

Lacan's Psychoanalytic Way of Love

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In a recent interview, Jacques Alain Miller was asked: Does psychoanalysis teach us something about love? To which he responded:

A great deal, because it's an experience whose mainspring is love. It's a question of that automatic and more often than not unconscious love that the analysand brings to the analyst, and which is called transference. It's a contrived love, but made of the same stuff as true love. It sheds light on its mechanism: love is addressed to the one you think knows your true truth (Miller, 2008).

In this paper I argue that, in turn, the way the Lacanian psychoanalyst holds this address for truth is itself true love.

"What is love" for Lacan? Firstly I think that love is fundamentally ethical for Lacan. Thus the question: "What is Ethics?" In raising these Socratic questions one cannot avoid the realm of philosophy, which is, etymologically speaking, the realm of love for knowledge. And for Socrates, true knowledge begins with the Delphic dictum: "Know thyself." In order to know anything, philosophy begins with the subjective "I" who experiences wonder and asks questions. The first questions philosophy asks are: "Who am I?" and "How do I know who I am?" Classically, the questions "What is ethics?" and "What is love?" follow on from the ontological and epistemological questions.

For Lacan, ethics emerges in the interval between Aristotle and Freud, between the interval of rational knowledge and unconscious desire. Aristotle's ethics privileges the human faculty of reason for the development of good habits. Lacan points out that ethics for Aristotle is worked out against a science of "habits, training, and education" (Lacan, 1992, 314). As opposed to Aristotle's trust in rational deliberation as the mainspring of a proper ethics, Lacan turns to Freud's discovery of the unconscious and privileges the realm of desire as the wellspring of an ethical life. In the *Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan is clear that prior to the question of

rational knowledge, ethics is the "activity of living in conformity with the desire that is within you" (Lacan 1992: ch.14).

At the same time that Lacan was writing about the ethics of psychoanalysis, the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas was insisting on the priority of ethics to epistemology. I think that Levinas philosophy of ethics is worthwhile thinking about together with Lacan's theory of ethics. Instead of prioritising the knowledge of being, Levinas places ethics at the heart of human experience. Comparably, for Lacan, ethics as it pertains to desire is more paramount than knowledge. Although Lacan thinks about the workings of desire differently to Levinas, their conceptualisation of desire in terms of how it relates to ethics is similar in that Levinas posits the idea that desire is desire for the Other; and that, differently from need, desire can never be fulfilled. Furthermore, most significantly, Levinas shows how desire is realised in the singularity of a separated being who exists in a fundamental relationship to language which itself is the concretisation of desire. Clearly this is close to Lacan's theory, which posits desire as the absolute condition for the generation of subjectivity through the individual's entry into the symbolic order of language (Lacan 1977: 265).

In a nutshell for Levinas, ethics is based on the desire for responsibility - the subject's "ability to respond" to the other. Responsibility is characterised in the self - other relation as a relationship of alterity rather than identity. The ethical self approaches the other person as other, as different from oneself. Levinas's idea of separation, together with the notion of singularity, is crucial for his conception of ethics. Levinas maintains that ethics is possible only if the other is other with respect to the point at which the "I" departs, the point, that is, where the "I" can disidentify from others and therefore be separate in her or his own singularity (Levinas 1979: 36). Only in this way can we conceive that a relationship of alterity be maintained, whereby the other is radically other than me.

Lacan is also emphatic about the necessity of the singularity of each being. But in Lacan, singularity expresses something of the "real," something that escapes the conformism of the

subject – a non-negotiable distinctiveness of the individual subject as an always already divided subject.

I think that Levinas' phenomenology of ethics takes philosophy as far as it can up to Lacan's psychoanalytic understanding of an ethics of love. But all in all it is the clinical practice of psychoanalysis that goes beyond philosophy to the end point of a practice of ethics through transference love. Lacan declared that with the advent of psychoanalysis a new kind of love has come into being: true love as transference love (Lacan 1977: 123).

