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Jacques Lacan on Love: Realistic Cynic or Inveterate Optimist

ABSTRACT

A perennial question of philosophy, literature and psychoanalysis centres on the impact of love in human living, and endeavours to offer definition and explanation of this concept. From the Pre-Socratics, through Plato and Aristotle, to Derrida and Kristeva, philosophical reflections on 'truth', 'meaning', and subjectivity inevitably involve an exploration of the centrality of love in human experience, its significance as a characteristic of being human, and its response to the question 'how is one to live'? This essay explores, through the work of a philosopher who is considered notoriously cynical about human nature and its vicissitudes, the question of love from the perspective of its possibility in the realm of human relationships, and thereby examines the potential obstacles to its experience. Through a selected reading of the work of French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, the possibility of love is examined with a view to confronting the impediments to its experience – evident in any analysis of the contemporary world – and simultaneously to ascertain if such obstacles are insurmountable.

BIOGRAPHY

I am a research student in Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, Ireland. The title of my PhD thesis is 'The Possibility of Love: An Interdisciplinary Approach'. The thesis examines the possibility of love through a reading of philosophy, psychoanalysis and poetry as three disciplines concerned with truth, subjectivity, and the impact of love in

human experience.

JACQUES LACAN ON LOVE: REALISTIC CYNIC OR INVETERATE OPTIMIST?

Lacan enables us to question the way the human subject is structured by language, as he designates this structuring as central to human existence. This description of the subject's experience focuses on the meaning of subjectivity, the experiential stages determined in the development of the human subject, and the ambiguities and conflicts inherent in the living of a human life. Lacan's work is essentially an exploration of the following questions. What is a human being? What does it mean to be human? What does a human being need? How is a human being to live? And especially, what does a human being desire? Such questions have exercised the minds of philosophers from Plato and Aristotle, to Derrida and Kristeva. Integral to these questions is the concept of love. Lacan is notoriously cynical in his analysis of love, and draws much of his conclusions from observation and exploration of the attempted manifestations of love in the phenomenon of transference in the psychoanalytic setting.ⁱ The central importance of this concept for Lacanian thought can be verified by Lacan's statement that the question of love has always been pivotal to his work: 'I've been doing nothing but that since I was twenty, exploring the philosophers on the subject of love'ⁱⁱ. According to Lacan, psychoanalytic theory, as evidenced in Freudian texts, inevitably impinges on our understanding of love, and firmly positions this understanding within an ethical framework: 'Analysis has brought a very important change of perspective on love by placing it at the centre of ethical experience'ⁱⁱⁱ. The possibility of love, in sexual and non-sexual forms, is therefore questioned throughout Lacan's work, and in suggesting that it is often apparently impossible, he engages with the obstacles to its experience.

THE PARADOX OF LANGUAGE

in everything that approaches it, language merely manifests its inadequacy^{iv}.

Lacan's philosophy explores perennial questions pertaining to our understanding of concepts such as the subject, identity, recognition, desire, the good, and happiness. Lacan's view of human relationships places the subject as always at a distance from the object, the other. It is in this complex interrelationship between subject and object, self and other, that Lacan situates his delineation of the subject. He reformulates and expands on the dialogical and linguistic exigencies of human nature, and in rendering the subject as essentially a speaking being, a *parle-être*, he outlines the potential obstacles to love, knowledge, truth and happiness which originate in the alienation of the subject from the real, from desire, from the self; an alienation that is congruent with the individual's inescapable dependence on the distancing effect of language: 'And the subject, while he may appear to be the slave of language, is still more the slave of a discourse in the universal movement of which his place is already inscribed at his birth, if only in the form of his proper name'^v. Thus, Lacan raises questions regarding the conception of the subject, the approach of the other, and the existence of a relationship between the two. He suggests that all of our understanding is susceptible to the illusions, mirages, and distortions which are often implied by the unquestioned supremacy which is allocated to the signifiers that define our experience – words which name and translate both our inner and outer perceptions. The power of signifiers to label our experience and define our actions entails a threat to individual interpretation of one's personal reality, and an attraction to the safety of conformity and adaptation, regardless of whether the object of adaptation is beneficial or destructive, life-enhancing or dysfunctional.

