the values of subjective experience" (E, 158).

Bataille articulates this in the context of the festival in *Accursed Share*. In a section headed "The Festival Is Not Just a Return to One's Vomit," returning nature is characterised in terms of the "meaning" it invokes when impulses we ordinarily "refuse" become sanctioned (AS, II:90). "In any case," he writes, "these impulses cannot be mistaken for those of animals" (AS, II:90), given the complex of narratives unfolding. For making use of his striking heading he notes that what we return to has the "opposite meaning" to "a return by man to his vomit" (AS, II:90), to something expelled through nausea or disgust that remains as such thereafter.

Lacan and Nietzsche are relevant here—both of whom, in opposition to Plato, have praise for Greek tragedy because of the depths of its meaning-making wisdom which enables not just release but mindfulness, too.¹⁶ For "the hero trembles before nothing," Lacan observes, "crossing not only all fear but all pity," showing "where the pole of desire is" such that "the subject learns a little more about the deepest level" (SVII, 323). For Nietzsche it is thus an ecstatic victory, a "display of fearlessness in the face of the fearsome and questionable."¹⁷ And Bataille concurs in noting that "classical tragedy" is "most engaging when the character of the hero leads" to "destruction," looking at it "straight in the face," where "here eroticism is analogous to a tragedy" as taboos are transgressed "at the price of a sacrifice" (AS, II:107, 109, 119). This recalls the "joy in destruction," in "sacrifice of its highest types" (TI, X:5), that was for Nietzsche the Dionysian tragic-effect, but also Freud's noting that "in tragedy" we "do not spare the spectators" "the most painful experiences" that "can yet be felt by them as highly enjoyable"—through "an instinct of mastery," where repeating the real is to "master of the situation" (SE, 18:16-7). This *drives* beyond usual pleasures, limited by taboo, such that we are deepened, extended. And it is thus that Nietzsche concludes, when thinking of our pre-Platonic Greeks, that "Pleasure in tragedy characterises *strong* ages and natures."¹⁸

This strength pertains to the paradox where, Bataille observes, we negate our dependence on animality yet fail, "for this negation is fictitious" (AS, II:92). The fiction, however, cuts both ways, for although in transgression we seem then to be "renouncing independence," we are in the *sovereignty* of the drives part of "the culmination of a movement toward autonomy which is," for Bataille, "forevermore, the same thing as man himself" (AS, II:91). But this double-autonomy of taboo-

and-transgression was lost in the deference to Socrates of Plato, which set itself *against* the erotic-real and sought no truck with it—fixing the gaze on a Good made Sovereign such that we, beneath its awnings, would become reduced to slaves.

2. PLATONIC DUALISM AND THE DEATH OF TRAGEDY IN EURIPIDES

Lacan's commentaries on Nietzsche's texts are few—so it is imperative to register his *Transference Seminar* position that “undoubtedly Nietzsche put his finger on it” in pointing to a “profound incompetence of Socrates every time he touches on this subject of tragedy,” that “all Nietzsche's subsequent work came from there” (SVIII, 6:5). This section explores Nietzsche's critique of Euripides in *The Birth of Tragedy* for allowing Socrates' influence to destroy tragedy's Dionysian basis. This will capture the taboo-transgression relation shifting to its distorted Platonic form, where the imaginary of the Good seeks to buttress the symbolic *over-against* the real, as if to repress across all times.

In Bataille terms, Nietzsche finds Euripides using tragedy *not* anymore to transgress taboos but to reinforce them, shifting from taboo-*and*-transgression to taboo-*on*-transgression by making tragedy self-conscious and moral-rational, requiring *not* brief suspension but continuing of taboo. This is such for Nietzsche that although Euripides' final *The Bacchae*—written “in the evening of his life”¹⁹—has Dionysos, god of transgression, retuning to destroy those who denied him, it is more a return of the repressed *as* repressed than a sublimated outlet ennobled by the “shining one,” Apollo, to whom Nietzsche has Dionysos paired.²⁰

To explain this pairing, Nietzsche notes that “the immense gap which separates the Dionysian Greek from the Dionysian barbarian”—with its “savage natural instincts unleashed,” “horrible witches brew of sensuality and cruelty” and “extravagant sexual licentiousness” (BT, 2)—is the moderation of Apollo to beautify, subject to measure, lucidity and “self-knowledge,” so there was “nothing in excess” (BT, 4).²¹ Alas for Euripides, “the deity that spoke through him was neither Dionysos nor Apollo, but an altogether newborn demon, called Socrates (BT, 12)” —who, for Nietzsche, was “that other spectator who did not comprehend tragedy and therefore did not esteem it” (BT, 11), whose “moralism” (TI, II:10) was thus other to any affirmation of the drives in their inscrutable realness. “And because you had abandoned Dionysos, Apollo had abandoned you” (BT, 10), Nietzsche calls to Euripides directly—for by *The Bacchae*, “when the poet recanted, his tendency had already triumphed. Dionysos had already been scared from the stage” (BT,

12).

Nietzsche senses the symptom in Euripides' depiction of the fury wrought by Dionysos on Thebes because it is "what we are told by a poet who opposed Dionysos with heroic valour throughout a long life—and who finally ended his career with a glorification of his adversary and with suicide, like a giddy man who, to escape the horrible vertigo he can no longer endure, casts himself from a tower" (BT, 12). Occurring here through Bataille's optic is the denial of periodic rituals for transgression such that when normally refused animal needs *do* return, it is with an excess of violence beyond the pale of Apollonian control.

Something is lost in the structure of taboo-and-transgression, with, Nietzsche notes, "cool, paradoxical thoughts, replacing Apollonian contemplation—and fiery *affects*, replacing Dionysian ecstasies" (BT, 12). Lacan also noted the societies that previously "lived very well by reference to laws that are far from promoting their universal application," but rather "prosper as a result of the transgression of these maxims" (SVII, 78). This is the "potlatch" of Mauss, where, Lacan observes, "open destruction" enables a "maintenance and discipline of desire" (SVII, 235). But with Socrates' intervention on tragedy, thanks to Plato's subsequent writings in philosophy, we enter what Lacan calls "the longest transference" "the history of thought has known" (SVIII, 1:4). Transference is a belief-state projected onto an analyst as the one "supposed to know."²² And with Plato's Socratic transference, the *profound incompetence* within was later adopted by Christendom such that when it came to tragedy, it "didn't know" (SVII, 236), as neither do we, as this transference eventually becomes our own.

