

Lilian Munk Røsing

PhD., Associate Professor



**Professional Affiliations:**

Department for Arts and Cultural  
Studies, University of  
Copenhagen

**Publications:**

Three books published (in  
Danish):  
*At læse barnet, (Reading the  
Child)*, 2001  
*Kønnetes katekismus, (The  
Catechism of Gender)*, 2005  
*Autoritetens genkomst, The  
Return of Authority*, 2007

Articles in English:  
'The Phantom of the Father and  
the Sinthome of Love' *Journal of  
Culture and the Unconscious*  
(2004)  
'To Be or not to Be. On the  
Insistence of the Unconscious'  
*Journal of Culture and the  
Unconscious* (2007)

## Duty, Enjoyment, and Love

The development of capitalist society, from its puritan beginning to the consumer's society of today, could roughly be described as a development from duty to enjoyment. Or from the Lutheran dictum: "Man does not deserve anything" to the message of the commercial: "You deserve this" ("because you are worth it"). It is not that the late capitalist consumer has become "liberated" from duty and superego, it is rather that he now has the duty to enjoy. The superego of late capitalism tells us in shining neon letters: Enjoy!

The talk will enquire into the relation between duty and enjoyment by evoking Jaques Lacan's concept of "the obscene superego" and Søren Kierkegaard's analysis of the vicious circle of "law" and "sin". It will be centered in a psychoanalytical interpretation of Kierkegaard's *Works of Love*, hereby asking the questions: Could "love" be the answer to the late capitalist (lack of) ethics? And how are we then to understand this "love"?

According to Jaques Lacan and Slavoj Žižek, superego as the commandment to enjoy is not a new thing, but as old as the superego itself. Rather than in Kant and his moral imperative (you can do this because you must), the Lacanian superego has its image in the Marquis de Sade and his imperative to enjoy (you must do this because you can). The idea that duty and enjoyment are induced at the same time actually goes back to Saint Paul and his famous lines in *Romans 7:7*: "I do not know sin, but by the law; for I had not known concupiscence, if the law did not say: Thou shalt not covet." What Paul is saying here, is that by telling us what we shall not do, the Law at the same time tells us what we really want to do. When the Ten Commandments tell us not to steal, kill, cheat, envy etc., they at the same time tell us that these are the really enjoyable things to do.

Enjoyment is thus not really the transgression of duty, rather the two of them together sustain the Law. What transgresses the circle of duty and enjoyment is love. This is the basic idea of Kierkegaard's *Works of Love* which is one long reflection on the strangest commandment of all: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." The talk will try to follow this reflection (in its ethical and existential rather than religious implications), searching in Kierkegaard for an answer to that deadlock of duty and enjoyment in which we seem to be caught today. It will be argued that the commandment of love must be understood as something different from the commandments of the Law, and that the strangeness and provocation of the "neighbour" should not be reduced.