The paradox of language, in Lacan's exposition, emerges from the conflict between the subject's dependence on the apparatus of language as the only recourse available for expression, discourse, and relationship, 'the world of interhuman relations, the world of language'^{vi} and the failure of language to say it all: 'The whole truth is what cannot be told. It is what can only be told on the condition that one doesn't push it to the edge, that one only half-tells (*mi-dire*) it'^{vii}. Lacan repeatedly returns to his argument that the truth can only be half-said: 'half-saying is the internal law of any kind of enunciation of the truth'^{viii}, but he nevertheless considers the attempt essential and worthwhile. The paradox of language, as both a means and an obstacle to communication, inevitably impacts on the communication, the experience, and the possibility of love, as it is constitutive of love that it is somehow communicable.

Lacan formulates the mirror stage as the developmental moment in the subject's life when recognition of itself is assumed. The reflection in the mirror, in the gaze of the other, is taken as representing the identity of the subject. The child is captivated by its own image and misrecognizes this 'image' as its 'self'. Entry into what Lacan terms the imaginary realm is accomplished. Henceforth the child is aware of a rupture, a separation, between itself and the other; the pre-mirror stage of complete merger with the source of need satisfaction is fractured, and thus a gap, a lack, is created. This lack is the birth of desire, the desire to return to the state of unspoken and unconscious equilibrium where there is no demand because every need is capable of satisfaction. Now the lack necessitates the communication of need and demand, and hence the development of the subject within language.

The child's entry into language is an entry into the symbolic mode of identification and representation which precedes the subject; 'language, with its structures, exists prior to each subject's entry into it at a certain moment in his mental development'^{ix}. From this moment in development, this entanglement of individual and collective meaning, there are two forces which distance the subject from the real; the imaginary realm wherein one's identity, one's sense of self and one's sense of the world, is constructed through the image, the reflection, the recognition, of the other, 'The transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image'^x, and the symbolic realm wherein one abides by the laws, the structures, and the incompleteness of language in order to attain and maintain one's identity as a human subject in the world, 'Because the law of man has been the law of language since the first words of recognition presided over the first gifts'^{xi}.

The paradox of language is its effect in distancing the subject from the real, the impossible to say, while simultaneously providing the only pathway to the reality of one's experience, of oneself and of others: 'The function of the mirror stage thus turns out, in my view, to be a particular case of the function of imagos, which is to establish a relationship between an organism and its reality'^{xii}. The necessity of establishing a relationship between the organism and its reality is central to Freud's analysis of the conflict between individual happiness and collective security, outlined in his essay *Civilization and its Discontents*, and this title is echoed by Lacan when he refers to 'the malaise of civilization'^{xiii}. Lacan's study of the subject in tension with the socio-cultural environment, the essence of the social bond, leads him to the conclusion that repression is inevitable. 'From the moment he begins to speak, from that exact moment onward and not before, I can understand that there is such a thing as repression'^{xiv}. Repression is necessitated by an awareness that one's position, as relative to the law, the law of others and their signifiers, implies a splitting off and a denial of that which is deemed unacceptable to that law. The phenomenon of repression as the 'forgetting' of the truth is highlighted by Lacan as he links, through their echoing sound, the words *Lethe*, the river of forgetfulness, and *aletheia*, the Greek word for truth: 'In every entry of being into its habitation in words, there's a margin of forgetting, a *lethe* complementary to every *aletheia*'^{xv}. The images we have of ourselves are always filtered through language, through the signifiers of others, as experienced through family, community and culture. Alienation from the real, from the true, entails a repression or a displacement of one's constitutive drives, and hence an incommensurability of the reality of oneself and that of others. In his clinical work, Lacan, like Freud before him, witnessed the suffering and confusion resulting from this alienation, and he stressed repeatedly that the aim of psychoanalysis was not the adaptation of the individual to a system of perceived normality; 'There's absolutely no reason why we should make ourselves the guarantors of the bourgeois dream. A little more rigor and firmness are required in our confrontation with the human condition'^{xvi}. The absence of this confrontation results in 'empty chatter about maturity, love, joy, peace' according to R.D.Laing's exploration of the dichotomy between sanity and madness: 'What we call "normal" is a product of repression, denial, splitting, projection, introjection and other forms of destructive action on experience. It is radically estranged from the structure of being'^{xvii}. The ensuing 'impossibility of relationship' denies the possibility of love, of oneself and of others, because what is in question is only a mask, a disguise, a fiction: 'Distance creates mirages'^{xviii}. Mark Patrick Hederman, in his brief essay on love, *Manikon Eros*, opposes this argument, and describes it as 'the depressing suggestion of Lacan...that we never have access to others as they are'^{xix}. Hederman interprets Lacan's analysis of subjectivity as the confinement of a private world which can never grasp or gain access to the real of the other.