Bataille characterises this loss of sacred-erotic transgression as the "dualist evolution" in his 1948 *Theory of Religion*, published posthumously in 1973²³—also taking this up in his 1949 *Accursed Share* (AS, II:133) and 1957 *Eroticism* (E, 122) when critiquing Christianity.²⁴ Now we can locate this binary dualist turn, where Dionysos is bad and Apollo good, such that transgression cannot allow proper return from the latter to the former, to the death of tragedy through Socrates—acting as both "agent" and "symptom," Nietzsche observes, of "the dissolution of Greece" (TI, II:2), which was subsequently universalised in Plato.²⁵

In *Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche senses what would irk a Euripides, Socrates, or Plato in Greek religion where it bore "accents of an exuberant, triumphant life in which all things, whether good or evil [*böse*], are deified"—such that "whoever

approaches these Olympians with another religion in his heart,” searching not for aesthetic beauty but only “moral elevation,” “disincarnate spirituality,” or “charity and benevolence, will soon be forced to turn his back on them, discouraged and disappointed, for there is nothing here that suggests asceticism” (BT, 3).²⁶ The subsequent substitution of the *ascetic* for the aesthetic by Platonism is the “dual attitude” (E, 138) disclosed by Bataille, for “originally, in the divine world, the beneficent and pure elements opposed the malefic and impure elements, and both types appeared equally distinct from the profane,” only then, in “a dominant movement of reflective thought, the divine appears linked to purity, the profane to impurity” (TR, 69), as “the divine becomes rational and moral and relegates the malefic sacred to the sphere of the profane” (TR, 72).

Bataille calls this “dualism” of puritan-sacred and impure-profane “a shifting of boundaries and an overturning of values” as before, an “immanent sacred is predicated on the animal intimacy of man,” accessible in *transgression*, “whereas the profane world is predicated on the transcendence of the object, which has no intimacy,” relying on *taboo* for “manipulation of objects,” “relations with objects, or with subjects regarded as objects” through “reason and morality” (TR, 71).²⁷ Then with Plato, although neither he nor Socrates is named here by Bataille, “the intellect or concept” is “situated outside time, is defined as a sovereign order, to which the world of things is subordinated, just as it subordinated the gods of mythology” so that only “the intelligible world has the appearance of the divine”—“forever separated from the world of the senses,” “outside” and “opposite the sensuous world” (TR, 73).²⁸

This dualism is deepened genealogically through critique of Socrates-Euripides: For this also “brought the masses onto the stage” (BT, 80), Nietzsche notes, with their “civic mediocrity, on which Euripides built all his political hopes,” so that gone were the “demigod,” the “drunken satyr,” the “formerly only grand and bold traits”—replaced with the herd that “philosophised, managed land and goods, and conducted lawsuits with unheard of circumspection” (BT, 11).

Life increasingly imitates this new art as new ideals buttress, from the Good beyond the sky, the symbolic *over-against* the real to *repress* at all times. For Bataille this is what “reintroduces evil as a major force,” when repressions fail and the repressed returns, as “the sleep of dualism is also a reduction to the order of things that leaves no opening except toward a return to violence” (TR, 79). Lacan’s *Transference Seminar* reading of Plato’s *Symposium* is also relevant, where

Socrates' preaching of an Eros cleansed of flesh, that *inflates* Diotima's ladder of love up towards the Good, is met with the return of a drunken Alcibiades, Socrates' pupil and beloved, to raze this dualism to the ground. This is for Lacan the "irruption of the real" (SVIII, 5:2), which, despite the "fascinating mirage" and "beautiful stories" about a "world beyond," "is enough to bring us back to it as it really is" (SVIII, 9:9).

How *It* really is was wonderfully metaphorised by the Olympian deities²⁹—and *staged* in the Apollo-Dionysos dynamic—prior to the Platonic whitewash that meant the real could only return of the banal dialectic between neurosis-*and*-perversion, like the Socrates-*and*-Alcibiades show of *Symposium*, akin to what Nietzsche at Athens' decline called "two decadence movements running side by side."³⁰ Alcibiades becomes the barbarian Dionysos of Euripides, repressed by Socrates instead of moderated by Apollo so bent on destruction, which is why for Lacan Alcibiades is "the demon of Socrates" (SVIII, 11:13), embodying the artificially elided elements of "the real gods" that could appear "in the rock of scandal," such as "stealing, cheating, adultery" (SVIII, 11:12-3).³¹ But without sufficient outlet for the drives, all of this would worsen in the Christendom to come, which Bataille will decry as the "sovereignty of taboos" at their most "clear cut" (E, 136), as "absolute" (E, 126), which only "deepened the degree of sensual disturbance by forbidding organised transgression" (E, 127).

3. CHRISTIANITY AND TABOO ON TRANSGRESSION ABSOLUTE

To understand Christianity Nietzsche's genealogy traces to its Hebraic roots. Here I combine it with Lacan's own analysis to explore Bataille's apropos of taboo-transgression. The key for this is Lacan's *Seminar XVII* invoking of "Yahweh's ferocious ignorance" of "sexual knowledge," and "religious practices" blending "supernatural agencies" with these aspects of "nature itself" (SXVII, 136). For although unlike his later Christian version Yahweh exhibits violence, this impure is already not libido. Lacan's acumen in tracing this *denaturalising* path is to see in Freud's thesis of a primal-father's murder and repetition on Moses, then Jesus, a hysteric's myth to "castrate" now our sexed *and* aggressive aspects via Oedipal imaginaries.³²

Bataille's position on Freud here is similar to Lacan, but also to Lévi-Strauss. Bataille writes: "Really Freud's myth brings in the most fantastic guess work yet it has the advantage over the sociologists of being an expression of living

compulsions. Lévi-Strauss expresses it neatly: ‘He gives a fair account not of the beginnings of civilisation, but of its present state’ (E, 200). That is, Freud’s myth retro-projects both the violent incestuous desire (transgression) and its violent rejection (taboo) constituting the unconscious structure of Christocentric nuclear families. Bataille’s complaint about Lévi-Strauss is only the tendency to found the whole transition from nature to culture on the incest taboo, “just one aspect of the general taboo” (E, 51), to the neglect of others coequal in value. By speaking of nature-to-culture, moreover—rather than *animal-to-human*—Bataille’s sense is that Lévi-Strauss is “setting one abstraction beside another,” omitting the “drama in which they oppose one another” as “a laceration which exposes the whole of divided being,” “if man and animal nature confront each other as the totality of being is rent asunder” (AS, II:52, E, 213-4).³³

Lacan’s aim in *Seminar XVII* to go *beyond* “everything in the same basket as Oedipus” and the “cock-and-bull story” of primal murder, to see in it Freud’s “strange Christocentrism” and “dream” that needs to be “interpreted” (SXVII, 114, 117, 137, 176), signals a similar intent to *not* reduce us to the incest taboo. Later Lacan is found to “metaphorise” as incest the relation “truth maintains with the real.”³⁴ But one should also factor Nietzsche’s genealogy, for what is really murdered, sacrificed, “castrated,” with the Judeo-Christian unfolding is “the erudite culture” of Greek and Roman nobles, and the gods *and* goddesses of *Hellenismos*, by the slavish *ressentiment* and “petty envy” that continues to unduly press normativity today (AC, 59). Bataille’s acumen is to note that lost in the Christian universalisation of Yahweh’s ignorance—Eastwards also with the Islamic version—is the erotic rituals of transgression that were once the very domain of religion, according to the *originary* sacred that mixed pure with the sexed impure of repressed animality, returning then as “deified nature” (AS, II:131).

