

ABSTRACT for the Conference

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From the Paradox of Happiness to the Paradox of *Jouissance*:

Economics and Psychoanalysis as Ethical doctrines by

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In this paper entitled "**From the Paradox of Happiness to the Paradox of *Jouissance***" I will read the Neo-Classic discourse of William Stanley Jevons and Alfred Marshall along with the psychoanalytic discourse of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, in order to demonstrate that the entrance into the economic exchange process is dependent upon the subject's possibility to locate himself or herself within the intersubjective realm in a meaningful manner. I will maintain that the symbolic integration of the subject is a precondition of an effective and rational economic action. This formulation will put in the foreground few concepts that are extensively used in the economic and in the psychoanalytic discourses: demand and desire; pleasure (or utility) and *Jouissance*.

Since the Neo-Classic turn in the history of economic thought, realized in Jevons' *The Theory of Political Economy* (1871), and Marshall's *Principles of Economics* (1890), the concept of desire has tended to be excluded on the ground that it is too subjective, unpredictable and capricious. In demand, which is the sum product of personal desires and wants, subjectivity aberrations are cancelled out statistically. The mathematization of economics transformed and abstracted human desires into a scientific, quantifiable and manageable object, i.e., into demand.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, utilitarianism was considered common and acceptable ethical doctrine, both among "professional" thinkers and among a wider

circle of intellectuals. The fact that Mill's *Utilitarianism* (1861) was published in a general journal rather than in a professional journal, may testify that happiness and pleasure were considered legitimate topics to discuss publicly. It was only natural that Jevons and Marshall chose to found their economic theory on utilitarian foundation.

Economics, by appropriating the utilitarian discourse, shifted the focus from subjective desires to objective demand. In their work, Jevons and Marshall assumed that the sum of observed economic transactions can serve as a measure for the human desires and wants. The statistical practices by which demand was measured and quantified alienated it from its utilitarian meaning, and abstracted it from desire which was subjective, immeasurable and unpredictable.

In 1911 Freud publishes his *Formulations of the two Principles of Mental Functioning*. Here Freud outlines the elements of his early theory which consists of a distinction between the pleasure principle and the reality principle, that is, between sexual instincts and calculated ego interests.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) Freud reformulated his metaphysical foundation in order to account for the paradox inherited in his earlier work. This new formulation received further thrust by Jacques Lacan.

In his seventh seminar, entitled *The Ethic of Psychoanalysis* (1960), Jacques Lacan rereads Freud in order to reopen the question of Desire (*Wunsch*) in psychoanalytic theory and practice. Desire, claims Lacan, is defined in relation to a missing object (*Das Ding*), in relation to the lack of the object that can never be fully appropriated into the process of exchange. Exchange here refers both to economic exchange of commodities and to discursive exchange of words, ideas and signs.

Also, reading Freud's *Civilization and its discontent* (1929), Lacan introduces the concept of *Jouissance*, which is the experience of the unattainable satisfaction of the subject's Desire to revive the primordial condition of wholeness from which he or she was expelled. *Jouissance*, says Lacan, lies in a paradox between the Desire of the subject to the 'lost Thing' on the hand, and the universal law that prohibit the attainment of the Thing: while the law prohibits satisfaction, it is also a precondition of Desire itself.

Hence, both *Jouissance* and pleasure (in its utilitarian sense) are defined in relation to a paradox. In the first case the paradox is internal to the thing: *Jouissance* is defined by

and through a paradox: the very condition of its possibility is its condition of impossibility; in the case of pleasure, the paradox is external: though most of its conditions of possibility – the satisfaction of the subject's needs and desires – are being fulfilled, pleasure slips away.

The paradox of happiness emerges, I will claim, from the fact that the economic discourse (which is factual, objective, statistical and mathematical) in which the modern subject is submerged, tends to exclude, or at least to diminish, the possibility of articulating the subject's Desire to integration in intersubjective realm in a meaningful manner. In other words the economic discourse tends to efface and repress local identities such as cultural particularities, personal narratives, histories and myths, which are, in final account, the condition of possibility of the economic process itself.