The quest for recognition through the reflection and the signifier of the other resounds with Hegel's master-slave dialectic, but Lacan is sceptical of the possibility of a resolution to this dialectic, suggesting that lived experience rarely remains fixated within this binary opposition but vacillates between the two, and often combines elements of both master and slave. In Lacan's constitution of the subject, whereby there is a demand for recognition from the other, as he says, 'man's...first objective is to be recognized by the other'^{xx}, there is always a gap between self and other, as he asserts that 'Between two, whatever they may be, there is always the One and the Other'^{xxi}. Lacan, therefore, rejects the popular notion of the unifying power of love, sexual or otherwise, to merge two into one. This craving to merge with the other is a human experience explored from the philosophy of Plato to the present day. Fromm states categorically that 'the deepest need of man...is the need to overcome his separateness, to leave the prison of his aloneness'^{xxii}. In the light of Lacan's reference to the artifice of language, 'language always involves artifice relative to anything intuitive, material or lived'^{xxiii}, its capacity to hide as much as it reveals, the loss of the real, integral to the subject's entry into the symbolic domain of language, results in a gap, a lack, which henceforth separates the subject from his/her desire.

THE MYSTERY OF THE UNCONSCIOUS

In fact, to a certain degree, at a certain level, fantasies cannot bear the revelation of speech'^{xxiv}.

However, there is another dimension to the subject which is not limited and defined by an external imposition -

the law of language, of society, of the other – and it is the revelation and description of this dimension that Lacan interprets as the greatest Freudian contribution to an understanding of the human subject: ‘It all began with a particular truth, an unveiling, the effect of which is that reality is no longer the same for us as it was before’^{xxxv}. This is the dimension of the unconscious, that aspect of the mind which is outside of one’s awareness and understanding, and which resists systematization, measurement, and adaptation. It is the seat of all that is deemed unacceptable to one’s private and public image, all that is too frightening and ‘dangerous’ to confront, all that is repressed in order for the subject to survive in a world that designates, through language, the conditions and expectations of human being: ‘The fundamental situation of repression is organized around a relation of the subject to the signifier’^{xxxvi}. The universality of this phenomenon is attested by Freud: ‘No human individual is spared traumatic experiences...none is absolved from the repressions that they give rise to’^{xxxvii}. Aversion towards certain aspects of humanity – evil, aggression, duplicity, greed, and much more – leads to a disavowal of unwanted parts of the self, and finds the solution in repression and selective amnesia; ‘Man deals with selected bits of reality’^{xxxviii}.

The distorted image of human nature is attractive in its idealized picture of goodness and kindness; ‘Those who like fairy stories turn a deaf ear to talk of man’s innate tendencies to evil, aggression, destruction, and thus to cruelty’^{xxxix}. In this fairy-land human experience is diminished to a pseudo-existence where passions of love and hate, compassion and destruction, are replaced by more ‘comfortable’ and ‘polite’ representations. Rather than deluding ourselves with idealistic and unreal ideologies of human nature, Lacan, like Nietzsche and Freud before him, urges a more honest and realistic appraisal;

Lacan advocates that we recognize practical anti-humanism, an ethics that goes beyond the dimension of what Nietzsche called ‘human, all too human’, and confronts the inhuman core of humanity. This means an ethics that fearlessly stands up to the latent monstrosity of being human, the diabolic dimension that erupted in the phenomena broadly covered by the label ‘Auschwitz’^{xxx}.