Bataille is keenest to mark that Christianity alters this by leaving “transgression condemned,” “condemned out of hand” as “sin,” “evil” (E, 127, 262), and in doing so conceals “that the sacred and the forbidden are one, that the sacred can be reached through the violence of a broken taboo” (E, 126). Previously in *Accursed Share* he noted that in forbidding transgression Christianity “took up in a renewed form the movement that set the first men against nature,” “revived within themselves the original drama that was the transition from animal to man,” but with no route back—rendering thus “repudiated the pagan world in which transgression counterbalances the prohibition to form the totality” (AS, II:135-6).

This is what Bataille means later in *Eroticism* when stating that “in the Christian world the taboo was absolute,” which nevertheless could never cease to eroticise precisely what it repressed as it dammed to bursting point, meaning “Christianity in its turn deepened the degree of sensual disturbance by forbidding organised transgression” (E, 126-7).

For Bataille, then, “misunderstanding the sanctity of transgression is one of the foundations of Christianity” (E, 90), but Lacan’s *Ethics Seminar* also marks the disturbance this creates in citing Paul’s as “the Law which causes sin” (SVII, 170), which “causes our desire to flare up” as “desire for death” as it “takes on an excessive, hyperbolic character” (SVII, 83-4). And so as *not* to “leave us clinging to that dialectic” for an “ethics of psychoanalysis,” Lacan is also found declaring that “we will have to explore that which, over the centuries, human beings have succeeded in elaborating that transgresses the Law, puts them in a relationship to desire that transgresses interdiction, and introduces an erotics that is above morality” (SVII, 84).

This is because with Christianity we *forget* that an ethics must preserve an erotics, which for Lacan is akin to how in “having lived for a long time under Christian law,” “we no longer have any idea what the gods are” (SVII, 259). The gods sanctioned transgression, rendering its erotics guided, but now they have taken-flight—which is what makes Christianity for Bataille “the least religious religion of them all,” which “sets its face against eroticism and thereby condemns most religions” (E, 32), sanctioning transgression only in the alleged “*felix culpa*” (E, 262) of “the ignominious death on the cross” (AS, II:136). This is the “central image” Lacan observes leaving desire “literally poisoned,” “pursued throughout the world by Christian missionaries,” “crucifying man in holiness for centuries” as it “absorbs all other images of desire in man with significant consequences” (SVII, 262).

Lacan refers to the “inner catastrophes” of “neurosis” stemming from always “doing things in the name of the good, and even more in the name of the good of the other,” as “desire keeps coming back, keeps returning, and situates us once again in a given track” (SVII, 319). Bataille also stresses a “contempt for animals,” forging a “perceptible link” with this “victory of morality and the sovereignty of taboos,” which is “this morality pushed to its logical conclusion,” as “the attributes of deity vanish from the animal kingdom” (E, 136-7). Even a saviour’s birth cannot directly involve what we share with other mammals: “private parts, the hairy ones

to be precise, the animal ones” (E, 143)—draped over by an ambiguous virginity.

We are a long way from Zeus’s divine rapes, where he would *expressly* take animal form: a swan for Leda, a serpent for Semele, a shimmering white bull for Europa.³⁵ And in what echoes in Lacan’s later dictum of “no sexual relation” (SXVII, 116), Bataille chides Christian attempts to now deny fear of sex in a 1952 congress of Carmelites, who invited other orders, along with “religious historians and psycho-analysts” (E, 221).³⁶ Bataille notes that in their concern “to prove that fear of sexuality was not the mainspring of the Christian practice of continence,” “everything was going along so nicely that Schopenhauer’s simplifications were readily accepted: the impulses of sexuality had one meaning only—Nature’s purpose working through them,” but “no one bothered to reflect that ‘Nature’ behaved in a ridiculous way” (E, 222, 232). This harks back to Bataille’s observing how “the sexual channels are also the body’s sewers,” how our vanity is offended when we “connect the anal orifice with them” and, like Augustine, recollect how “we are born between faeces and urine” (E, 56-7).

If the Carmelites insist on “harmony between sexuality and life” it is, for Bataille, only by *narrowing* to “certain limits” where “outside these it is forbidden” (E, 230), reduced to the procreative form, “limited to marriage” (E, 238), to give it transcendental significance. “Transcendental?,” Bataille ripostes, “That means denying its horror, the horror connected with earthly reality” (E, 224).³⁷ Lacan concurs in noting that “signifiers are not made for sexual relations,” that “once the human being is speaking, it’s stuffed, it’s the end of this perfection, this harmony, in copulation—which in any case is impossible to find anywhere in nature” (SXVII, 33).³⁸ Perhaps it is no accident, then, that where Bataille in *Eroticism* chides this transcendentalism is a statuette of an Alexandrian “temple prostitute,” attributed to the “Jacques Lacan collection” (E, 224), whom he earlier thanks as among “a great many friends” for their “active support” in finding “relevant documents” (E, 9).

Regarding our own distinct hue of animal beauty, given divine affirmation in Greco-Roman contexts not just in prostitution but in homoerotics and the orgy, Bataille notes that for the Christian “there is a halo of death about it that makes its beauty hateful” (E, 237). It is the “snare of the devil,” “at once hateful and desirable” as the “lure of forbidden fruit,” which “stands out more sharply,” Bataille observes, with “harsher flavour,” because of strict taboo which left so much of sex “guilty and sin-laden” (E, 234, 237-8, 270). Hence “flesh is the born

enemy of people haunted by Christian taboos” while they live as if dead, waiting for death to give them life by “calculations” on after-worlds that for Bataille will “confer a miserliness, a poverty, a dismal discipline on the ascetic life of no matter what religion or sect” (E, 92, 251).

