Jevgenia Konoreva

The Lacanian Concept of Sexuation as an Alternative to the Genderqueer Paradigm

As a topic of her PhD. thesis, Jevgenia Konoreva has chosen a most interesting subject: the Lacanian concept of sexuation (and several related matters) as an alternative to what she calls, at the very beginning, "genderqueer framework" of human sexuality and subjectivity. This is not an easy task – Lacan's treating of the (human) sexuation (especially in the form of the famous – or infamous – "four discourses", presented in the *Seminar XVII*) is notoriously difficult and it is hard to avoid the clichés often repeated in the Lacanian literature. Jevgenia Konoreva has, however, added several remarkable insights to the problem in question and what is more, her thesis is written in a clear and comprehensible language, rather uncommon in Lacanian circles. In this respect, I also highly appreciate the succinct summary of the "thesis structure" in the opening chapter (pp. 9-11).

There are several points that I would like to stress as particularly positive. Not only does the author present a remarkably clear – but also original – interpretation of Lacan's later teaching. She also enriches her insights by viewing the Lacanian theory through the lens of certain lesser known (at least to me) Lacanians – Alexander Smulyanskiy in particular, whose work is presented on pp. 34-37 but keeps reappearing as a key reference throughout the whole thesis. It permits the author to take a certain distance vis-a-vis the orthodox Lacanism. It is not, however, only Smulyanskiy who appears as an important interlocutor in the text. Lacanism is constantly confronted with other theoretical currents and frameworks (many of which are not necessarily psychoanalytic): Yannis Stavrakakis, Mark Bracher, Michel Foucault and many others. The text, in the final instance, appears as a true patchwork with a clearly dialogical structure (this, however, entails a few minor methodological difficulties – more on that later).

The thesis comprises quite a few highly original and compelling arguments which, I believe, deserve the reader's attention; let me mention at least two of them. First, the author's interpretation of Foucault's work with regard to the "genderqueer paradigm" (pp. 16-25). The author persuasively argues that within the frame of this paradigm, "Foucault's thought remained essentially misapplied in its most radical and most sought-after positions" (p. 16). In what respect? While Foucault's view of power is that of a de-centered (or "micro-dispersed", as the author puts it) and agentless structure of power relations in which the subjects are immerged often without knowing it, the "activist social theory" replaces Foucault's fine analyses with "unsophisticated invocation of opportunistic claims" (p. 17). Thus, it "reconstructs the figure of the malicious master who oversees the situation" (p. 18). In this context, the author proposes to pay particular attention to Foucault's later analyses of the "care of the self" (where morality "was conceptualized not as law, but as a practice", p. 20). Even if this view would deserve a more nuanced elaboration (this, however, would on its own make a topic of a different thesis), in general, I cannot but endorse the author's remarks.

The second argument I would like to mention is the author's very remarkable criticism of Judith Butler (pp. 83-90). In the author's view, Butler may well argue that "subjectivity is constructed as versatile, decentralized, and fragmentary" (p. 85). However: "(…) regardless of its critique of the metaphysical foundations which presupposes some free agency behind the reformative action, Butler's own theory of performativity cannot entirely avoid this legacy (…)"; thus, her own theory "does not allow her (Butler) to postulates a flawless theory of subjectless agency" – in other words, "Butler was unable to avoid the dimension of intentionality in her theory" (p. 90). Let me only mention in passing that this criticism, that I consider to be of extreme importance, brings us back to certain ageless philosophical questions that are of high relevance to Butler's theory: when did the concept of subject as agency

precisely emerge (the general opinion has it that it was with Descartes; this, however, is highly problematic)? Is the notion of "subjectless agency" (p. 87) or "agentless subjectivity" (p. 88) not an oxymoron? Etc.

Above, I have mentioned that despite these – and many other – highly inspiring discussions, the present thesis is not devoid of certain problematic points. I will, again, limit myself to two that I consider to be the most salient ones:

1) Some of the formulations, especially in the introduction, appear to be rather schematic a rather difficult to understand. "Following Lacan's insistence on the determinative character of the subject's relations with speech, this thesis demonstrates that the lack of functioning instrument in the domain of social theoretical investigation is caused by the specific enunciation regime of modernity" (p. 7). I admit that I am lost – what is "the specific enunciation regime of modernity"? And what is "modernity" itself? "The analysis should be directed to the linguistic situation registered since Descartes's famous formula *cogito ergo sum*" (ibid.). Leaving aside the fact that the alleged "Descartes's famous formula *cogito ergo sum*" (later, the author even speaks of "Descartes's aphorism", p. 91) is a post-cartesian construct (nowhere does Descartes say *cogito ergo sum*!), what would the "linguistic situation" in question exactly be? The author seems to be succumbing, probably unwittingly, to the rather cheap anti-cartesianism that has plagued modern philosophy for at least a century (every evil that befell the humankind in modern times is due to Descartes…).

Etc. There are not many similar unclear formulations, but there are some.

2) Perhaps most importantly: the principal theoretical "enemy" in the present thesis is the "genderqueer paradigm"; despite its importance – albeit negative – in the present text, no clear definition of the paradigm is given. Very few authors are mentioned, there is no particular chapter on the genderqueer theory, and it is referenced in an obviously schematic way. "Regardless of the exhaustive and socially significant account of the injustices motivated by racial, gender, and class inequality, genderqueer agenda still has very little to say about what it means to be a sexual being or what consequences this sort of being implies" (p. 9) – but what is "genderqueer agenda"? No specific authors are mentioned, nothing specific is said about the "genderqueer agenda", except that it has very little to say about sexuality. "Genderqueer theorists aim at making visible the marginal which is expelled from or assimilated in the heteronormative by analysing the effects of power distribution in conjunction with sex difference" (p. 13) – again, which theorists? Judith Butler? Teresa de Lauretis? Is this not a very simplified view of what appears to be a very heterogeneous and diverse theoretical field? Brief, the "genderqueer agenda" may well become the object of the author's criticism, but it would certainly deserve to be presented in a less caricatural way.

By these remarks, however, I do not mean to imply that Jevgenia Konoreva's work is not original, innovative and in many respects highly inspiring. They are meant to be contributions to discussion rather than authoritative criticism of any sort.

Overall, I recommend Jevgenia Konoreva's thesis for defence and I suggest that it be classified as **prospěla**.

Prague, 3. 12. 2022 Josef Fulka