Adhering to Freudian doctrine, Lacan asserts that denial and repression is a futile attempt to eliminate what is ‘unbearable’, whether this is considered ‘evil’, ‘trauma’, or any concept which is deemed excluded from human nature; repression is counterparted with the ‘return of the repressed’.

Lacan looks to Freud’s exploration of the unconscious and finds there several pathways to the truth which is concealed therein; ‘The unconscious evinces knowledge that, for the most part, escapes the speaking being’^{xxxi}, but paradoxically, Lacan states that ‘the unconscious is only accessible through the artifice of the spoken word’^{xxxii}. What is repressed in the unconscious is not obliterated, but is expressed through various detours; ‘The true...is never reached except by twisted pathways’^{xxxiii}. From his clinical practice and general observation of human nature, Lacan evinced that the unconscious is transmitted through dreams, fantasies, symptoms, slips of the tongue, jokes, and myriad hidden messages lurking behind speech and behaviour, by which ‘the path of truth is suggested in a masked form’^{xxxiv}, and that the interpretation of these transmissions, through psychoanalytic practice, can lead to access to the real: ‘The real, I will say, is the mystery of the speaking body, the mystery of the unconscious’^{xxxv}. As Žižek asserts in his interpretation of Lacan’s formulation of the Freudian unconscious, ‘The unconscious is...the site where a traumatic truth speaks out’^{xxxvi}. The masked forms in which the unconscious is manifested, the dream, the symptom, the fantasy, can only be deciphered when they are expressed in language, in words which try to both reveal and conceal their latent content:

We can only grasp the unconscious finally when it is explicated, in that part of it which is articulated by passing into word. It is for this reason that we have the right...to recognize that the unconscious itself has in the end no other structure than the structure of language^{xxxvii}.

It is here that the insights and techniques of psychoanalysis are used to enable the emergence of truth in human reality, and in so doing, to testify to the obstacles which hinder such truth; these are also the obstacles to the possibility of love. Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis posit truth as its ultimate purpose, characterized by Philip Rieff as an ethic of honesty: ‘Psychoanalysis...demands a special capacity for candour which not only distinguishes it as a healing movement, but also connects it with a drive toward disenchantment characteristic of modern literature’^{xxxviii}. Freud stated clearly ‘that psychoanalytic treatment is founded on truthfulness. In this fact lies a great part of its educative effect and its ethical value’^{xxxix}. It is not suggested here that truth and love are synonymous, but it is argued that truth is essential to love, in the sense of a recognition of its motivation, desire, and experience, and an acknowledgement of the many guises which masquerade as love. This relationship between love and truth inevitably posits the question of access to truth; is it ever possible, given Lacan’s exposition of the barriers to truth inherent in the subject’s constitutive position within the symbolic and the imaginary realms of human existence, and accepting the Freudian assertion of the powers of the unconscious, that truth can be accessed? Žižek bases his answer to this question on Lacan’s insight into the real:

'truth itself can function in the mode of the Real'^{xi}. Thus love, truth, and the real are intrinsically related, perennially questioned, and continue to elude fixed systematization and ultimate definition.

In the clinical setting, which can be used as a microcosm of the wider reality of interaction between subject and object, between self and other, the analysand approaches the analyst initially with a symptom, an experience, a behaviour, which is causing suffering and discomfort. From this initial encounter to the end of the analysis, everything that takes place is grounded in language, in some sort of discourse; 'psychoanalysis has but one medium: the patient's speech'^{xii}. An encounter is initiated and develops through dialogical action, an action which takes place through language, dialogue, the spoken word. As Lacan states, 'psychoanalytic action develops in and through verbal communication, that is, in a dialectical grasping of meaning. Thus it presupposes a subject who manifests himself verbally in addressing another subject'^{xiii}. This approach is in fact a demand; a demand that the analyst fulfil the function of "the subject supposed to know"^{xiiii}, the embodiment of the prototypical omniscience which variously takes form as God, Buddha, The Father, or in more contemporary categories of 'the expert'. Lacan claims that speech always implies a demand, that 'all speech calls for a response'^{xlv}, even if this response is silence. The analyst's response is to listen, to what is said and unsaid, whether in the symbol of the word or the symptom; 'we must be attentive to the unsaid that dwells in the holes of discourse'^{xlv}, and listen 'in order to detect what is to be understood'^{xlvi}. This kind of listening accepts that the meaning which is striving to be articulated is prohibited or censored in the subject's ego and so is often 'impossible knowledge', but Lacan claims that this impossibility can be overcome by listening to what 'is said between the words, between the lines'^{xlvii}, what he calls the '*inter-dit*'.