“Man must die to live eternally,” Bataille quotes a Father Tesson as “speaking for the whole Church,” with an “ambiguousness of vocabulary” (E, 235) that resonates with Lacan’s notion of “second death” if the soul were seduced by “the phenomenon of the beautiful” (SVII, 260). Hence Christians bank with their ultimately selfish calculation on the souls’ salvation as “forever divided, arbitrarily distinct from each other, arbitrarily detached from the totality of being with which they must nevertheless remain connected,” violating forever for Bataille in this “atomisation of totality” the return “from isolation to fusion, from the discontinuous to the continuous”—to the “totality of the real” and “continuity of being” implicit of the sacred-erotic Dionysian path “marked out by transgression” (AS, II:117; E, 13, 120).³⁹

4. MODERN SCIENCE AND CAPITALISM: PSEUDO-SYMBOLIC GOODS

The atomistic soul of Christianity, like much in our subsequent modern era, now takes a secular form. The detached soul is the individual, and this an empirical matter. This section shows the transgressions of modern capitalism, fuelled by advances in science, have more in common with the *disturbed* transgressions of the Christian age than they do with those sacred of the Hellenic. Capitalist transgression is a secularised descendent of “sin” because of its still degraded nature. I begin with Bataille’s critique of sex-positivism in the chapter of *Eroticism* titled “Kinsey, the Underworld and Work” (E, 149-63). Then I broach Lacan’s split-subject, Nietzsche’s ascetic ideal, and a modern world where everything already is symbolic.

For Bataille the “originality” of the Kinsey Reports, published in the *Human Male* in 1948 and *Human Female* in 1953, is “to discuss sexual conduct as one discusses things” (E, 152). Here “sexual activity is treated statistically like external data,” and Bataille’s sense is that “the doubts” cast by some on the scientificity of “the results” are “technical and superficial,” commending the authors instead for their “precautions” (E, 151). Following the strictness of Christian taboo, the reductionism of the Kinsey team was key for recovering knowledge of the sexual domain and repairing damages done to reason—what Freud referred to as the

“intimidation of the intelligence” (SE, 21:84) wrought by the Church on all such matters. Bataille concludes, “The sexual behaviour of our fellows has ceased to be so completely hidden from us because of this gigantic enquiry” (E, 151).

Bataille’s complaint with this enquiry, with its “often senselessly clumsy business of bringing man’s sexual life down to the level of objective data” (E, 152), is with the assumption that now taboos can be dismissed as irrational altogether. He writes, “We are faced with a voluminous collection of facts remarkably well assembled,” by “methods” “brought to a high pitch of efficiency, though it is harder to admire the theories they spring from”—because “for the authors sexuality is a normal and acceptable biological function in whatever form it appears,” “but religious principles restrict this natural activity” (E, 156). This assumption will not do for Bataille because sexuality is not just transgressive relative to Christian taboo, but relative to the order of things in general.⁴⁰

What the authors miss regarding restrictions is “the factor of work,” and Bataille repeats his formulation that “by work man orders the world of things and brings himself down to the level of a thing among things,” as a “means to an end” in “opposition to animal nature” (E, 157). For without taboo, “animal darkness would still hold sway” (E, 161), but also without work, which is the very reason for taboo, as indicated for Bataille in Kinsey’s class results which show only “in the underworld alone, where no work is done and where behaviour in general adds up to a denial of humanity do we find 49.4%” for the seven orgasms per week thought to be “the normal frequency in nature—the animal nature of the anthropoids” (E, 158-9). Other classes interviewed had “16.1% to 8.9%” (E, 159).⁴¹ Regardless, Bataille will add, “we are animals anyway,” and “cannot help the animal in us persisting and often overwhelming us,” our “sexual exuberance demonstrating how animal life persists” (E, 150).

That the “facts of sex” are not just “things,” or reducible to an external aspect, is, for Bataille, also revealed in Kinsey’s observing that “beyond the desired result lie consequences” they “did not anticipate”—the “private feelings as opposed to things that the Reports suggest must exist beyond the graphs and curves,” implying “the memory of deep wounds, frustrating pain, unsatisfied desire, disappointments, tragic situations and utter catastrophe” (E, 152, 154). Bataille is suggesting that while Christian taboo makes problems more acute, it is not alone responsible for the traumas of the real inherent in nature itself, and soon enough “the authors themselves knew what abyss yawned beneath the facts they report”

(E, 155).⁴²

Bataille's aim is to broach the limits of science apropos of taboo-transgression. He reproaches scientism, positivism—and indeed sex-positivism—for neglecting the functions of religious eroticism, which “are closed books to us if we do not locate them firmly in the realm of inner experience,” for “we put them on the same level as things known from the outside if we yield albeit unwittingly to the taboo” (E, 37). This implies rejecting taboo is a consequence of the sustained functioning of taboo—shutting off inner-experience, making it unconscious. “The worst of it,” Bataille adds, “is that science whose procedures demand an objective approach to taboos owes its existence to them but at the same time disclaims them because taboos are not rational” (E, 37). This is from taboo continuing in secularised form, which, Bataille notes, “acted on behalf of science in the first place” by having “removed the object of taboo from our consciousness by forbidding it”—the “disturbing object”—attaining thus “that calm ordering of ideas without which human awareness is inconceivable,” such that “in science the scientist himself becomes an object exterior to the subject, able to think objectively,” where “he could not do this if he had not denied himself as a subject to begin with” (E, 37-8).⁴³

Bataille senses “professorial philosophy” (E, 260) to share this tendency, for “emotions put it out of joint,” and we find “superiority in one field bought at the expense of relative ignorance in other fields,” as “everyday philosophy becomes a little more of a specialised discipline like the others” (E, 253). Bataille suggests “reaction against this cold and rigid aspect of philosophy is characteristic of modern philosophy as a whole” from “Nietzsche to Heidegger,” caught “in an impasse” where the very discipline it requires leaves it unable to “embrace the extremes of its subject,” eliding “the outer most reaches of human life” such that “it is doomed to failure” (E, 259). Bataille asks: “Yet what significance can the reflections of mankind upon himself and on being in general have, if they take no account of the intense emotional states?”—discerning here “the specialist’s peculiar narrow-mindedness” even as it tries to be “the sum of knowledge,” for “it does not even aim at being the sum of experiences” (E, 254). So with “clear conscience, even with a feeling of getting rid of a foreign body, getting rid of some muck, or at least a source of error,” it “leaves out the intense emotion bound up with birth, with the creation of life as with death” (E, 259)—forgetting thus for Bataille how “the truth of taboos is the key to our human attitude” (E, 38).⁴⁴

Here we encounter the general critique where for Lacan, too, the discourse of science and the university produces “the *Spaltung* [splitting] of the subject,” “a divided subject” (SXVII, 104, 148), *split* from subjective truth and the drives in their “remembering, historicising,” which is irreducible to “need and reason” (SVII, 208-9)—for while “the discourse of science” has a place for everything it “leaves no place for man” (SXVII, 147). This invokes also Nietzsche’s critique of science’s “unselfing and depersonalisation” in pursuing “disinterested knowledge” (BGE, 207), “despiritualising” (TI, VIII:3) under the same “ascetic ideal” or nihilism of hitherto Christian-Platonism.⁴⁵ Lacan depicts the shift to modernity as going from Sovereign Good to the “service of goods” for “satisfaction of all” (SVII, 292), which never can integrate the Freudian Thing, or fill the gap of this loss. “We don’t seem to have produced integral man yet” (SVII, 208), Lacan concludes, for when it comes to the “human sciences” as they *condescend* to “form a branch of the service of goods”—“implied here is a no less systematic misunderstanding of all the violent phenomena that reveal that the path of the triumph of goods in our world is unlikely to be a smooth one” (SVII, 324).