A constitutive principle of the transference is the supposed subject of knowledge: that the analyst will know the "true truth" of the subject. As Miller says of love: "We love the one who harbours a true response to the question: "Who am I?" (Miller 2008). However, psychoanalysis points to a knowledge that is not known, that is unconscious. Lacan maintained that there is really no such thing as knowledge without acknowledging that it is limited by the jouissance of the speaking being. Really, "knowledge is an enigma," an enigma that is presented to us by the unconscious (Lacan 1998: 126).

Fundamentally, psychoanalysis is ethical for Lacan because it assigns an actual space for the singular being of the difficult desire of enduring desire (Lacan 1992: 309). Further, Lacan later develops an emphasis on the drive, *das Ding*, the real, the fundamental fantasy, the *sinthome* and the enjoyment of jouissance in relation to desire, which shows up even more so that it is psychoanalytic practice which provides the space for the distress of the anguish (of the real) experienced in the subject's confrontation with her inner life (Lacan 1992: 304). And this is because psychoanalysis works with transference love. Whereby philosophy is the love of wisdom, psychoanalysis uses wisdom in the service of love.

I think that there are two fundamental types of love in Lacan's writing that need to be differentiated: narcissistic sexed love and true sublime love. In his early writing Lacan conceived of love as a function that is fundamentally a narcissistic structure: the desire to be desired (Lacan 1977a: 186). On the nature of narcissistic love, Lacan said: "The whole question is to discover how the love object may come to

fulfil a role analogous with the object of desire" (Lacan 1977: 186).

Lacan, and Freud before him, thought that all demands are demands to be loved. What Lacan emphasised is that it is desire that lies behind the demand. As desire is produced in the beyond of demand, demand is actually aimed at the Other. The subject, in confusing desire with the demand to fill lack, also confuses an actual other with the Other. Desire for the Other then gets projected as a demand placed upon others. Thus, the lover uses the other as a stopper, rendering invisible the lack in the Other.

Seen in this way, the demand for love "annuls the particularity of everything that can be granted by transmuting it into a proof for love" (Lacan 1977: 286). Being then is reduced to the crushing of the demand for love; and this is fundamentally unethical. The narcissistic subject who thinks he loves really hates and destroys the other. Lacan said it like this: "I love you, but, because inexplicably, I love in you something more than you – the *objet petit a* – I mutilate you" (Lacan, 1977, 263).

Hence, this first kind of love as "a specular mirage is essentially deception," it is an "essential duplicity" (Lacan 1977: 253). Love is deceptive because the subject who demands to be loved or who imagines that he gives love fails to recognise that it is really desire that is operating within the hollow of a demand for love. At the same time the lover loves so that the other will see her or him how she or he wants to be seen. Hence, what we often call love, for Lacan, is really ignorance; and it is also hate (Lacan 1977: 263).

I think Lacan, like Freud before him, is referring here to love as courtly or romantic: sexed love. And he is clear in his later work that there is no such thing as a sexual relationship. Instead, romantic love is a mirage that fills out the void of the impossibility of the relationship between the sexes. Furthermore in romantic love there is no person as such; you don't need a real person; what is necessary is merely the existence of an image (Salecl 1994: 19).

Beyond romantic love and beyond philosophical love Lacan propounded the case that, only with Freud, has a psychology of

love been truly understood. Freud's analysis of love progressed well beyond the abject failure of his precedents because he grounded love at the level of the drive (Lacan 1977: 191). Psychoanalysis shows how love is ethical but more than ethics, it reveals that its origin is to be found through transference in the drive.

Freud said that in psychoanalysis a person discovers a new kind of love: self-regard with regard to others. He postulated that, "the state of being in love that makes its appearance in the course of analytic treatment has the character of genuine love" (Freud 2001 [1915]: 168). Freud refers here to transference love whereby the subject achieves "things that would otherwise be beyond his power" (Freud 2001 [1938]: 39). In "Observations on Transference Love" where Freud discusses a notion of "genuine" love, he is clearly referring to a love that goes beyond narcissistic love. The course of transference love is true love and has "no model in real life" (Freud 2001 [1915]: 166).

