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Merging Lacan and a role-playing game for understanding the 'adversarial subject'

Abstract

This paper proposes the design of a heuristic relating to a specific kind of subject – dubbed 'the adversarial subject' – with a view to understanding its orientation and probable actions vis-á-vis *other subjects. This 'design' consists of merging Jacques Lacan's three registers – the 'real', the imaginary and the symbolic – with the ethical 'alignments' of the role-playing game, Dungeons and Dragons, to be able to nuance the former in such a manner that differentiating among subjects who share the same dominant register becomes possible. For example, a subject in whom the imaginary register is dominant, it means that ego or self (either in narcissistic or in self-assertive form) comprises the primary locus for initiating action, but when combined with the role-playing 'alignments', it enables one to assess, on the basis of the subject's actions, what her or his ethical motivation is. These alignments – nine in total, with three variations ('lawful', 'neutral' and 'chaotic') on each of the three categories of 'good', 'neutral' and 'evil' – range from 'lawful good' through 'true neutral' to 'chaotic evil', and combined with Lacan's three registers (depending on dominance), functions in a revealing manner to comprehend the actions of 'adversarial subjects'. In order to demonstrate its efficacy, this synthesised heuristic is applied to several fictional characters and one actual subject, which are selected against the backdrop of the question: what constitutes a psychopathic subject? The reason for this is the arguably justifiable assumption, that – from a societal perspective – psychopaths embody the 'adversarial subject'* par excellence*, and the differentiated (and differentiating) heuristic in question enables one to identify them by 'reading' their actions through its variegated lens. In addition, an existing subject is presented anonymously with a view to gauging the extent to which the amalgamation*

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of Lacanian theory and DaD alignments may contribute significantly to understanding the 'adversarial subject' in all its manifestations, including psychopathy and sociopathy.

> *If you know the enemy and yourself, you need not fear the outcome of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory you gain, you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle.*
> – Sun Tzu, *Art of War*, III.18.

Introduction: Why knowing adversaries is important

Most psychologists would probably agree that, when confronted by an adversary (or an enemy, if the adversarial relationship is not on 'friendly' terms, as in playing a game) in society, and you wish to prevail over him or her, it is imperative to *know* them. And the more powerful this adversary is, the more urgent it is to be able to gauge their character – their strengths, their weaknesses, and most important, their psychological disposition. Why most important? Imagine being a professional boxer, or, for that matter, participant in a less dangerous sport, such as tennis or squash. Unless you know what to expect of your opponent, you don't really enjoy optimal probability of winning. If your opponent is the cool type, you have much less of a chance of disconcerting him or her with certain tactics, compared to someone who is easily ruffled, for instance. If they are known for gamesmanship, you have to be doubly alert for signs that they are employing dubious tactics to gain the advantage. And, of course, if gamesmanship is characteristically taken to the hilt – in other words, if they would do everything and anything to win the game – you have to be fully prepared for such an eventuality. Anticipating somewhat where this argument is going, a lethal version of such 'gamesmanship' – or cunning, if you will – is encountered on the part of psychopaths.

Switch from sport to outright, hostile conflict, where the stakes are qualitatively different from sport, and it is no longer just a matter of winning to strengthen your CV; it is a matter of life and death. Arguably some people treat sport as war, which is a reminder that there are two levels to this exigency to 'know' your opponent – a general level pertaining to human beings as a species and a particular level applicable to the specific differences among individual subjects. Regarding the first of these, Michel Foucault famously argued – in response to a question about the tension between 'structure' and 'event', and which of the two should get priority in historical analyses – that (2001: 116):

> The problem is at once to distinguish among events, to differentiate the networks and levels to which they belong, and to reconstitute the lines along which they are connected and engender one another. From this follows a refusal of analyses couched in terms of the symbolic field or the domain of signifying structures, and a recourse to analyses in terms of the genealogy of

> relations of force, strategic developments, and tactics. Here I believe one's point of reference should not be to the great model of language *[langue]* and signs but, rather, to that of war and battle. The history that bears and determines us has the form of a war rather than that of a language— relations of power, not relations of meaning. History has no 'meaning,' though this is not to say that it is absurd or incoherent. On the contrary, it is intelligible and should be susceptible of analysis down to the smallest detail— but this in accordance with the intelligibility of struggles, of strategies and tactics. Neither the dialectic, as the logic of contradictions, nor semiotics, as the structure of communication, can account for the intrinsic intelligibility of conflicts. 'Dialectic' is a way of evading the always open and hazardous reality of conflict by reducing it to a Hegelian skeleton, and 'semiology' is a way of avoiding its violent, bloody, and lethal character by reducing it to the calm Platonic form of language and dialogue.

In accordance with Foucault's contention, above, that our attempt to understand history – which is ultimately a history of human actions – one should *not* have recourse "…to the great model of language…and signs but, rather, to that of war and battle…", would serve well as a heuristic point of reference in an attempt to come to grips with the notion of the 'adversarial subject'. This is the case, even if Foucault clearly has not only such subjects in mind, but human beings as such. As he says, above, "The history that bears and determines us has the form of a war rather than that of a language". This sounds very much like Thomas Hobbes's well-known saying, "man is a wolf to man" (in *On the Citizen*'s [*De Cive*'s] Dedication; Hobbes 1997: 51), which tellingly goes back to a Latin proverb, except that Foucault has made of this 'war of all against all' a methodological principle of interpretation.

Hence, taking my cue from Foucault, one might say that, in a situation where one faces an adversary, one is capable of engaging in actions, including 'speech-acts', that are susceptible of being understood in terms of 'battle'. If he is right, this includes potentially every social situation, that is, where one finds oneself with another human being (or beings), not only spatio-temporally, but also in communicational spaces such as telephone conversations or internet spaces such as social media. This is because even an apparently 'friendly' meeting could turn into one characterised by one of various kinds of bellicosity, if not outright aggression. If this is generally the case, it is arguably even more so when a social situation is explicitly set up in an adversarial manner, such as a boxing or tennis match (even a chess match), or more collectively, a soccer or rugby match. What I want to do here, however, is to shift the terrain somewhat, to Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory and role-playing games, in both of which one encounters the conceptual means to comprehend the 'adversarial subject' (which, in Foucault's terms, all of us are, at least latently) in a sophisticated, differentiating fashion. Along this route,

I hope to arrive at a heuristic of sorts, which may enable one to categorise – and perhaps identify – different kinds of adversarial subjects.

Epistemological status of the proposed heuristic

As implied above, there are probably many different ways to approach the 'adversarial subject' interpretively. One of them, which I would like to outline briefly here, involves a scenario where an unlikely meeting takes place between psychoanalytical thinker, Jacques Lacan, and the role-playing game, Dungeons and Dragons. I have written on Lacan's work several times before, but in different contexts (including Olivier 2004; 2005; 2005a; 2005b; 2012). This time I hope to show that it helps one understand one's adversary or enemy – particularly if this person displays characteristics associated with psychopathy or sociopathy – in a broadly social situation.