Lacan’s *Seminar VII* comments above are best understood with his *Seminar XVII* reference to “the capitalist’s discourse, with its curious copulation with science” (SXVII, 110). This is where we can bring in Bataille’s critique of modernity for its inexorable capitalism, as discussed prior to *Eroticism* in *Theory of Religion* and *Accursed Share*.

Making use of Max Weber, Bataille traces capitalism to the Protestantism of Luther, who initially “formulated a naïve, half-peasant revolt,” and Calvin, whose “reactions were those of a jurist familiar with business matters,” who “expressed the aspirations of the middle class of the commercial cities” (AS, I:115). Here the lack of erotic transgression on the Christian ethical plane is transferred further into the political sphere such that earthly deeds are reduced to accumulation, governed by more work and respect for taboos, rather than any sacrificial, festive function given “to the use of excess resources, or rather to their destruction,” Bataille adds, “at least insofar as they are useful” (AS, I:120)—referring to the potlatch type expenditure, transgression or *gift* that retains a divine about it. Something of the latter had survived with “the Roman Church,” Bataille notes, in the “contemplative idleness,” “ostentatious luxury,” “splendour of ceremonies and churches” and “forms of charity” to make good the losses for the poor: “Shining through the world of pure utility that succeeded it, where wealth lost its immediate value, it still radiates in our eyes” (AS, I:122-3).⁴⁶

Luther denied “the idea of merits gained by these means,” Bataille explains, for basing himself on “the Gospel’s principle of hostility to wealth and luxury” he was incensed by “the possibility of gaining heaven by making extravagant use of individual wealth,” seeing the transgressive squandering of surplus as a profane self-aggrandisement deflating what to him was the “decisive separation between God and everything that was not the deep inner life of faith,” rendering “everything that we can *do* and *really* carry into effect” on this earth “futile” or “culpable” (AS, I:121). Calvin then extends what for Bataille is this “utter negation” by seeing the pursuit of profit, made possible by work, taboos, and thus some self-denial, as governed *not* by any greed but by “diligence and industry,” thereby asserting the “morality of commerce”—for even in Luther, Bataille notes, earthly activity “must still be subject to moral law” (AS, I:122). Consequently in the capitalism emerging, fuelled by advances in science and “the rise of industry” (TR, 87), the aim of accumulation was *only more* accumulation, shifting from what Bataille saw as the “former, static economy” which “made a non-productive consumption of excess wealth,” to one which only “accumulates and determines a dynamic growth of the productive apparatus” (AS, I:116).

For Bataille “Calvin rejects merit and works no less firmly than Luther,” but with principles “articulated a little differently” and “more consequences,” such that “the reformed Christian had to be humble, saving, hardworking” and “bring the greatest zeal to his profession, be it in commerce, industry or whatever”—as values were “overturning,” “withdrawn,” and only “given to the virtues that have their basis in utility” (AS, I:123). How better to show this than the size of one’s wallet?—*not* now as “a way of attaining salvation” but “as a proof salvation has been attained” (AS, I:123), Bataille notes, citing Tawney, as the *God rewards the rich* doctrine emerges. This is the “rich Calvinist” doctrine Lacan invoked in *Seminar VIII*, referring to “Calvinist theology” which “had the effect of making appear, as one of the elements of moral direction, that God fills with good things those he loves on this earth,” that “observation of laws and commandments has as fruit worldly success” (SVIII, 4:8). As long as wealth did not attract a “halo of splendour,” Bataille would add, and was limited to “useful works,” one could take pride in “attachment to a profession,” “the desacralisation of human life,” and “the glorifying of God” through negation of one’s “own-glory,” through the “relegation of mankind to gloryless activity” (AS, I:124).

With immediate spending now considered waste, one invested *only* in production, causing uncontrolled destructions as disavowed drive emerged without prior

knowledge, affirmation or consent. Here violence continues the *ferocious ignorance* of Yahweh, the *superego* as Sovereign Good, savaging within, projecting without, but now in the name of profit. Bataille concludes, “the revolution effected by the Reformation has, as Weber saw, a profound significance: It marked the passage to a new form of economy”—for “by accepting the extreme consequences of a demand for religious purity it destroyed the sacred world, the world of non-productive consumption, and handed the earth over to the men of production, to the bourgeois [...] whose accomplishment is economic mankind” (AS, I:127).

Here we are “*reduced to the order of things*,” Bataille laments, and “more estranged” “than ever before” in a world “that no longer knows what to do with its products,” surrendered to a movement “no longer controlled” (TR, 93-4). How could one in fact know, or control?—when “capitalist society reduces what is human to the condition of a *thing* (of a commodity)” (AS, I:129), such that *everything already is symbolic*, and the imaginary of this reduction veils the returning real in the guise of Law growing violent by the day.⁴⁷ The physical destruction of the environment is the most dire effect—given, Lacan notes, that it “threatens” not just culture or civilisation but “the planet itself as a habitat for mankind” (SVII, 104).⁴⁸ Bataille would only add that while this monstrous capitalism, which in its “pure form” expressed the austerity of “time is money,” was “implicit in the first formulation” of “self-denial, which in Calvinism is the affirmation of God,” at the time “what was needed was less to give complete freedom to the natural impulses of the merchants than to tie them to some dominant moral position”—for “it was only in England, in the second half of the seventeenth century, that Puritans linked the principle of the free pursuit of profit to the Calvinist tradition,” as the “independence of economic laws was posited,” and the “abdication of the moral sovereignty of the religious world on the plane of production came to pass” (AS, I:125-6, 136).⁴⁹

CONCLUSION

This article considered how the different discourses of Lacan and Bataille—an ethics and erotics of the real respectively—extend on each other. I suggested focus on the real was necessitated by the distortions Nietzsche points to when Plato’s *inflation* of the Good was installed, exacerbated by Christendom, then “naturalised” without overcoming in Modernity today. Then there was Lacan’s *Ethics Seminar* call for an enquiry that goes *more deeply* into the real—a directive reissued in his *Anxiety Seminar* as “any morality is to be sought out, in its principle

and in its origin, on the side of the real,” despite the anxiety caused (SX:148).