Developing Freud's observations further, Lacan argues that true love as transference love gives the subject the opportunity to get a distance between how he sees himself as lovable and where he can come to see himself as caused by lack. The transference, therefore, allows for a separation of the demand for love from desire. As Lacan said, there is a radical distinction between loving oneself "through the other," which allows no transcendence for the other, and loving through a "circularity of the drive in which the heterogeneity of the movement out and back shows a gap in its interval" (Lacan 1977: 194).

Lacan first defines love in terms of a narcissistic image that forms the substance of the ego ideal – from which the subject wishes to see himself in a desirable way. In romantic love, the other is placed in the position of the ideal ego. The other is loved because of a desire to attain perfection for the ego. (Salecl 1994: 19). For the later Lacan, however, true love goes beyond the ideal to the real. Beyond the narcissistic relationship towards the love object Lacan later in his work shows that we need to encounter the real, the traumatic object in the subject. Thus, true love aims at the kernel of the real. And this is accomplished in psychoanalysis.

Contemporary Lacanian psychoanalytic treatment is dedicated to the real, for each subject to discover her or his real. But this discovery still is accomplished only through the transference. The transference is the driving force of any psychoanalysis. As Miller explains:

the transference gets unravelled on the basis of the function of the real in repetition. What repetition is destined to miss... (then later) is found to be enacted in the transference" (Miller 2008).

Repetition is the continued disappointment of the encounter with the *objet a*. When lacking "evokes the real with which repetition attunes itself to but misses, there will be the traumatic real" (Miller 2008). And it gets experienced as *jouissance*. Transference love then gives access to *jouissance*.

The first type of love I have referred to in Lacan's work is a love that aims to make up for lack protecting itself from an originary trauma of a sexual relationship. The second kind of love I refer to in the later Lacan, true love, aims at the real bearing within it the traumatic lack of the sexual relationship. However, the real is allied with the excessive enjoyment of *jouissance* (Reinhard 1994: 788). It is this alliance that forms the imperative of an ethics-of-love. An ethics-of-love is what remains of the object when the imaginary and symbolic features of the object are annihilated. (Salecl 1994: 6). This love sacrifices those illusionary characteristics of the other as sexed *objet* allowing for the other to be other, different from me, an ethical disposition; albeit an ethical disposition that is extended to incorporate the *jouissance* of the real.

Lacan stresses in "Seminar XX" the difference between the sexed relationship and a *soullove* relationship. He says here "when one loves it has nothing to do with sex" (Lacan 1998: 25). Instead, love addresses a being, our own being, as *soullove* (Lacan 1998: 84). The soul who loves, has the courage and patience to confront being. Lacan advises us that to love we need to love our own being first in order to pay appropriate homage to the other. "To love our own soul." "Sex doesn't count here" (Lacan 1998: 84).

Beyond loving our own soul, or to put it another way, beyond loving our own unconscious, Lacan notoriously defines love as consisting in giving nothing of what one has. To love is to recognize your lack and give it to the other. Love therefore approaches the being of the other from a standpoint of the Nothing. It is important here to qualify this assertion by arguing that love is not an attitude which has any clear objective of what is good for another; it does not amount to altruism. To give love for Lacan does not mean to give moral good nor goods as possessions. Rather giving pertains to a gift giving something else that you don't possess, which goes beyond you, the beyond of a possession and the beyond of a non-possession of myself – a sublime love.

Lacan at the end of "Seminar XI" expressed that "love which it seems to some that I have downgraded can be posited only in the beyond where at first it renounces its object" (Lacan 1977: 276). Sublimation goes beyond the traumatic object as *das ding*, circling it but never acquiring it or touching it. The object as part object cannot be reached except to raise it as a no-thing to a level of dignity of the real: "a Voiding love" (Johnston 2005).

As I have shown, Levinas is adamant that ethics is a question of responsibility. This is true for Lacan too. I concur with Reinhard that both thinkers show up the condition for responsibility as enjoyment – not the enjoyment of responsibility but the responsibility for enjoyment (Reinhard 1994: 803). Sublime love enjoys *jouissance*. It bears the ability to respond to the Symbolic in such a way that it would no longer be opposed to the traumatic encounter with the real. Instead there would be *joui-sense* – an enjoyment of signification.