The question concerning the epistemological and theoretical status of this interdisciplinary investigation-based 'proposal' obtrudes itself unavoidably, as an anonymous, but benevolent critic has reminded me by posing the following questions: "Is it a literary-critical tool? A philosophical thought experiment? A psychoanalytic typology? A contribution to psychology? A cultural studies framework?" It is certainly not intended as the latter – a framework for cultural studies – although there is no reason for practitioners in this field not to make use of it for intellectual or theoretical purposes. Nor is it intended as a literary-critical tool, but at a certain level it could reasonably be seen as a philosophical thought-experiment, keeping in mind that, in the history of the sciences, thought-experiments have at times given rise to respectable theories (recall Galileo's thought-experiment with falling bodies in a vacuum, which laid the essential empirical and conceptual groundwork for Newton's macro-mechanical law of universal gravitation). Along this avenue philosophy could also inform psychologically relevant theories, as it has done historically; think of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche preparing the ground for Freud's epochal founding of psychoanalysis, for example (Cybulska 2015). Therefore, I certainly hope that it makes a contribution to psychology, at least broadly speaking (regarding 'adversarial' subjects), and more specifically, in relation to psychopathy and sociopathy, and that it could function as a psychoanalytical typology.

I might add that, although I *first* (below) apply the 'heuristic framework' to two well-known fictional psychopathic (or sociopathic) characters and one equally familiar real-world psychopath, I *also* discuss a really existing 'adversarial' subject, known to myself (but presented anonymously), to show the possible *diagnostic* relevance of the framework. I do this to counter probable criticism, that the heuristic has no value whatsoever for psychological or psychoanalytical practice. Hence, stating the *epistemological status* of the proposed heuristic explicitly, one could say that its infrastructure is philosophical (and to some extent literary), but theoretically speaking,

it is located, broadly, in psychological theory (or theorisation), and more particularly in psychoanalytical typology, with *possible* diagnostic applicability.

Lacan's theory of the human subject: the three registers

As some readers may recall, Lacan theorises the human subject as being precariously 'stretched' between three registers of subjectivity, to wit, the unsymbolisable '*real*' (not the same as 'reality,' which can be symbolised, and is observable), the '*imaginary*' order of images, and the '*symbolic*' register of language (Lacan 1977a; Lee 1990). This tripartite structure of the subject does not function in exactly the same way for every individual – sometimes the one, then the other, of these registers is dominant in an individual subject. When the supra-symbolic 'real' preponderates for the subject, this does not mean that they are unable to express themselves in language, or of identifying with an image. It simply means that the subject inclines towards the realm of the inexpressible (the 'real'), such as the unpresentable sublime (Olivier 1997) in art or architecture (for example the baffling spatial complexity of Frank Gehry's deconstructive Bilbao Guggenheim museum), or the incomprehensible quality in interpersonal relations (which you may *feel*, but not be able to name), and that, for them, the imaginary and the symbolic are of secondary importance.

Note that, per definition, the three registers in question here function in every 'normal' subject. When the imaginary (the sphere of the ego) is dominant, it means that the 'real' and the symbolic are subordinate to the requirements of imaginary identifications (such as with the image of a movie star, or a politician you admire). In instances where the imaginary predominates, it could either tend in the direction of narcissism, or – as in the archetypal case of the historical Socrates – that of personal autonomy and self-assertion. Similarly, when the demands of the symbolic, as linguistic register of the social, gain precedence over those of the 'real' and the imaginary, the person concerned is primarily drawn to language, and to people, as it is also the social register. Whichever of the three registers prevails, however, it is to be noted that (as remarked earlier), for a 'normal' person, all three have to be functioning; if one of them is absent, such a person would be psychotic. After all, if a person lacks the imaginary, she or he would have no sense of self (ego); lacking the symbolic, they would have no access to language and be without any social sense. Without the supralinguistic 'real', the world would appear to them self-sufficient, and any sense of a sphere 'beyond' what is known as the 'given' perceptually and comprehensibly spatial and temporal realm (something that functions tacitly and indispensably in 'normal' people, and could be phenomenologically ascertained, as Maurice Merleau-Ponty demonstrated in *The Visible and the Invisible* through the concept of "The Intertwining – The Chiasm" [1968: 160-162]) would be absent.

This way of conceptualising the human subject is *complex* in a particular sense, which is not the same as being *complicated*. The latter adjective could be attributed to the plot of

a detective bestseller, but complexity is different. Paul Cilliers (1998: viii-ix) characterises the difference between the two as follows:

> If a system—despite the fact that it may consist of a huge number of components—can be given a complete description in terms of its individual constituents, such a system is merely *complicated.* Things like jumbo jets or computers are complicated. In a *complex* system, on the other hand, the interaction among constituents of the system, and the interaction between the system and its environment, are of such a nature that the system as a whole cannot be fully understood simply by analysing its components. Moreover, these relationships are not fixed, but shift and change, often as a result of self-organisation. This can result in novel features, usually referred to in terms of *emergent properties.* The brain, natural language and social systems are complex.

What Cilliers writes, above, about the brain and language, also goes for the human psyche, or putting it differently, for human subjectivity conceived of in Lacanian (or for that matter, Deleuzo-Guattarian; see Olivier 2017) terms. While every ('normal', that is, nonpsychotic) subject comprises a tripartite subject-structure consisting of the three 'orders' of the 'real,' the imaginary and the symbolic, something should be added to this, which highlights its complexity. Recall Cilliers's insight concerning complexity, above, about "interaction among constituents of the system, and…between the system and its environment", which "are not fixed, but shift and change, often as a result of self-organisation", which demonstrably applies to the three registers listed above, then it should be apparent that the Lacanian subject is a complex one. For example, a traumatic experience, which disrupts the subject's symbolic horizon unbearably, and which Lacan (1981: 55) considers a "missed encounter" with the 'real', would leave an indelible mark on the subject in the registers of the imaginary and the symbolic. While psychoanalytic therapy may ameliorate the impact of the trauma, it would never disappear completely, as Josephine Hart (2002) has shown convincingly in her Lacan-oriented novel, *The Reconstructionist* (Olivier 2008).

Add to this that, although in different individuals a different one of the three orders is dominant, such dominance is also *qualitatively* different, so that *there are no two individuals in the world who are exactly the same* – not even so-called 'identical' twins. They may be genetically 'identical', but when it comes to interests and focused abilities, this 'identity' is overlaid by a psychic divergence, which is even more accentuated when one considers people who are not related to one another. This heightens the complexity of the subjects involved. *The present article is an attempt to provide* (some) *conceptual means to grasp and articulate the* qualitative *differences among subjects by means of a merger of sorts between Lacan's three registers and a different schema, discussed below*. This may also aid one in assessing the extent to which a subject could be identified as an 'adversarial subject'.

To illustrate the divergence in question, take two people who are both symbolic-dominant – that is, where the social register of language predominates over those of the 'real' and the imaginary. In one case this could have the effect, that person A is sociable, instead of being a loner, while person B, who is similarly gregarious, also has a noticeable interest in, and gift for, language and linguistic articulation, which A lacks. This difference between the two individuals could extend to the imaginary (ego-register) and supra-symbolic 'real' as well, where A could display a narcissistic ego, while B is assertive but not a narcissist, and A is not drawn to wilderness experiences (where one may feel close to the 'real'), while B relishes them. It is these qualitative differences that lend themselves to being further nuanced and complexified by means of the '*alignments*' of characters in the role-playing game, Dungeons and Dragons (DaD) – which, importantly, impart an *ethical* dimension to the Lacanian registers.