Emerging from this analysis was that an *erotics* of the real prevents ethics from taking-flight into the moralising hustle that only *re-finds* its disavowed real through distorted projections onto an *Other* demonised in the process: The Christian Dark Ages, with its crusades and inquisitions, its neuroses and psychoses, is forever testament to that. I suggested restoring *living-openness* to the erotic means an ethics has no need to disavow what it can now *enjoy*—empowered within the structured other limits that pre-Platonic cultures help exemplify.

Here a genealogy of the *sacred* via Bataille’s taboo-transgression relation proved insightful. Traversing from the Palaeolithic *animal-to-human* transition to the Socratic incompetence on tragedy that protracted in the Platonism to follow, manifesting was the *loss* of the religious aspect of transgression. After Plato, transgression was a spitting on the dignity of the Good, rather than its complement through a periodic return to the real, which worsened when Christianity reduced transgression to *sin*. Modern attempts to reclaim positivity for taboo-objects then fell short because taboo remained insufficiently understood. After two-millennia of repression, blindness about desire still held sway, as *inner*-experience was relegated to a nightmarish past of morose naiveties in confessional praxis.

As Richardson put it, Judeo/Christian ideology “served to tear our inner experience from itself” by installing “work ethic to all areas of social life,” cutting “adrift” erotic transgression with a “puritan detachment” that even permissiveness cannot restore.⁵⁰ This is where we saw foreclosure of transgression transferred further into the economic sphere, as the aim of accumulation became *only* accumulation and “profit” constitutes the Good. Anything heterogeneous becomes waste, reduced to a pseudo-symbolic service of goods through the *violent* commodification of the globe. For capitalist homogeneity overwhelms “every aspect of life,” Richardson explains, so that “sacred forms like festival, play and sacrifice can no longer be integrated”—never adequately, anyway—due to what Bataille calls the “unreserved surrender to *things*, heedless of consequences and seeing nothing beyond them” (AS, I:136).⁵¹

The violence of the latter is no doubt real but always “rationalised,” and rarely understood: The consequence of our prior systemic flight from the real through two-thousand years of binary-dualism. Hence the moralists who hustle for ever *more* flight continue to feed the problem without realising. Here “a crook is

certainly worth a fool,” as Lacan quips on the political, noting that the “gathering of crooks into a herd” yields “collective foolery” which is what “makes the politics of right-wing ideology so depressing”; whereas by a “curious *chiasma*, the ‘foolery’ which constitutes the individual style of the left-wing intellectual gives rise to a collective ‘knavery’” (SVII, 183)—which is arguably more depressing still.⁵²

To conclude, then, abreast of a genealogy that seeks to restore the erotic to its proper place—like in the early dawning of *Hellenismos*—I throw to the Bataille whose contribution apropos of the equiprimordially of taboo-*and*-transgression, and its optimal functioning in days and nights, gods and plays gone by, should continue to *resonate* across the myriad discourses, and unconscious formations, until something better with *it* can be done.

The various forms of human life have superseded each other and we finally see how the last step must be taken. A gentle light, not the full glare of science, shows us a reality difficult to come to terms with compared to the reality of things; it makes possible a silent awakening.

Bataille, *Eroticism* (1957), 163

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NOTES

1. Elisabeth Roudinesco has Bataille as “one of the first French Nietzscheans” who, with interwar experience of the “analyst’s couch,” was “a great reader of Freud” and his notion of the death-drive, which influenced Lacan’s notion of *the real* as impossible, unassimilable and heterological. The two had a “long, subterranean friendship,” which included Lacan marrying Bataille’s first wife. Benjamin Noys notes Lacan’s notion of *jouissance* [enjoyment] drew on Bataille connecting violence with sexuality. See Elisabeth Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan: Outline of a Life, History of a System of Thought*. Trans. B. Bray. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997, 121, 131, 134, 136-8; and Benjamin Noys, *Georges Bataille: A Critical Introduction*. London: Pluto, 2000, 3.
2. Georges Bataille, *Eroticism*. Trans. M. Dalwood. London: Penguin, 2001. Repeat citations abbreviated (E).
3. Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy. Volume I: Consumption*. Trans. R. Hurley. New York: Zone, 1991; Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share: Volume II: The History of Eroticism & Volume III: Sovereignty*. Trans. R. Hurley. New York: Zone, 1993. Repeat citations of these volumes of *The Accursed Share* are abbreviated as (AS).
4. Michael Richardson notes that by 1931 Bataille is “considerably widened by attending the lectures of Marcel Mauss on anthropology,” yielding his first important article, “The Notion of Expenditure” in “1933”. See Michael Richardson, *Georges Bataille*. London: Routledge, 1994, 20-1.
5. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book VII, The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-1960*. Trans. D. Porter. New York: Norton, 1991, 11. Repeat citations abbreviated (SVII).
6. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*. Trans. W. Kaufmann. New York: Vintage, 1989, 230. Repeat citations abbreviated (BGE).
7. As Lacan’s term for *maximal* enjoyment *beyond* usual pleasures, *jouissance* requires transgression: “without a transgression there is no access to *jouissance*” (SVII, 177).
8. Bataille writes: “My true church is a whorehouse—the only one that gives me true satisfaction.” Michael Surya suggests for Bataille “the girls are god’s saints, whom he loves.” See Georges Bataille, *Guilty*. Trans. B. Boone. Venice: Lapis, 1988, 12; and Michael Surya, *Georges Bataille: An Intellectual Biography*. Trans. K. Fijalkowski, M. Richardson. London: Verso, 2002, 84.
9. For more on how taboos function “within this horizon” of labour to order nature, see David Allison, “Transgression and the Community of the Sacred” *The Obsessions of Georges Bataille*. Eds A. Mitchell, J. Winfree. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009, 85-7.
10. Lacan writes, “Man thus speaks, but it is because the symbol has made him man,” noting how incest taboos impose names, establishing “lineage through the generations.” See Jacques Lacan, “The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis” *Écrits*. Trans. B. Fink. New York: Norton, 2006, 229-30. For Lacan’s debt to Mauss’s anthropology on the “birth of the symbolic,” see Markos Zafiroopoulos, *Lacan and Levi-Strauss or the Return to Freud (1951-1957)*. Trans. J. Holland. London: Karnac, 2010, 5-6, 44, 106, 138-9, 158.
11. Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Trans. J. Strachey. London: Vintage, 2001, 19:220-1. Repeat citations abbreviated (SE).
12. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book III, The Psychoses, 1955-1956*. Trans. R. Grigg. New York: Norton, 1993, 12.
13. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XVII, The Other Side of Psychoanalysis, 1969-1970*. Trans. Grigg. New York: Norton, 2007, 180. Repeat citations abbreviated (SXVII).
14. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book X, Anxiety*. Trans. A. Price. Cambridge: Polity, 2014, 160-1.