The aim of Lacanian psychoanalysis is therefore not the removal of the symptom, but rather the revelation of its meaning for the subject, so that 'a certain real may be reached'^{xlviii}. As Žižek explains, 'for Lacan, the goal of psychoanalytic treatment is not the patient's well-being, successful social life or personal fulfilment, but to bring the patient to confront the elementary coordinates and dead-lock of his or her desire'^{lix}. According to Lacan, this meaning exists in the unconscious; it is above all a desire which has been denied and excluded from awareness, but which strives for acknowledgement through the detours of symptom and fantasy: 'The unconscious is the chapter of my history that is marked by a blank or occupied by a lie; it is the censored chapter. But the truth can be refound; most often it has already been written elsewhere'^l. Lacan explains that this chapter, the unconscious, is written in bodily symptoms, childhood memories, life-style and vocabulary, and distortions of truth which its repression necessitates. It is in fact the subject's history, 'a page of shame that one forgets or undoes, or a page of glory that obliges'^{li}. The meaning which is sought, demanded, by the subject, does not however emanate from "the subject supposed to know"; the analyst merely 'frees the subject's speech'^{lii}, by 'suspending the subject's certainties until their final mirages have been consumed'^{liiii}. The subject's certainties are fixed in certain words, scripts and stories wherein one explains oneself to oneself, but the process of the psychoanalytic experience is a new reading of the script: 'You give a different reading to the signifiers that are enunciated than what they signify'^{liv}. Thence, the subject recognizes his/her own truth, he/she allows it to come to awareness. The analyst is not the 'one supposed to know', he or she merely enables the subject to arrive at his/her own meaning, because 'true speech already contains its own response'^{lv}.

This interpretation of the resolution of analysis is disputed by Derrida when he argues that in analysis a truth is imposed, no matter how this imposition is masked as interpretation, facilitation, or echoing of the subject's own truth; 'To analyze anything whatsoever, anyone whatsoever, for anyone whatsoever, would mean saying to the other: choose my solution, prefer my solution, take my solution, love my solution; you will be in truth if you do not resist my solution'^{lvi}. Lacan's view repeatedly refutes this and sees the end of analysis as coinciding with the subject's relinquishment of the ideal of 'the subject supposed to know', and a corresponding avowal of self-ownership and responsibility. In Freud's words, 'people can only achieve insight through their own hurt and their own experience'^{lvii}. In an open recognition and acknowledgement of what is contained in the unconscious the subject confronts his/her desire, an answer to the question 'what do I want?' and ultimately decides whether to pursue this desire or to endure its refusal. What has been achieved is at least the awareness and honesty whereby the choice can be made. Through the insights and techniques of psychoanalysis the subject may approach the reality of desire, and discover, through experience, the truth therein; 'Once one enters into the register of the true, one can no longer exit it'^{lviii}. For Lacan, this constitutes 'the law of desire', the only proper ethical agency, an ethical agency which is far removed from theoretic doctrines of philanthropy, pseudo-altruism and selflessness

FROM DEMAND TO DESIRE

I propose that...the only thing of which one can be guilty is of having given ground relative to desire'^{lix}.