'Alignments' in Dungeons and Dragons

The nuances implied by the qualitative differences and interactions among the three registers in a subject, as well as between the subject and her or his social environment, are already endless, as may be seen above, but when the fine-tuning categories of Dungeons and Dragons are added, this is exacerbated even further. What are these? They represent ways in which the characters (or 'avatars') one chooses in the game are 'aligned,' that is, *ethically* and *morally* oriented or directed as far as their choices and actions are concerned, just as in real life individuals could be 'aligned' in these terms. 'Ethical' here denotes actions in accord with the guiding precepts of a specific *community*, while 'moral' entails actions pertaining to *universally* valid guiding principles, such as Immanuel Kant's well-known 'categorical imperative' (Jankowiak, n.d.). Note that, when reading the characterisation of the different alignments (below), it becomes apparent that although these are understood as ethical and moral, their source does not only lie outside of the characters (in social norms and mores), but is in a stronger sense 'internal' to them insofar as they have appropriated and 'internalised' them; they can therefore legitimately be merged with Lacan's three registers to comprehend the actions of individual subjects. These types of alignment and what they mean are as follows (Andrew 2019):

> ***i. Lawful Good***
> Characters with lawful good alignment have a sense of duty and honor. It's frequently stated that lawful good does not mean lawful stupid, and lawful good characters can sometime do otherwise harsh actions…
>
> ***ii. Neutral Good***
> Characters with neutral good alignment mostly act altruistically. They don't have any regard or disregard for or against any lawful precept such as traditions or rules. These are the most peace-loving characters in the game. They don't

have a problem cooperating with the lawful officials. But they don't feel indebted to them. Neutral good characters don't suffer an inner conflict like the lawful good characters if they have to choose between bending and breaking the law or rule. If they feel it is a decision that will bring a positive change, they will not hesitate to take the decision.

iii. Chaotic Good

Chaotic good characters always disdain the bureaucratic organizations that often interfere in social improvement. These characters try to bring a change for the better. They believe in personal freedom for everyone. If you are playing a chaotic good character, you will usually incline to do what is right; regardless of the law. However, their methods to bring about the change are often disorganized, and they don't tune in well with society.

iv. Lawful Neutral

A lawful neutral character believes in lawful concepts like order, tradition, rules, and honor. Sometimes, these characters can even have a prior preference to choices that they think are controlled by benevolent authorities…

v. True Neutral

True neutrals don't feel strongly towards any alignment, and they don't actively seek their balance. They take decisions on their feet instead of judging what is right and what is wrong according to their character traits…

vi. Chaotic Neutral

Chaos is the defining attribute for these characters; frequently they are disruptive to the party and can wreak havoc on even the best laid plans…

vii. Lawful Evil

Lawful evil characters often search for a well-ordered system. They try to exploit this system to show a combination of both desirable and undesirable traits. Some of the alignments that fall under the lawful evil characters are devils, tyrants, mercenaries, and corrupt officials. They will probably stick to a deal that is made, but you can be certain they don't have your best interests in mind when they make it…

viii. Neutral Evil

Neutral Evil characters are very selfish and may not care if they turn against their allies. NE characters won't hesitate to hurt others if it furthers their means. All they care about is to fulfill their wishes and demands. However, they won't go out of their way to achieve their desires; they won't cause any

mayhem or carnage if they think that the actions will not benefit them. A suitable example of a neutral evil is an assassin. They may have little regard for the formal laws of society. However, he/she will not kill anyone needlessly…

ix. Chaotic Evil

These characters are more evil than neutral evils. They don't respect any rules, don't value people's lives, and they will do anything to fulfill their desires; they are the most cruel and selfish characters in the game who value nothing but their personal freedom. These characters are so evil that they don't work well in groups as well. A big differentiation for chaotic evil characters is that they may do evil things even if they don't benefit from it.

What do we get when we combine these 'alignments' with Lacan's three registers? It would take too much space to write in detail about all 27 instances (3x9=27; where every alignment is combined with the three Lacanian registers, each considered as dominant in turn), so some examples will have to do. Every category – for example 'Lawful good' – could be unpacked in terms of the 'real,' the imaginary or the symbolic. A 'lawful good' character or person, we already know, has a sense of 'duty and honour,' and acts accordingly. To illustrate – largely (but not completely) avoiding the potentially controversial terrain of historical or actually existing individuals in favour of fictional examples – some people may recall the movie, *Scent of a Woman* (Brest 1992), where Lt. Col. Frank Slade (Al Pacino), a blind ex-soldier, comes to the rescue of Charlie Simms (Chris O'Donnell), who is being persecuted at an exclusive boys' school for not being willing to snitch on his fellow students. Slade is arguably the personification of a 'lawful good' person who, because he admires Charlie's demonstration of honour and solidarity with his peers – even when he knows they are guilty – steps into the breach to defend him, very eloquently and assertively. Moreover, in terms of Lacan's three registers, given his linguistic flair and assertiveness, both the symbolic (language) and the imaginary (the register of the ego, which can be either narcissistic or, as in his own case, self-assertive) function strongly in him as subject, with the symbolic just ahead of the imaginary, because it is also the social (and ethical/moral) register, where a sense of fairness and justice is located insofar as values are embedded in the symbolic (Olivier 2005a).

Someone with 'neutral good' alignment is less straightforward to understand; one might see in them what is known as 'philosophical anarchists' (Fiala 2021), who argue that power, domination and authority of some or other institution over individuals cannot be justified; every person should 'rule' themselves, and we therefore don't need governments (which do not have authority over us, anyway). 'Neutral goods' are said, above, to be altruistic, hence their neutrality regarding rules, and cooperation with 'lawful' officials. Hence also their willingness to break or bend rules. Note that they are not bad or 'evil;' they are just able to make up their own minds about what is good or

not, avoiding dependence on authorities to decide for them. In Lacanian terms 'neutral good' characters display a dominance of the *imaginary* register in the sense of autonomy and self-assertion. (This is arguably also the case with 'chaotic good' characters, perhaps even to a greater extent.)

It seems to me that the typical film *noir* character known as the *noir* detective is paradigmatic of this 'neutral good' (and possibly also the 'chaotic good') alignment, a case in point being private detective Jake Gittes in Roman Polanski's justly famous *Chinatown* (1974) – often regarded as the best film *noir* ever made, recalling that film *noir* as genre is predicated on the ineradicable presence of evil in the world (Olivier 2004a). Jake does not mind bending the rules for the sake of justice; neither does he back off when threatened by any goons. His altruism shows in giving everyone the benefit of the doubt until they show their true (evil) character beyond any doubt. In the light of Lacan's three orders it appears that the imaginary predominates (he is self-assertive in the ego-register), with the 'real' slightly less so (he has a kind of sixth sense for evil that surpasses language). This does not mean that he is deficient in the symbolic register; he is quite adept at communicating with others; it is just not dominant.

Is merging Lacan's three registers with Dungeons and Dragons' 'alignments' justifiable?

The question has to be posed, whether the proposed merger between Lacan's three registers and Dungeons and Dragons' 'alignments' is theoretically – and more debatably, regarding psychological practice – justifiable. After all, it could, as observed earlier, be *just* an inconsequential 'thought experiment', and nothing more. The answer is, I believe, affirmative, for the following reasons, which have been hinted at earlier, in passing.