15. Charles Shepherdson notes this post-symbolic real “only exists as a result of symbolisation” but is “not reducible to it,” and “not at all equivalent to reality.” See Charles Shepherdson, *Lacan and the Limits of Language*. New York: Fordham, 2008, 38.
16. Lacan cites *Gorgias*, 502b-d, where Plato reduces tragedy to self-interested rhetorical flattery that despoils the “common good.” Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book VIII, Transference, 1960-1961*. Trans. C. Gallagher. From unedited French manuscripts, 2002, 6:5. Repeat citations abbreviated (SVIII).
17. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*. Trans. R. Hollingdale. London: Penguin, 1990, IX:24. Repeat citations abbreviated (TI).
18. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*. Trans. W. Kaufmann, R. Hollingdale. New York: Vintage, 1968, 852.
19. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*. Trans. W. Kaufmann. New York: Vintage, 1967, 12. Repeat citations abbreviated (BT).
20. Paul Daniels notes that Nietzsche favours Apollo’s Homeric appellation *Phoibus*, “shining one”; in Delphi he was known as *Pythios* from the serpent he slew there. Erwin Rohde suggests *Pythios* was equated with Dionysos by an “untrustworthy witness,” evidence suggesting Dionysos was not buried as Python beneath the Omphalos but in the Adyton by the tripod—taking over the site each winter, as Roberto Calasso notes, when Apollo enacts his “nordic quest among the Hyperboreans.” Calasso sanctions the slippage of Dionysos and Python, “a snake,” who is “close to Dionysos, the god generated by Zeus when in the form of a snake and escorted by virgins who tied snakes around their foreheads like ribbons.” See Paul Daniels, *Nietzsche and the Birth of Tragedy*. Durham: Acumen, 2013, 45; Erwin Rohde, *Psyche: The Cult of Souls and Belief in Immortality among the Greeks*. Trans. W. Hillis. Eugene: Wipf-Stock, 2006, I:97, 110, II:287-8; and Roberto Calasso, *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony*. Trans. T. Parks. New York: Vintage, 1994, 148-9.
21. Rohde reports that Dionysos is introduced to Athens by the Delphic oracle already reconciled with Apollo, as “gentler and more civilised,” “pruned and moderated,” thereupon finding “wide-reaching influence” on all Greece. See Rohde, *Psyche*, II:288.
22. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XI, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. Trans. D. Sheridan. New York: Norton, 1998, 232.
23. Georges Bataille, *Theory of Religion*. Trans. R. Hurley. New York: Zone, 1992, 72. Repeat citations abbreviated (TR).
24. Richardson suggests one is “well-advised” to take *Eroticism* as the entry point into Bataille—a “clearly written” summation of his “overall themes.” See Richardson, *Georges Bataille*, 133.
25. In 1929 Bataille also discussed Gnostic dualism, with its Persian/Zoroastrian origins, to develop a base materialism to counter the idealist notion of matter in monistic empiricism. Denis Hollier calls this Bataille’s “dualist materialism,” based not on the Gnostic matter-spirit binary but the profane-taboo/sacred-transgression dynamic. See Georges Bataille, “Base Materialism and Gnosticism” *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*. Trans. A. Stoekl. Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1985, 46-7; and Denis Hollier, “The Dualist Materialism of Georges Bataille” Trans. H. Allred. *Yale French Studies* 78 (1990, 130-1).
26. Daniels notes that such gods exhibit *real* human desires: strengths *and* flaws. E. R. Dodds suggests they are *projections* of real inner-states, personified by the poets as if intervening from without. See Daniels, *Nietzsche and the Birth of Tragedy*, 51; and E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*. Berkeley: California University Press, 1951, 14-5.
27. This is Lacan’s “divided subject” (SXVII,148).
28. Richardson notes Bataille’s *Theory of Religion*, whence these citations come, is “important” but

- initially “most difficult” to understand. See Richardson, *Georges Bataille*, 133.
29. For analysis of the continued relevance of the Hades-Persephone myth for female sexualization see Alison Horbury, *The Persephone Complex: Post-feminist Impasses in Popular Heroine Television*. Houndmills: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2015.
30. Nietzsche also expresses admiration for Alcibiades’ seductive qualities (BGE, 200), while Lacan notes his remarkable “absence of castration fear” (SVIII, 11:8). See Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, 427.
31. Lacan also states that “the gods belong to the field of the real”. See Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XI*, 45.
32. Nietzsche calls Judeo/Christianity a “morality as anti-nature” and “castration” that is “*hostile to life*” for failure to “spiritualise, beautify, deify a desire” (TI, V:1-2)—a “denaturalising of natural values.” See Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*. Trans. R. Hollingdale. London: Penguin, 1990, 25. Repeat citations abbreviated (AC). For more on Lacan on the Judeo/Christian primal-father thematic see Tim Themi, *Lacan’s Ethics and Nietzsche’s Critique of Platonism*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014, 87-97.
33. Paul Smith notes that Bataille’s erotic disrupts the structuralist “nature/culture opposition” from *in-between*, preserving the actuality of “inner experience.” See Paul Smith, “Bataille’s Erotic Writings and the Return of the Subject” *On Bataille: Critical Essays*. Ed. L. Boldt-Irons. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995, 233-4.
34. Jacques Lacan, “L’Étoudit” Trans. C. Gallagher. *The Letter* 41 (2009, 44).
35. For exploration of the amorousness of Hellenic deities involving “rapes, preceded by animal metamorphoses,” see Calasso, *Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony*, 3, 5, 47, 52-3, 126-7, 136, 152, 205.
36. Bataille also resists the sexual reductions of psychiatry on mystics (E, 225-6). Amy Hollywood, with aid of Lacan’s concept of “not-all [*pas-tout*],” defends against the charge of Sartre and Beauvoir that Bataille’s mysticism is a search for imaginary wholeness. See Amy Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2012, 15-6, 35, 65, 113-4, 120, 149.
37. For Bataille nature invites “horror” as it “brings together and even in part mingles the organs” of “sexuality and dejecta” (AS, II:62).
38. Lacan’s *Ethics Seminar* riposte to the Good in nature is, “consider how far that notion of nature is different to ours, since it involves the exclusion of all bestial desires from what is properly speaking human fulfilment” (SVII, 13). In *Discourse to Catholics* of the same period he similarly rebukes altruistic notions of genital-relation for repressing the “fundamental perverseness of human desire”; and later in *Triumph of Religion* he calls the speaking-being a “sick animal,” “ravaged by the Word,” which Christianity seeks to “cure” by “drowning the symptom in meaning,” “to repress it,” “so that they do not perceive what is not going well.” See Jacques Lacan, *Triumph of Religion, Preceded by Discourse to Catholics*. Trans. B. Fink. Cambridge: Polity, 2013, 44, 67, 71-2, 74, 77.
39. Bataille adds that the Christian-modern view of the orgy “must at all costs be rejected,” for it assumes lack of “modesty” instead of sacrifice that “demands equality among the participants,” despite “differences between individuals and the sexual attraction connected with those differences” (E, 117, 129). In his earlier *Guilty* he discloses both orgy and brothel as religious sites of erotic fusion, despite modern contexts maintaining a sordid aura: “I escape the illusion of any solid connection between me and the world.” Bataille, *Guilty*, 12-13.
40. James Shields notes that in reacting against Christianity Kinsey commits the naturalistic fallacy, that “whatever is, is right,” that “all sex is good.” See James Shields, “Eros and Transgression in an Age of Immanence: Georges Bataille’s (Religious) Critique of Kinsey” *Journal of Religion and*

