

THE CREATIVE AND REVOLUTIONARY NATURE OF DESIRE

A CRITICAL COMPARISON OF SOME POSTMODERN VIEWPOINTS

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Beginning with our ordinary consciousness in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel intends to move his reader to the more authentic perspective of *Geist*, a viewpoint that will not manifest us as finite subjects in opposition to the world, but will allow us to perceive ourselves as vehicles of a spirit in which the world is no longer distinct from us. By following the dialectical movement of consciousness and the things themselves that are replete with contradiction, Hegel arrives at a discussion of self-consciousness and its dialectic of desire and fulfillment. The certainty of the self is the ground of fulfillment, which reflects our notion of ourselves and the goal of total integrity for which we work. This drive for total integrity is even evident in lower forms of life that take and incorporate needed elements for their survival from the external world and thereby cancel their otherness. More than just a basic drive for integrity, desire indicates the facticity of the need for external objects. And the dialectic of desire and fulfillment implies that self-consciousness possesses two objects: its embodiment and the object of desire. By overcoming its two objects or returning to itself, self-consciousness maintains its existence by feeding on life. But desire is not merely intentional in the sense of being for an object or other, it is also reflective because it enables the subject to discover and enhance itself.¹

This philosophical scenario depicted by Hegel makes it clear that a human being is a creature of desire and not a simple self-identical being. With the continual arising of new desires, a human being alternates between being before another and being before noth-

ing at all, an encounter with the wholly other and an incorporation of it in an attempt to satisfy one's desire and recover integrity. In order to arrive at integrity, one must find a reality whose otherness can be negated without its being annihilated. This appears to suggest that the fundamental desire of self-consciousness, a process of destroying and incorporating foreign objects, can only be satisfied by another self-consciousness, a steadfast reality that can cancel its own foreignness and yet allow one to discover oneself. This is possible in the encounter with another human being in so far as one is recognized as human by that being. Since this recognition must be mutual for both parties to achieve integrity, it is, of course, impossible within the context of the master-slave relationship for Hegel. Nonetheless, it is evident that for Hegel desire is connected with self-knowledge and the search for identity.

In reaction to Hegel's position on desire, some postmodern thinkers claim that his conception of desire is too negative, and there is rather a need to emphasize the affirmative nature of desire. Moreover, from the perspective of some postmodern thinkers Hegel's notion of desire is metaphysical because it raises the problem of human identity. By introducing an affirmative nature of desire and correcting Hegel, it will be possible to see that desire is not something negative, but it is rather something productive, creative, and even revolutionary. In the following discussion, I shall focus on the contributions of Emmanuel Levinas, Jacques Lacan, Felix Guattari, and Gilles Deleuze on the topic of desire. Since Guattari and

Deleuze form a team, I shall compare their position on desire to those of Lacan and Levinas with respect to the relation of desire to need or lack, the connection of desire and the self, the necessity of the liberation of desire, and the relation between revolution and desire. I will then conclude with some critical observations.

Need and Lack

Since there is an absence of an analysis of desire in Heidegger's phenomenology of Dasein, Levinas attempts to correct this oversight in his own work. By drawing a fundamental distinction between desire and need, Levinas stresses that the former is excessive, exterior, strange, other, and possesses an ability to disrupt and reorient us. In contrast, need is a term that refers to something that is lacking in a human situation, and it is not a simple lack or mere privation because it suggests the promise of potential enjoyment. In other words, need is always oriented toward satisfaction. If a need reflects a human orientation toward that which is lacking, desire is characterized by exteriority and the strangeness associated with otherness of the desired. If we view desire and need within the context of time, it becomes obvious that desire exposes an uncharted future for a person, whereas the time of need is provided by desire.² Since need is dependent with respect to the other and across time, Levinas' notion of desire replaces the role of care in Heidegger's philosophy because when a person desires, one is not concerned with being. From Levinas' perspective, one is rather absorbed with the desirable, with an object that will totally satisfy one's desire. This suggests that desire possesses no further intentions beyond itself: "The desirable is a terminus, an end."³ This does not imply that it can be attained because desire is always unfamiliar to me and does not function or find a suitable location within the context of the desiring person. The basic conundrum is the lack of

correlation between desire and that which is desired.

According to Levinas, to satisfy one's needs involves enjoying life, which in turn renders a person independent. Moreover, it makes one at home in the world, and constitutes a person as the same in contrast to the heteronomous, a more desirable situation from the perspective of Levinas. This suggests that enjoyment makes a person solitary and confirms the subject in its own identity in which it is comfortable with itself, but it is separated from others, although this autonomy is dependent upon the satisfaction of one's needs.⁴ However even though it is possible to satisfy needs, it is impossible to satisfy desire because it can never be fulfilled for Levinas, a feature that radically differentiates it from needs because it wants the infinite.