Lacan is adamant that nowhere does sublime love show up like it does in the psychoanalytic setting. He declared that with psychoanalysis, a place of "limitless love" has come into being; "there only may the signification of a limitless love emerge, because it is outside the limits of the law, where alone it may live" (Lacan 1977: 276). In psychoanalysis desire can be brought back through the formation of a gap in relation to an Other: the analyst. The analyst loves by giving the gift of the gap to be suffered and enjoyed.

In psychoanalysis, it is the responsibility of the individual to endure the desire of desire, but most significantly for true love to be realised, it is the responsibility of the analyst to give the subject patient experience of her or his own desire as it emanates from lack (Lacan 1993: 300). Freud argued that the whole responsibility for psychoanalysis lies with the analyst. He said that it is up to the analyst to unite ethical motives with technical ones (Freud 2001 [1915]: 169).

The subject in analysis can deal with his demand for love only by first transferring it to the analyst. But it is the analyst who must ardently and vigilantly maintain the gap whereby the drive emerges so that the subject can be joined with her or his own desire. The analyst gives the gift of love as distance for the subject so that the subject can freely desire and gain her or his own existence as fully lived.

Lacan insisted on the analyst's desire to guide the analysis. As Russell Grigg makes clear, the active desire of the analysand for the analyst attaches less to the flesh and blood person of the analyst as it does to the Other as the signifier of the analyst (Grigg 2008: 101). The analyst himself remains an enigma to the subject in analysis. The analyst's desire, on the other hand, a very singular desire, encompasses an end for analysis for the specific person in analysis. The goal is separation. In the first moment of transference the subject's particular fantasy is traversed and the analyst as a supposed subject of knowledge gets de-idealised. In the second moment of separation, love's effect of imaginary coherence gets stripped away to reveal the pure drive of the subject. Throughout the entire analysis, the analyst desires this end of the real for her patient. The analyst creates a way of proceeding from his or her own worked-through desire in the transference in order to be rejected as master signifier and then finally mourned by the subject (Grigg 2008: 114).

Psychoanalytic love as true love involves an act of absolute freedom, suspending the field of meaning and the symbolic order, allowing for the trauma of the real. Profoundly singular in psychoanalysis the subject undergoes jouissance. This is only possible through the subject's transference being met with an analyst's desire. The analyst's desire as soullove is responsible for jouissance in the subject. The analyst's

ethical disposition of love comprises her or his desire to patiently give nothing of what she has but in the beyond of her own ability-to-respond, to orient the transference as a love aimed at the real in order to allow for the subject's desire to be raised to the level of the dignity of jouissance. The analyst bears up to the jouissance of the real and in doing so bears witness to sublime love. In this way, the subject undergoes love for her own being, her own soul.

I want to conclude this article by referring to Lacan's psychoanalytic "way" of love as the *Tao* of psychoanalysis. Following Eric Laurent, the word *Tao* here is used to mean the "way" one can at the same time do and say, that is, enunciate (Laurent 2007: 43). Lacan was interested in how to articulate in psychoanalysis the void of the real. Of course the real as a motivating brute force cannot be known as such but with the analyst's decoding of the signifier an opaque jouissance can come to the fore for the subject that empties words of meaning and changes one's relationship to knowledge.

My argument here is that the *Tao* of psychoanalysis is given through the psychoanalyst and that the *Tao* of the psychoanalyst is "the way insofar as it is that which is nameless and that can all the same name itself": *the void median* (Laurent, 2007, 42). Ultimately, the *Tao* of the psychoanalyst is to hold oneself in one's place of desire. There in this place of holding desire, "making what does not hold together hold together" - the real and sense, doing and speaking emerge (Laurent, 2007, 51). There where there was a fracture or a rupture the analyst can transform knowledge into an active void median. And it is the void median which is at the heart of the person.

Herein lies the Lacanian psychoanalytical way of love.

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