What is this desire which Lacan insists is integral to the constitution of the subject? What is the desire revealed through psychoanalysis? Why is this desire repressed or denied in the assumption of a conventionally lived life? And where is the position of love in this ambiguity of desire? Lacan asserts that the answers to these questions are facilitated by access to the unconscious; 'That is why the unconscious was invented – so that we could realize that man's desire is the Other's desire, and that love, while it is a passion that involves ignorance of desire, nevertheless leaves desire its whole import'^{lx}. In questioning the popular portrayals of love as union and merger, as a striving towards the One, as the release from the unbearable tenacity of separation, 'Love... is but the desire to be One'^{lxi}, Lacan argues that it is in the gap between what is real – essential aloneness – and what is sought – complete connection, that desire dwells. It 'leads us to aim at the gap'^{lxii}. However, the essence of desire is that it is not satisfied. (A satisfied desire no longer exists, and is automatically replaced by another version of itself.). So desire is what can never be accomplished, achieved, finished. It is the essence of desire that it is insatiable. The gap remains because 'Everyone knows, of course, that two have never become one'^{lxiii}. Rejection of this truth understandably results from the demand that one gets what one wants, and from the reluctance to acknowledge that satisfaction of desire is the antithesis of living.

The uncovering of desire, its revelation from the confines of symptom and displacement, metaphor and metonymy, is the work of psychoanalysis. A corollary of desire is the quest for love, and so love is at the forefront of psychoanalytical discourse; 'the linchpin of everything that has been instituted on the basis of analytic experience: Love'^{lxiv}. Lacan credits Freud with unveiling many aspects of the phenomenon of love, in particular is narcissistic component:

The beginning of wisdom should involve beginning to realize that it is in that respect that old father Freud broke new ground...to realize that love, while it is true that it has a relationship with the One, never makes anyone leave himself behind...everyone senses and sensed that the problem is how there can be love for another^{lxv}.

The paradox here is between the reality of narcissism which psychoanalysis witnesses in the various guises in which it attempts to disguise itself, and the urge to love, and/or the urge to be loved which propels the desire towards the other. The apparent narcissistic nature of desire – it is rooted in the domain of the self – does not limit its aim; when desire is directed towards the other, it can have various goals, across a spectrum of ultimate selfishness, as in the desire to have one's identity affirmed and recognized, to an acknowledgement of this potential aspect, but attempting to transverse this reality to a recognition of the other as not possessing that which one lacks, but rather as embodying vulnerability, incompleteness and disunity which propels a desire to love, free of need, control, or assimilation.. It is a reality of the human condition that it is self-centred. This appears to be an uncomfortable reality to embrace, so it is masked and sublimated through various images and personas, such as the Ideal I of the mirror stage: 'a kind of mirage of the One you believe yourself to be'^{lxvi}. Thus, interrelationships are based on semblances, negations of the truth, and are conducted within the framework of the mask: 'It is only on the basis of the clothing of the self-image that envelops the object cause of desire that the object relationship is most often sustained'^{lxvii}.

In his exploration of the concept of love, Lacan returns to Freud's rejection of the Christian dictum that one should 'love one's neighbour as oneself', and agrees with Freud's assessment of love's capacity as being limited to a choice of beings considered worthy of one's love. Lacan differentiates between altruism and love, and reminds us that 'in any encounter there's a big difference in reality between the response of philanthropy and that of love'^{lxviii}. Mistaking one for the other is an obstacle to love, and for the recipient, is often felt to be insulting and manipulative. Highlighting the gap between the ideal of the good and the reality of human nature, Lacan warns that 'only saints are sufficiently detached from the deepest of our shared passions to avoid the aggressive repercussions of charity'^{lxix}. The altruistic goal of working for the other's good begs the question as to the constitution of this good. Lacan explains the appeal of this altruistic goal:

It is a fact of experience that what I want is the good of others in the image of my own. That doesn't cost so much. What I want is the good of others provided that it remains in the image of my own...provided that it depends on my effort^{lxx}.

Highlighting the gap between the ideal of the good and the reality of human nature, Lacan warns that 'only saints are sufficiently detached from the deepest of our shared passions to avoid the aggressive repercussions of charity'^{lxxi}. One imagines the experiences, joys, sorrows, needs, of the other as being a mirror of one's own, and it is through one's own experience, one's own perception of the good, that one assumes to know what is good for the other; Lacan describes it thus: 'The benevolent fraud of wanting-to-do-one's-best-for-the-subject'^{lxxii}. and outlines the complexities and ambiguities which are involved:

If one has to do things for the good, in practice one is always faced with the question: for the good of whom? From that point on, things are no longer obvious...Doing things in the name of the good, and even more in the name of the good of the other, is something that is far from protecting us not only from guilt but also from all kinds of inner catastrophes^{lxxiii}.