Levinas therefore argues that the desired cannot be integrated by a person because it assumes the character of exteriority and height, which suggests that one cannot convert it into something that one can own. Since there is always an unbridgeable distance between the desired other and the desiring subject, he traces this lack to the intentional structure within desire. This is indicative of the paradoxical nature of desire: separation and relation.⁵ This twofold feature of desire indicates that it can never be satisfied because the closer one approaches it the more one becomes aware of the dramatic distance and separation that is essential to the very nature of alterity.

In contrast to Levinas, Jacques Lacan views desire as a lack, something more akin to the Levinas' description of a need. Indeed, Lacan defines desire in relational and ontological terminology as an inexpressible lack: "Desire is a relation of being to lack. This lack is the lack of being properly speaking. It isn't the lack of this or that, but lack of being whereby the being exists."⁶ Lacan wants to indicate a primordial rupture that develops early in the life of a human being where one

develops two images: a fragmented self and a contrasting mirror image of a unified self. There is no hope of reconciling these contrasting images because the lack exceeds anything that can represent it. In a cryptic way, Lacan explains, "It is only ever represented as a reflection on a veil."⁷ Emerging from its inexpressible lack, similar to the void associated with Freud's death instinct, Lacan's notion of desire is paradoxically sustained by a prohibition that constitutes it and yet makes it impossible for desire to find final satisfaction because it is always encountering a limit.

Disagreeing with Lacan, Deleuze and Guattari assert that desire is not associated with a lack because it does not lack its object. The problem resides with the subject:

It is, rather, the subject that is missing in desire, or desire that lacks a fixed subject; there is no fixed subject unless there is repression. Desire and its object are one and the same thing: the machine, as a machine of a machine. Desire is a machine and the object of desire is another machine connected to it.⁸

By rejecting the positions of both Lacan and Levinas, Deleuze and Guattari demonstrate that they want to stress the affirmative, productive, and generative nature of desire and reject any negative connotations. If one argues that desire lacks a real object for the sake of argument, such a desire would produce a fantasized object, which would function as a kind of double reality. In other words, it would be as though an imaginary object existed behind every real object.⁹ Judith Butler interprets this position of Deleuze and Guattari regarding desire as including the notion of an exchange that increases and intensifies energy and power into a state of excess.¹⁰ This interpretation appears to be mistaken, however, because Deleuze and Guattari deny that desire represents an exchange.¹¹ But if desire were concerned only with theft and gift, this would

appear to support Butler's interpretation. Deleuze and Guattari answer, however, that "it is theft that prevents the gift and the counter-gift from entering into an exchange relation."¹² Instead of viewing desire leading to a negative end as one might argue Hegel does, Deleuze and Guattari understand it as a life-affirming force and not some rationale for a destitute social condition, or a means to legitimate a social hierarchy established to dominate a weaker and more servile group, or a form of spiritual bondage. But this force does not create anything permanent, stable, or self-identical. From their perspective, a negative grasp of desire is symptomatic of repressing an original positive and bounteous desire, an originally unrepressed libidinal diversity, and it indicates the necessity for a liberation of desire from the prohibitive and repressive restrictions of culture. Desire is in fact more akin to a machine that experiments without standardizing anything, creating continually new alignments, linkages, and connections.

Not only do Deleuze and Guattari perceive desire as a machine, they also view everything as a machine. This position should not be confused with a prior philosophical notion: Deleuze and Guattari might appear to be simply reviving the eighteenth-century notion of *l'homme machine*, but actually theirs is not a mechanistic model of reality. They speak of machines to suggest that the unconscious is less a theatre than a factory, and to convey a positive, dynamic sense of the cosmos without falling into religious or anthropomorphic vitalism (since machines have no souls and no personalities).¹³

They see a mechanical process at work that transforms everything into a machine and brings these machines together into relationship with one another. This mechanical process supersedes the self and nature, and it leaves the self and non-self without any meaning. Within the context of human ontology, desire thus plays a privileged role along with the social.¹⁴ Hence it is desire, a life-affirming force that stands in sharp op-

position to Hegelian negativity, that creates desiring-machines and make humans an organism. The process of the continual production of desire and desiring machines is called schizophrenia.¹⁵ These desiring-machines that are produced are also referred to as binary machines that adhere to their own set of laws governing their associations, forming a view of desire that is foreign to the spirit of both Levinas and Lacan.