The three Lacanian registers of the 'real', the imaginary and the symbolic do not, explicitly, indicate any ethical or moral import, except insofar as the imaginary and the symbolic index these, at least implicitly, where narcissism or autonomous self-assertion, regarding the former, and the embeddedness of the 'moral' law in language, concerning the latter, are concerned. The 'real' may appear to be problematical, but even here one could arguably bring ethical and moral considerations to bear, insofar as a person who is 'real'-dominant would arguably – given the supra-linguistic character of the 'real' – if not impervious to ethical or moral concerns, then at least be less susceptible to them. However, by merging these psychic registers with DaD alignments, an ethical and moral dimension is explicitly added. To the extent that the imaginary and symbolic (and even the 'real') implicitly allude to these dimensions, augmenting or overlaying them with the alignments in question would therefore conceivably make them theoretically more complex. This is the case insofar as every subject would ineluctably be comprehended through a 'finer' heuristic grid than before, which enriches them interpretively and possibly even as far as diagnostic considerations

go. This will be kept in mind with what follows, which should either confirm, or (in Popperian terms) falsify this expectation.

Knowing one's adversary or enemy: psychopaths and sociopaths

This is where we start focussing on (mainly fictional) characters who embody what is arguably the most adversarial, if not inimical kind of person one ever has to face in reality. Where should one say does a psychopath (or sociopath) belong in terms of a combination of Lacan's three registers and the Dungeons and Dragons ethical/moral alignments? As one might expect, among the latter one would find that those that have to do with 'evil' are the most relevant – in fact, *all three of the variations on an 'evil' alignment may clarify something about psychopaths and sociopaths.* Before we delve deeper into the meaning of 'psychopath' (and the closely related concept, 'sociopath'), consider the telling question asked by Ray Williams (2018) in a fascinating article, namely, why there are more psychopaths in corporate boardrooms compared to other environments.

Williams reminds one that the first examples that come to mind when we think of psychopaths are the fictional Hannibal Lecter or the real Jeffrey Dahmer, never dreaming that real-life 'corporate psychopaths' have destructive effects on the lives of people and sometimes entire countries through their boardroom decisions. In fact, he points out, while the percentage of psychopaths in the general population amounts to about 1%, studies have indicated that this increases three- and even fourfold among business executives and leaders.

He further reports that a Danish study which carried out tests among students according to their major subjects found, alarmingly, that – when assessed by means of the criteria of Machiavellianism (disposing of one's rivals ruthlessly), narcissism (excessive self-love and egocentrism) and psychopathy (unscrupulous, remorseless decisions regarding others) – students majoring in economics and business displayed significantly higher levels of these 'dark' personality qualities. Those specialising in law occupied a position in the centre, while students primarily interested in psychology showed – perhaps predictably – the least inclination to psychopathy. I would add that students drawn to philosophy are equally unlikely to tend to psychopathy or sociopathy, for the simple reason that, like psychology, philosophy is a discipline that promises, and cultivates, understanding in its practitioners, not (the drive for) power.

The researchers in this study suggested that their findings may be because of a need for status, money and power, which is associated with the corporate sphere, where individuals with these dubious traits may benefit from them. Put differently: decisions which benefit both the self and the company, often at the cost of rival companies – and sometimes the public, as Joel Bakan (2004) has demonstrated at length – come easily

to individuals endowed with the 'dark triad' of personal characteristics, listed above. Commenting further on the characteristics of psychopaths, Williams writes:

> The hallmarks of the psychopathic personality involve egocentric, grandiose behavior, completely lacking empathy and conscience. Additionally, psychopaths may be charismatic, charming, and adept at manipulating one-on-one interactions. In a corporation, one's ability to advance is determined in large measure by a person's ability to favorably impress the boss. Unfortunately, certain of these psychopathic qualities – in particular charm, charisma, grandiosity (which can be mistaken for vision or confidence) and the ability to 'perform' convincingly in one-on-one settings – are also qualities that can help one get ahead in the business world.

He also refers to the work of a well-known European psychoanalyst (see Verhaeghe 2014):

> Paul Verhaege, a Dutch psychologist and psychotherapist has a simple argument to explain the high incidence of psychopathy in the modern corporate world. He points the finger at our current economic system, neoliberal capitalism. Verhaeghe argues that meritocratic neoliberalism rewards those who display psychopathic traits. Risk taking, superficial charm, lack of empathy, impulsivity, setting short-term goals – are becoming necessary in the cut-throat corporate environment.

Having referred to psychopathy several times, precisely what does this psychological condition denote? Resonating with Williams's description, above, *The Oxford Dictionary of Psychology* (Colman 2003: 593) describes it thoroughly:

> **psychopathy** *n.*
> A mental disorder roughly equivalent to antisocial personality disorder, but with emphasis on affective and interpersonal traits such as superficial charm, pathological lying, egocentricity, lack of remorse, and callousness that have traditionally been regarded by clinicians as characteristic of psychopaths, rather than social deviance traits such as need for stimulation, parasitic lifestyle, poor behavioural controls, impulsivity, and irresponsibility that are prototypical of antisocial personality disorder. Whether psychopathy and antisocial personality disorder share a common referent is an open question. Compare sociopathy. psychopath *n.* A person with psychopathy. psychopathic *adj.*[From Greek *psyche* mind + *pathos* suffering.]

Sociopathy, which is closely related to, but not identical with, psychopathy, is characterised as follows (Colman 2003: 69):

antisocial personality disorder *n.*
A personality disorder characterized by a pervasive pattern of disregard for and violation of the rights of others, beginning in childhood or early adolescence and continuing into adulthood, with such signs and symptoms as failure to conform to social norms, manifested by repeated unlawful behaviour; deceitfulness, as indicated by repeated lying or swindling for pleasure or personal gain; impulsivity or failure to plan ahead; irritability and aggressiveness involving frequent assaults or fights; reckless disregard for the safety of self or others; consistent irresponsibility involving failure to hold down jobs or to honour financial obligations; and lack of remorse for the mistreatment of others, as indicated by indifference and rationalization. *Also called sociopathy* or (in ICD-10 and elsewhere) *dissocial personality disorder*. Compare conduct disorder, psychopathy, XYY syndrome. APD *abbrev.*

Note that, when scrutinising these characteristics of psychopaths and sociopaths, respectively, it is probably the case that many such individuals embody a synthesis of the two. They could, for example, display the "superficial charm, pathological lying, egocentricity, lack of remorse, and callousness" of the psychopath, while simultaneously reflecting signs of sociopathy as well, such as "a pervasive pattern of disregard for and violation of the rights of others", combined with "failure to conform to social norms, manifested by repeated unlawful behaviour; deceitfulness, as indicated by repeated lying or swindling for pleasure or personal gain".

When one consults the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5, 5th ed.; 2013), the descriptions drawn from the *Oxford Dictionary of Psychology* (Colman 2003) are corroborated. Under "Diagnostic Criteria" (DSM-5 2013: 659) one finds this account of "Antisocial Personality Disorder" (which merges psychopathy and sociopathy):

A. A pervasive pattern of disregard for and violation of the rights of others, occurring since age 15 years, as indicated by three (or more) of the following:

1. Failure to conform to social norms with respect to lawful behaviors, as indicated by repeatedly performing acts that are grounds for arrest.