The subtle slide from the position of wanting the other's good to the more sinister proclamation that one is acting 'for the other's own good' implies an assumption of knowledge that justifies one's power over another who is deemed not to have such knowledge: 'The domain of the good is the birth of power'^{lxxiv}. Hence, the essence of group psychology, the demand for obedience, and the suppressive power of tyranny emerges. The subtle nature of this slide accounts for the manifold guises in which it masquerades as; the 'strong' parent, the 'controlling' or 'dependent' partner, the 'infallible' teacher, the 'civilizing' colonizer, the 'patriarchal' president, and in Lacan's day, the 'protectors' of the national good in the personages of Hitler and Mussolini. Hence, Lacan states, 'a radical repudiation of a certain ideal of the good is necessary'^{lxxv}. The assumption of power in the guise of altruistic action, or as the expression of love, is an attempt to obliterate the desire of the other: 'The position of power of any kind in all circumstances and in every case, whether historical or not, has always been the same. Whether Alexander or Hitler: "I have come to liberate you from this or that...as far as desires are concerned, come back later, make them wait"^{lxxvi}. In Lacan's vision, the obliteration of desire is the destruction of life itself; the repression of one's desire necessitates duplicity and deception, betrayal of oneself and of others; 'the first effect of repression is that it speaks of something else'^{lxxvii}.

The unfolding of desire resulting from an articulation of the unconscious enables the decision to be made regarding its place in one's life. According to Lacan, acknowledgement of one's desire is essential to ethical living, and indeed to love; 'desire...therein lies the mainspring of love'^{lxxviii}. He asserts that desire is at the root of one's destiny, and therefore to reject it is to say no to life. The key question for Lacan in relation to love, ethics, life, is; 'Have you acted in accordance with the desire that is in you?'^{lxxix} Lacan warns against the betrayal involved in 'giving ground relative to desire' because desire is integral to our being: 'The channel in which desire is located...what we are as well as well what we are not, our being, and our non-being'^{lxxx}. Desire is central to who and what we are, it is unique and personal to the subject, and in Lacan's terms it insists on our response:

Desire is nothing other than that which supports an unconscious theme, the very articulation of that which roots us in a particular destiny, and that destiny demands insistently that the debt be paid, and desire keeps coming back, keeps returning, and situates us once again in a given track, the track of something that is specifically our business^{lxxxi}.

On this point Hederman concurs with Lacan that 'desire is an inescapable condition of humanity' and goes on to state that it is from an acceptance of this reality that love is born: 'Such acceptance of reality is love. Love is the way we are in ourselves and amidst the others who surround us'^{lxxxii}. Desire and love as a way of being is central to Lacan's thesis: 'In love what is aimed at is the subject...in something that is organized or can be organized on the basis of a whole life'^{lxxxiii}.

Lacan's philosophical vision may appear to be pessimistic; he attempts to shatter our illusions of relationship, goodness, and love. But the shattering of illusions enables the emergence of the real, and it is in the real that the possibility of love may be discovered. The difficulty in accessing the real, the obstacles outlined by Lacan as formulated in the constitution of the subject within the imaginary and the symbolic, and the complexity and ambiguity pertaining to any Lacanian definition of love, 'love, in its essence is narcissistic'^{lxxxiv}, or 'true love gives way to hatred'^{lxxxv}, suggests a cynical attitude to love in Lacan's thought, and a confrontation with the question 'is love possible?'. However, Lacan also points to the central role of love in human living, and he points out that 'people have done nothing but speak of love in analytic discourse'^{lxxxvi}. The pivotal role of love in releasing truth, desire, and freedom is stated clearly by Lacan when he urges recognition of 'the imaginary servitude that love must always untie anew or sever'^{lxxxvii}. The difficulties of love, the 'impossibility' of its symbolization, and the obstacles to its experience, do not in themselves constitute love's impossibility, but rather point to its essential necessity, and the inescapable attempt to make possible the impossible.

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