Culture 13 (1999, 178, 180).

41. Contrary to Kinsey's "insistence," Shields agrees that work, not religion, hinders the most sexual release, as evidenced in Kinsey's own data. Shields, "Eros and Transgression in an Age of Immanence", 180.

42. Cf. Lacan's remarks on Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis: "not the failure of a method, but the choice of a failed method. The so-called scientific objectivity" (SVII, 194).

43. Lacan also notes "the subject who loses his meaning in the objectifications of discourse," "the most profound alienation of the subject in our scientific civilisation," that "we encounter first when the subject begins to talk to us about himself." Lacan, "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis", 233.

44. As Jean-Louis Baudry remarks, "Science, resulting from the realm of work, can only be developed within the delineated realm of taboo where desire is diverted and the subject [...] laid bare by transgression—is buried." See Jean-Louis Baudry, "Bataille and Science: Introduction to Inner Experience" *On Bataille: Critical Essays*. Ed. L. Boldt-Irons. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995, 277.

45. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Trans. W. Kaufmann, R. Hollingdale. New York: Vintage, 1989, III:23.

46. Jean Piel suggests Bataille's "Copernican change" beyond *restricted* notions of scarcity, growth, and utility is from focus on the *general* economy of "the living masses in its entirety—where energy is always in excess and which must unceasingly destroy a surplus" because "the sun's rays, which are the source of growth, are given without measure." An epoch is thereby structured by its uptake of this surplus, excess, or "accursed share." See Jean Piel, "Bataille and the World from 'The Notion of Expenditure' to the Accursed Share" *On Bataille: Critical Essays*. Ed. L. Boldt-Irons. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995, 102-3.

47. Slavoj Žižek suggests Bataille's Law-transgression dialectic overlooks a "Kantian philosophical revolution" that makes *Law itself* transgressive. However, Nietzsche points to Kantianism as retrograde Christianity (AC, 10-12), Lacan notes its fixation on "pain" (SVII, 80), and Bataille here shows its disturbed violence preserved in capitalism as a symptom of a still *degraded* taboo-transgression relation and "Law" unworthy of the name—far from the more optimal form in Greece's tragic age. Later Žižek seems to remove the Dionysian base of the real by seeing it only as "the monstrous aspect of the Apolyniac itself," "gone awry, exploding in its autonomy," again suggesting *loss* of the optimal taboo-transgression or Apollo-Dionysos dynamic when the *profound incompetence* of Socrates on tragedy was idealised by Plato and *exacerbated* by Christianity. See Slavoj Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003, 56; *The Parallax View*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006, 95; "Ideology III: To Read Too Many Books is Harmful" *Lacan.com* (2007, 4), accessed November 18, 2015, <http://www.lacan.com/zizchemicalbeats.html>.

48. While capitalism for Richardson cannot escape wasteful-useless expenditure, its refusal to properly acknowledge this "turns it into an accursed form," externalised in "imperialistic wars and destructive violence" assuming "uncontrollable and potentially catastrophic forms"—for missing is "sacred being devoted to life enhancement," through "joyous surpassing of limits" serving "real needs of mankind," rather than "the market" with its begrudging "eye upon an ultimate accumulation." See Richardson, *Georges Bataille*, 94-5.

49. Jean-Joseph Goux suggests today's consumerism is so wasteful it undermines Bataille's critique. Noys responds that the "unproductive expenditure" of Bataille "cannot be reduced to the losses of capitalism" because it is not "how wasteful or destructive" a society is but "*how* it goes

about dealing with the accursed share,” which Goux acknowledges in saying “it is not the quantity of waste” but the “mode of waste” that is “the difference.” Noys suggests Goux was trying to extract a “purified” accursed share, failing which was its forced reduction back into the restricted economy of capitalism. See Jean-Joseph Goux, “General Economics and Postmodern Capitalism.” *Yale French Studies* 78 (1990, 210, 223); and Noys, *Georges Bataille*, 118-9.

50. Richardson, *Georges Bataille*, 104.

51. The Christian-modern tendency to ban sex-work, which worsens its problems, or reduce it to degraded commercialism, illustrates the lack of heterogeneity that could instead return with Napoleon’s reaffirming-regulation of bordellos (leading to their *Belle Époque* which Bataille saw the tail-end of), or Solon’s instating of them as Aphrodite *Pandemos* (for the people), with taxes generated for reciprocal gifts to the polis. It is in this sense that Bataille could hope to deepen his *experience* of brothels as true churches again—as temples of reciprocal gift-giving beyond the narrowed mores of profits, “sins,” and production. (He returns to this in E, 132-5). A recent philosophical defence of sex-work is in Raja Halwani, *Philosophy of Love, Sex, and Marriage*. New York: Routledge, 2010, 170-7, 210-24. See Richardson, *Georges Bataille*, 91.

52. Although Žižek suggests Bataille’s “passion for the real” is “obsessed with communism and fascism” and mistakenly opposes communism, Richardson notes that for Bataille the left must develop a sacred to “counter” that of fascism, rather than compete with capitalism on its strength, “economic utility,” and equate us in the process “with state domination and needs” and “onerous duties” neglecting “the importance of mankind’s drives.” For Richardson, Bataille is only misread as an “advocate for unlimited excess” and transgression “in isolation from a sense of order,” as if taboo were not equiprimordial. See Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 55; *The Parallax View*, 95; and Richardson, *Georges Bataille*, 92-3, 23.