2. Deceitfulness, as indicated by repeated lying, use of aliases, or conning others for personal profit or pleasure.

3. Impulsivity or failure to plan ahead.

4. Irritability and aggressiveness, as indicated by repeated physical fights or assaults.

5. Reckless disregard for safety of self or others.

6. Consistent irresponsibility, as indicated by repeated failure to sustain consistent work behavior or honor financial obligations.

7. Lack of remorse, as indicated by being indifferent to or rationalizing having hurt, mistreated, or stolen from another.

B. The individual is at least age 18 years.

C. There is evidence of conduct disorder with onset before age 15 years.

D. The occurrence of antisocial behavior is not exclusively during the course of schizophrenia or bipolar disorder.

Under "Diagnostic Features" (DSM5: 659) it is emphasised that:

> The essential feature of antisocial personality disorder is a pervasive pattern of disregard for, and violation of, the rights of others that begins in childhood or early adolescence and continues into adulthood. This pattern has also been referred to as *psychopathy, sociopathy,* or *dyssocial personality disorder.*

Considering that, according to DSM5, at least three of the listed criteria are required for a person to be justifiably evaluated as displaying signs of antisocial personality disorder, *in a sustained fashion*, as long as one's observation of – or acquaintance with – such a person confirms recurrent actions or behaviour corresponding to the relevant criteria, she or he could be described as a psychopath or a sociopath, both of which represent what is here conceived as an 'adversarial subject'.

Fictional psychopaths

Keeping in mind the characterisation of psychopaths by Williams and by *The Oxford Dictionary of Psychology*, above (particularly their lack of conscience and remorse), one has to ask the question, where they stand in the light of the proposed merging of Lacan's three registers and Dungeons and Dragons' system of ethical 'alignments'. It seems beyond doubt that they belong with Neutral and Chaotic Evil characters, and probably more with the latter, given the specification, that "a neutral evil… will not kill anyone needlessly", while chaotic evil characters "don't value people's lives, and they will do anything to fulfill their desires… they may do evil things even if they don't benefit from it".

An argument could be made to differentiate between the kind of psychopaths which are found in boardrooms belonging under the heading of 'Lawful Evil' characters, given the

stipulation, that they "often search for a well-ordered system", which they "try to exploit", and others in the 'evil' category. After all, even if some may arguably also be classified as 'neutral evil', these are not the psychopaths who work as (literal) assassins or go on killing sprees, such as the fictional Patrick Bateman (discussed below). Regarding the Lacanian registers, the manner in which psychopathic behaviour manifests itself would depend largely on which of these registers is dominant.

Patrick Bateman

A fictional example of a psychopath who exhibits all the traits listed above paradigmatically, is encountered in Bret Easton Ellis's nihilistic novel, *American Psycho* (1991), which has also been filmed (Harron 2000), with Christian Bale in the protagonist's role. Patrick Bateman (probably a corruption of 'Batman') embodies a psychopath so completely that the book and the film leave one with a hollow feeling born partly from disgust and partly from despair. The novel is, in my estimation, a work of genius that constructs a model by which one might assess those who occupy the oft-valorised position of investment banker, or any cognate profession in the business world. Not literally, perhaps, given Bateman's ambivalent role as banker by day and serial killer by night (a kind of contemporary Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde) but at least metaphorically, in so far as such businessmen (or -women) in the real world routinely have to indulge their desire to dispose of the competition in the financial world ruthlessly, if not sadistically, sometimes with disastrous material consequences for the latter.

Can Bateman be cogently comprehended through the combined Dungeons and Dragons/ Lacanian hermeneutic lens? Undoubtedly. Recall that psychopaths belong with Neutral and Chaotic Evil characters, particularly with the latter, because – unlike a 'neutral evil' character – chaotic evil characters "don't value people's lives". Hence, anything which promises to fulfill their unconscionable desires is up for grabs. This is graphically demonstrated in both the book and the film, where Bateman indulges his every sadistic whim, with his victims at the receiving end. There is no 'reason' to abuse and kill them in such a mind-blowingly cruel manner, except to satisfy his craving for their suffering and eventual demise.

What about the Lacanian twist to the tale? Given the graphic nature of Bateman's assault on his victims, it seems that the imaginary plays a decisive, even dominant, role in his exploits, combined with the Lacanian 'real', given that the latter goes beyond both the imaginary and the symbolic, instantiating the realm of the ineffable, inexpressible, and in this instance, horrific, or what might be termed the 'terrible sublime' – that which may be thought, but lacks a corresponding image because of its intolerable character, such as the phenomenon of Hiroshima or the Holocaust (Olivier 1997; 2021).

In the light of Bateman's ostensible intention, to destroy the very body-image of his victims through the act of cutting and gouging, for example where he mutilates the

body of a beggar with a knife (Ellis 1991: 124), another Lacanian insight asserts itself here, namely the significance of aggressivity, which I have explored elsewhere in relation to masochism, where the act of cutting one's own body may be understood as destroying an unwanted ego-image (Lacan 1977; Olivier 2005). Here, too, one might add that this is accompanied by the 'real' raising its (in this case ugly, terrifying) head, except that, with a masochistic act, it is the *self* that is the object of destruction at the imaginary level, and not the *other*, as in the case of Bateman's sadistic-psychopathic sprees. Nevertheless, despite the evident prominence of these two registers in Bateman's actions, he does not lack the symbolic, as the following excerpt from Ellis's novel shows – surprisingly, given the decisive functioning of the imaginary and the 'real' – where he tells his friends at a dinner party (1991: 14):

> "Well, we have to end apartheid for one. And slow down the nuclear arms race, stop terrorism and world hunger. Ensure a strong national defense, prevent the spread of communism in Central America, work for a Middle East peace settlement, prevent U.S. military involvement overseas. We have to ensure that America is a respected world power. Now that's not to belittle our domestic problems, which are equally important, if not more. Better and more affordable long-term care for the elderly, control and find a cure for the AIDS epidemic, clean up environmental damage from toxic waste and pollution, improve the quality of primary and secondary education, strengthen laws to crack down on crime and illegal drugs. We also have to ensure that college education is affordable for the middle class and protect Social Security for senior citizens plus conserve natural resources and wilderness areas and reduce the influence of political action committees."

What makes of Patrick Bateman such a suitable and convincing template for psychopathic individuals, is what I have alluded to as his 'ambivalent' role. What I mean is that Ellis has cleverly crafted the novel in such ontological-literary terms that one is never sure whether, in the intra-fictional Manhattan business world, Bateman is a banker with an overactive sadistic imagination that conjures up a series of bloody murders, sometimes combined with violent sexual encounters, committed by himself, or whether he *really* lives this double life. Not that a conclusive answer to this question would alter the analysis, above, of his character in the Lacanian and Dungeons and Dragons registers. And perhaps the final stroke of genius is that Ellis concludes the book with the words, 'THIS IS NOT AN EXIT', supposedly when Bateman is looking for an exit to leave a certain venue called 'Harry's'.

The implication? The reader should not fool her- or himself into believing that they can leave the fictional world of the novel behind. It is an exemplary poststructuralist (sometimes called metafictional) literary device of the 'both/and' kind. The novel is *and*

is not fiction; the former because (phenomenologically speaking) one 'intends' the intra-novelistic reality as imaginary, and the latter, in so far as that concluding literary *coup* shocks the attentive reader into the awareness that the world depicted in the novel bears an uncanny, unsettling resemblance to the real world in which we live today (and even when the novel was published, in 1991).

Dr Hannibal Lecter

In a sense, the character of Dr Hannibal Lecter needs no introduction; as fictional (cinematic) characters go, this psychopath *par excellence* is firmly cemented into the firmament of the social imaginary. In *Silence of the Lambs* (Demme 1991), Lecter (Anthony Hopkins) – a highly intelligent, cannibalistic psychiatrist incarcerated in a state hospital for the criminally insane – is interviewed by Clarisse Starling (Jodie Foster), an FBI trainee, with a view to eliciting from him information that would aid her in tracking down a serial killer who calls himself 'Buffalo Bill'. The latter's nickname derives from the fact that he skins the young women he murders, apparently – as Starling later finds out – to sew a 'suit' or dress from his victims' skins, patterned on the designs of his first victim, who was a dressmaker.

Cutting the proverbial long story (which can easily be traced on the internet) short, with the help of Lecter (who offers her various clues), Starling eventually manages to track down and dispatch 'Buffalo Bill' when he tries to kill her. The film narrative ends with Lecter – who has escaped from custody after gruesomely murdering his guards and using the 'face' (facial skin) of one of them as a disguise – telling Starling chillingly during a phone call (with obviously intended ambiguity) that he was "having an old friend for dinner", before following the duplicitous Dr Chilton, one of his enemies, into a crowd.

Although the audience does not witness Lecter actually eating any of his victims in the film, this heightens, rather than diminishes the abjection and horror of such a spectacle – a well-known technique in fiction: stimulating the imagination through omission. This is further intensified by Lecter mentioning some of these 'meals', such as where he remarks that he once ate a census official, who had the misfortune of visiting him, "with some fava beans and a nice Chianti". This information, together with scenes showing how deftly and unscrupulously he disposes of the two guards, leaves one in no doubt that he is a paradigmatic incarnation of psychopathy.

What does the combined interpretive lens of Lacan's three registers and the role-playing game, Dungeons and Dragons, yield in Lecter's case, apart from apparently (even conspicuously) casting him in the category of 'Chaotic Evil'? Or does it? Should one not put him in that of 'Neutral Evil', rather, in light of the fact that, when he phones Starling, he reassures her that he means her no harm? After all, the latter category's characters, unlike the former's, do not kill needlessly. This is a debatable issue, but

whatever the case may be, Lecter belongs in one (or perhaps both) of these. To the extent that 'Lawful Evil' characters are attracted to "a well-ordered system", one could even detect traces of this in Lecter.

Compared to Patrick Bateman, who (as was argued earlier) exemplifies a chaotic evil character with a penchant for puncturing and dismembering the embodied ego of his victims at the imaginary level, in this way revealing, paradoxically, the *inexpressible* manifestation of the Lacanian 'real' by way of what Lacan (1981: 53-55) calls a "missed encounter", where does Hannibal Lecter stand? There is a certain similarity regarding the first, imaginary specification – Lecter also cuts his victims up – but in his case the paradoxical nature of the 'real' is displayed differently. He ingests his victims' bodies in their brute, 'real' facticity, merging with them at the ineffable organic niveau, so that one can say that the 'real' is dominant in his psychopathic subjectivity – this is what drives him. Ironically, as in Bateman's case, the symbolic – while not dominant – also plays quite a prominent role in Lecter's actions, insofar as he excels at analysing the material on 'Buffalo Bill' provided to him, in order to formulate clues that might assist Clarice Starling in tracking the latter down.

Jeffrey Dahmer

With Jeffrey Dahmer one crosses the line separating fiction from the factual world, although it could be argued that, given all the media attention to this notorious psychopathic serial killer, a layer of fiction has been added to his image in the social imaginary, particularly since the release of the Netflix documentary film series (created by Ian Brennan and Ryan Murphy), titled *Dahmer – Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story* (2022). It would make for an interesting study to explore the extent to which this film narrative – which unavoidably required thoroughgoing, sustained interpretation, by Murphy and Brennan, as well as by the individuals who directed the separate (ten) episodes – fictionalised the life on which it was based, but this is not the purpose of the present article.

Hence, suffice it to state that (apart from the documentary series) the available information (accessible on the internet, for example Jenkins 2025; FBI 2014) regarding Dahmer's life (1960 –1994) – or more particularly, the time during which he committed the murders (from 1978 to 1991) – provides ample material for comprehending his psychopathic personality through the heuristic lens employed in this article.

Without doubt Dahmer's alignment is with Chaotic Evil, as his choice of victim was evidently arbitrary, mostly guided by homoerotic attraction, which corresponds with the typical need, for such a character, to satisfy his (sexual) desires, but unlike Neutral Evil characters, not bothered by the thought that killing anyone would be 'unnecessary'. This arbitrariness is shown by the fact that he killed a hitchhiker picked

up by him (Steven Hicks) when the latter turned down his sexual advances, and by the fact that he murdered Steven Tuomi, with whom he was in a hotel room, in a state of drugged unawareness, discovering it only the next morning. In other words, anyone who was unfortunate enough to cross Dahmer's path was a potential victim. This was the case, too, with Tony Hughes in 1991. Admittedly, some got away because of fortuitous circumstances, such as Ronald Flowers Jr., who would almost certainly have been another victim, if Dahmer's grandmother, Catherine (with whom he was living at the time) had not intervened when she noticed that Flowers had been drugged, and persuaded Jeffrey to put him on a bus. In sum, Dahmer's psychopathy is a persuasive example of a psychic condition aligned with Chaotic Evil.

It is only when one turns to an assessment of his actions in terms of the Lacanian triad of registers that the full implications of his psychopathy become apparent, however. He certainly was not lacking in the symbolic register, as shown by the regularity with which he managed to persuade his victims – met at various venues – to accompany him to his house or apartment, where he usually (unless prevented by unexpected events) murdered them by either strangling them or bludgeoning them to death with something like a hammer.

This was not where the register-dominance peculiar to Dahmer manifested itself decisively, though. If the fictional characters of Bateman and Lecter, discussed earlier, displayed unmistakable signs of the combined dominance of the imaginary and the suprasensible 'real' – detectable, for instance, in the mutilation of their victims' bodies – Dahmer's fixation on the (attraction *and* destruction of the) body-image of his victims went even further. He sometimes dismembered their corpses – something he learned to do in the course of dissecting animals – and sometimes disposed of them chemically. The fact that, after dismembering the body of Steven Tuomi, he sealed his head in a bag and put it in a secure box received from his grandmother, as well as the evidence that he not only drank human blood from blood bags when he worked as a phlebotomist, but also occasionally cooked and ate the flesh of his victims, puts him in a category of dominance by especially the Lacanian 'real' which exceeds even that of Lecter in terms of abjection and horror.

In brief, while Dahmer's ingestion of human blood and his victims' (cooked) flesh is on a par with Lecter's cannibalism and the dominance of the 'real' that this signals, his chemical reduction of some of his victims' corpses to the anonymity of the inorganic signifies his own proximity to the inexpressible 'real', or – in aesthetic terms – the unrepresentable, terrible sublime. We are here confronted by a subject in whom 'chaotic evil' and the inclination to reduce the other to the ineffable 'real' are so conspicuous that – in terms of what was stated at the outset in this article – as 'adversary' he is inscrutable, indescribably lethal, and hence to be avoided at all costs. Whether one would be able

to recognise such an individual – I hesitate to use the term, 'person' – as a psychopath in a social setting is another matter, of course, given the characteristic intelligence and charm of psychopathic personalities (evident in the examples discussed above). These attributes should already flash danger signals, of course.

Applying the augmented schema to a really existing subject

The real test of the heuristic usefulness – and perhaps the diagnostic efficacy – of the enhanced theoretical grid lies, as anonymous critics have perspicaciously reminded me, in its applicability to a real-life subject's behaviour. That is, the theoretical amalgamation of Lacan and DaD should arguably and demonstrably be shown to be useful in identifying existing individuals as 'adversarial subjects', and possibly candidates for the category of psychopathy or sociopathy. This contrasts with those instances, like the three discussed earlier, where the individuals in question were either persuasively presented as psychopaths in fictional narratives, or in retrospect, in the case of an historically documented subject.

I therefore propose focusing *anonymously* – for purposes of protecting the identity of the person involved – on an existing person (a man) who is relatively well known to myself through a good friend (his father), by first reconstructing his 'profile', as it were, and then offering an interpretation framed in terms of the enlarged and complexified theoretical framework outlined earlier. I shall call this person simply Mr P, and offer the following brief reconstruction of his personality, narratively interbraided with relevant episodes that shed light on my claim, that he is a candidate for 'adversarial subject'-status, and possibly for that of sociopathic behaviour. His profile is as follows:

- He is the father of a young boy, who receives a monthly salary as a teacher who works with children in a formal context.

- He was married before, but there are no children from this marriage.

- Mr P is separated, and shares custody with his erstwhile partner, who also earns a monthly salary. He sometimes threatens to bar her access to their child, claiming that he has the funds to employ an attorney to do so, whereas she lacks the money to oppose him.

- He has a married sister, with whom he previously had a relatively stable relationship, which has become unstable, arguably as a result of his own behaviour towards her and particularly her husband (and the husband's mother).

- Mr P's relationship with his father (my friend, who is divorced, but in a stable relationship with a partner), has been subject to the vicissitudes of his

personality, but until recently at least included intermittent mutual visits, partly motivated by his father's desire to see his (only) grandchild. This relationship has deteriorated to the point where his father has cut off all communication with him (through social media such as Telegram, for example), even though it is at the considerable cost of his son's retaliation, to block all access of his father to the latter's grandson.

- Mr P is fond of drinking (alcoholic beverages) in the evening, sometimes to the point of being inebriated, which seems to be conducive to becoming aggressive.

- The last item, above, is related to the fact that Mr P maintains an active social life, mixing with 'friends' at restaurants (which he can ill afford; his father has frequently been left little choice but to send him money to compensate for his own financial fecklessness). One gets the impression that the image of being very sociable, cultivated by Mr P, serves his own ulterior motives.

- Despite this appearance of being sociable, and having many 'friends', he has treated some supposed friends very badly (by laying blame on them for deeds performed by himself, and which he was accused of doing, for instance) and even broken ties with individuals who used to be his 'best' friends.

One might wonder how a relationship between a father and a son could worsen to such a point (although there are probably many which are worse), but a narrative glimpse into the background and the 'mechanics' of the relationship should help to make this intelligible:

- When Mr P was still at school, he frequently engaged in truancy, together with a friend, and lied to his parents about this. It was subsequently discovered that, in early high school, such truancy was accompanied by drinking alcoholic beverages.

- While still married, Mr P had a frequently stormy relationship with his wife, and persuaded his father (and mother) that this was precipitated by unreasonable expectations by his wife, which supposedly explained his extramarital affairs at the time.

- Once divorced, he stayed with his father and the latter's life partner for some time, before entering into a relationship with a new partner, destined to become the mother of his son. During this time his father was obliged to rush him to the emergency ward at a hospital several times, after he had supposedly

taken an overdose of sleeping pills, and once after attempting to slash his wrists. His father suspects that these 'attempts at suicide' were faked.

- Mr P eventually moved to a different city with his new partner, and for a time things seemed to calm down. He seemed to have become more stable, and during this time his father visited him and his partner several times.

- During one of these visits, Mr P confronted his father, claiming that the latter's partner was seeing other men, and insisting that his father should end the relationship. His father refused, denying that his partner was guilty of infidelity.

- Eventually Mr P's partner had a child, whose presence initially appeared to reinforce his relative stability, and made it possible for his father to visit with the intention of seeing his grandchild.

- Some time after their son's birth, Mr P showed signs of what could perhaps be described as the male equivalent of 'postpartum depression' – a term used by his father – and he decided to book into a clinic where he said he hoped to get some rest, as he could not cope with his infant son's presence at home.

- It later transpired that, while at the clinic, Mr P had slept with another 'patient', a woman, leading to his partner's decision, to leave him.

- Afterwards, Mr P tried to persuade his partner to 'try again' (to re-establish their relationship) on several occasions, but the latter refused, arguing that, whenever they had experienced difficulties in their relationship – which she attributed to his inability to abide by his promises – he had assured her that if she allowed them to 'try again', things would be better, which never happened. Consequently, they separated physically, moving into separate apartments, which put additional financial pressure on both. This also entailed coming to a formalised arrangement concerning joint custody of their infant son. According to his ex-partner, the unavoidable contact between them when their son is exchanged from one to the other, is often accompanied by aggressive behaviour on Mr P's part, such as, for example, being blamed by Mr P for not being willing to 'take him back'.

- In a social media message to a former friend (who shared it with his father), Mr P claimed that he "fucking hates" his ex-partner, and that he had since "moved on", while she was stuck in her ways, just moving between their son and her work.

- Since that time, Mr P has shown aggressive behaviour on many occasions, not

merely towards his ex-partner, but also towards his father and his married sister (and her husband).

- To illustrate: he would frequently use abusive, aggressive language to his ex-partner (as reported to me by his father), not only directly, but also on social media, as well as to his father, and never apologised.

- A recent incident illustrates this well. Out of the blue, Mr P phoned his married sister's husband and accused him, very belligerently, of 'breaking up the family', by coming between himself and his sister, and when her husband, exasperated by the unprovoked attack, ended the phone call, he promptly phoned the latter's mother, and repeated the onslaught. His sister subsequently cut off all communication with him.

- Shortly afterwards, Mr P launched a similar attack on his own father, after the latter had criticised him for the unjustifiable verbal assault on his sister's husband and the latter's mother. Furthermore, Mr P refused to apologise for his behaviour, showing no remorse, as indeed on many similar occasions before this. When his father refused to back down, and subsequently – given Mr P's continued aggressiveness towards him, blocked him on social media – Mr P sent me (a close friend of his father) a message on Telegram, which I reproduce here:

  Mr P: Hi B. I hope you are well, and already settled in your new place. Question: Why did my father block me?

  Me: Hi P – Your father blocked you because of your vicious attack on your sister's husband and his mother. And because of what you said to him. It is up to the two of you to sort this out.

  Mr P: I appreciate your honesty so much. I cannot believe that a man, who is turning 70, would block me. Totally childish. And AGAIN heard and believe only one side of a story. Please say the following to him: You choose your daughter's husband, again, above your OWN child. You don't know a quarter of the truth. But it is your choice. I will therefore make sure that you will never see your grandson again. You can get comfort from your daughter and her fucking husband. You are not interested in your own biological son. Shit father that you are. You can get another grandchild from your daughter and her husband. But oh snap! I forgot that she cannot have children (followed by a smirking emoji face). [Mr P's sister suffers from endometriosis. B.O.]

  Me: You are cruel, P…

Significance of this 'profile'

What does an analysis – through the combined lens of Lacan's three registers of subjectivity and the DaD set of ethical and moral alignments – of this reconstruction of Mr P's profile and narrative account of relevant episodes in his life produce? Considering the psychic domains correlative to the three registers of the 'real', the imaginary and the symbolic, with Mr P in mind, it seems that the *imaginary* plays a large role, in the sense of tending towards a degree of narcissism (not autonomous self-assertion), given that Mr P is predominantly concerned with his own interests, to the detriment of others. The supra-linguistic '*real'* also features to a noticeable extent, specifically insofar as his use of language (the symbolic) – which is often accompanied by a volume and tone of voice betraying undisguised animosity, according to his ex-partner, father and sister's husband – cannot disguise raw feelings of inarticulate aggression towards his father, his ex-partner and his sister's husband. Recall that the 'real' in you is that which eludes linguistic articulation; it could be the 'saint' in you, but it might also be the 'demon'. While the *symbolic* does not appear prominently in the information supplied above, the fact that Mr P is not hesitant to express aggressiveness verbally, and sometimes appears to be very sociable, mixing with 'friends' at restaurants and using social media extensively, suggests that he desires to be seen as sociable, and is 'comfortable' in the symbolic. It does not appear to be the dominant register, however.

How is this impression modified, or complexified, by the DaD alignments? In light of the information concerning Mr P, I believe one can safely discard the first five alignments, and look more closely at the last four, to wit, Chaotic neutral, Lawful Evil, Neutral Evil and Chaotic Evil. The first of these resonates to a certain degree with Mr P's personality, insofar as chaotic neutral characters are said to be "frequently…disruptive to the party and can wreak havoc on even the best laid plans". One can jettison neutral evil, in the absence of strong evidence that Mr P. desires a well-ordered system. When one gets to neutral evil and chaotic evil as (ethical and moral) alignments, however, both seem to chime with Mr P's profile in varying degrees. He is unmistakably selfish, and would easily turn against 'allies' or supposed friends. Nor does he hesitate to hurt others in an effort to achieve his own ends. It is difficult to say whether he would avoid 'going out of his way' to actualise his desires, however, or eschew causing 'mayhem' if it would not be in his own interest. In this respect it appears that Mr P is closer to the alignment of chaotic evil, insofar as he does not appear to respect rules, and would do virtually anything to satisfy his own desires, although it is perhaps unjustifiable to claim that he does not value people's lives. He is certainly selfish and ego-centric, but there is no indication that he is capable of either murder or the kind of negligence that could endanger other people's lives.

Fusing the Lacanian component and that of DaD, one might say that Mr P appears to be *imaginary*-dominant in the narcissistic sense (and not that of self-assertion or autonomy,

which is usually accompanied by a strong sense of ethics and morality), and that the unsymbolisable '*real*' plays a noticeable role in his actions, while the *symbolic* (in which ethical and moral principles are embedded) is active as social register, but is not dominant. This resonates with a fusion of the ethically and morally relevant alignments of chaotic neutral, neutral and chaotic evil, as qualified above. *In a nutshell, Mr P comes across as a selfish, ego-centric character, motivated by fits of uncomprehending rage when his wishes are resisted, as well as being remorseless, morally unscrupulous, unpredictable, and capable of relationship-destructive and disruptive behaviour in the face of real or imagined opposition*.

Does this finding allow one to describe or categorise him as an 'adversarial subject'? I believe that it does, insofar as 'adversarial' denotes latent and actual hostility and aggressiveness, even if usually covered up by a veneer of sociability. The evidence of frequent displays of aggression confirms this. Could one go further and tentatively propose that Mr P displays signs of being a candidate for psychopathy or sociopathy? Considering that DSM-5 (2013: 659), which is compatible with the *Oxford Dictionary*'s corresponding characterisation, requires evidence of "…a pervasive pattern of disregard for and violation of the rights of others, occurring since age 15 years, as indicated by three (or more) of the following" (as cited earlier), the reconstruction of Mr P's profile, supported by a selection of relevant events pertaining to his behaviour, does appear to confirm such candidacy on his part. How so? Number 2 on the list of DSM-5 criteria, namely, "deceitfulness…", as well as number 3, "impulsivity…", number 4, "…aggressiveness…", and number 7, "lack of remorse…" may all be discerned as evidence of such candidacy for psychopathy or sociopathy in Mr P's profile and supporting narrative information. Moreover, Mr P is older than 18 years, and the relevant behaviour manifested itself before he was 15 years old.

Does the theoretical model where the Lacanian registers are amalgamated with the DaD ethical and moral alignments amplify this finding in any significant manner? This is arguably indeed the case, in the sense of the amplified theory providing a dimension that goes beyond what would otherwise be mere categorisation based on behavioural evidence. The theoretical model imparts a crucial hermeneutic and analytical level of understanding to what are potentially diagnostic grounds, as can be seen in the elaboration above, which was summarised as follows: *In a nutshell, Mr P comes across as a selfish, ego-centric character (imaginary register), motivated by fits of uncomprehending rage (register of the 'real') when his wishes are resisted, as well as being remorseless, morally unscrupulous, unpredictable, and capable of relationship-destructive and disruptive behaviour in the face of real or imagined opposition (DaD alignments)*.

Conclusion: What one can learn from this

What may one learn from the preceding discussion as far as the 'adversarial subject' is concerned? When approached through the combined lenses of Lacan's three

registers and the 'alignments' found in Dungeons and Dragons, one is alerted to several salient, tell-tale characteristics on the part of potential adversaries whom one might encounter in various social situations, the awareness of which should equip one with the required vigilance to avoid confrontations of the kind that could have detrimental consequences for the unwary. While the probability of coming face to face with a ('chaotic evil') psychopath such as the two fictional ones and the one real-world example that have been interpretively analysed in this article is low, it is possible, if not likely, that the less lethal, but still potentially harmful kind, who – as Williams argues (see above) – populate boardrooms in the business world, may cross one's path sooner or later. On those occasions, should they occur, being armed with the knowledge imparted by a fusion of Lacan's three registers and the Dungeon and Dragons 'alignments', would assist one in identifying such potential adversaries and avoid disadvantageous confrontations. Moreover, amplifying the discussion of two fictional and one well-known psychopath(s) in recent history with an account of an existing, but anonymously presented subject, with a view to gauging the possibility of contributing to diagnostic grounds of such a subject's identification as 'adversarial subject', has yielded affirmative findings, that confirm, furthermore, the fecundity of the proposed amalgamation of Lacanian theory with Dungeons and Dragons alignments.

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