Desire and Self

According to Levinas, the ego or I is an existent, a way of being that breaks out of itself and projects itself forth. Since the ego is a mode of existing itself, it does not exist in a strict sense, but it stands outside of the oppositions between permanent and impermanent, and the categories of being and nothingness.¹⁶ This suggests that it exists by transcending itself. The ego is a substance: “The I is not a substance endowed with thought; it is a substance because it is endowed with thought.”¹⁷ An ego forms an identification and bond with itself because it is both for itself and with itself.¹⁸ Levinas refers to this identity of the self for itself as ipseity, which means that the self is not present before itself and is not present in itself. Within the world, the ego is both attracted to and withdraws from things, which implies that the ego possesses an inside and outside dimension.¹⁹

Lacan agrees with Levinas that the self is not autonomous, but they disagree about the self-conscious nature of the self. Lacan calls the subject correlative because its nature is determined by its relation to the other.²⁰ His subject is always divided because of an innate tension between the subject and the ego and a desire that cannot be satisfied by achieving any mundane or transcendent goal or experience. This suggests that the subject cannot give a name to that which it desires. And since the subject is always incomplete for Lacan, it is unable to return to its true identity or even to become comfortable with

itself. Moreover, Lacan thinks that the ego is an imaginary construction that is trapped between disintegration and a wholeness that is delusory. The ego is more akin to an imaginary function and object because the real I is not the ego.²¹ If a subject views itself in the ego, it does not see its true identity because it is not truly seeing itself because its true identity gets lost in the unconscious, forming an irreconcilable split between the subject and the ego and a basic alienation within a person.

For Levinas, the internal structure of the ego, as an existent, is temporality. By stressing the present moment within temporality, he wants to emphasize that it is not a segment of temporality, but it is rather a function of duration: “it is this coming out of a self, this appropriation of existence by an existent, which the ‘I’ is. Consciousness, position, the present, the ‘I’ are not initially—although they are finally—existents. They are events by which the unnameable verb *to be* turns into substantives. They are hypostasis.”²² Levinas conceives of this hypostasis as an event by which the self draws together with its existing in neither a substantial nor non-substantial way.²³ Hypostasis thus gives rise to solitude, a unity between the self and its existing, which is essential for the self gaining mastery over existing.²⁴ By so affirming that the ego is expressed in the present moment and is equivalent to the present, Levinas stresses the dynamic aspect of the ego, which involves a return of consciousness to itself and an incessant assuming of presence by the ego because the present does not last. Lacan, on the contrary, views the internal structure of a person as a tension between ego and subject in which the ego functions as the culprit by preventing the subject from becoming identical to its ever escaping conscious perception of the ego.

Levinas next contends that selfness is one’s primary identity in two fundamental ways: the self remains the same even though it may experience change, and it “hearkens

to itself thinking or takes before its depths and is itself an other.”²⁵ This line of argument suggests that the self is not autonomous and does not constitute itself because it exists as an existent with others within a world, a kind of sojourning at home within the world.²⁶ And since dwelling is a basic mode of maintaining oneself, the self dwells and exists with others within the world, and it establishes contact with others through dialogical interaction. Moreover, for a self to be truly related to itself presupposes its relation to an other. By the self entering into relation with this other and having the other return to the self, this double movement possesses important consequences for the self because it becomes decentered by the return of alterity.²⁷ In other words, the self is being continually uprooted and decentered by the other for Levinas, whereas Lacan’s subject is divided against itself. It is decentered, excentric, caught between a false view of wholeness and disintegration, trapped by paranoid alienation, and a narcissistic fool for the idealized self-image that one projects unto the other. It finds itself no one in particular. In contrast to Levinas, therefore, there can be no self for Lacan because there is no such thing as a total person.

Although akin to Lacan in spirit, Deleuze and Guattari conceive of the self as located on the periphery of life: “This subject itself is not at the center, which is occupied by the machine, but on the periphery, with no fixed identity, forever decentered, *defined* by the states through which it passes.”²⁸ Instead of a permanent and centered self, they conceive of a displaced, decentered, impermanent, and peripheral self that is superseded by a machine. Within the context of their notion of the self, Deleuze and Guattari therefore argue that desire, which is pre-personal and pre-individual, is not an internal aspect of the self. Desire remains forever strictly immanent for these thinkers. Moreover, desire is a circulating force that is socially apportioned according to laws of distribution.

Thus desire is divorced from affection and transformed into an economic resource.

In contrast to Deleuze and Guattari, for Levinas the self finds itself socially centered with others, otherwise than being, and located within time. By asserting that the self is otherwise than being, Levinas wants to emphasize its subjectivity. The subjectivity and uniqueness of a self includes desire for the non-desirable, responsibility for one’s neighbor, and substitution as a hostage. A person cannot escape responsibility, a process that empties the I of its egoism and confirms its uniqueness.²⁹ And since the self exists through and for the other, it must assume a submissive position in relation to the other to the extent of becoming a substitute, a form of passivity and not an act, or a hostage for the other within a process of emptying itself. If the self assumes the role of a hostage, the self, for instance, increases its degree of responsibility for the other and helps one to grasp the true meaning of compassion, pity, pardon, and proximity. Becoming a substitute for the other, the self gains liberation because it is freed from any imprisonment to itself, which suggests that for Levinas one’s being is undone and one becomes oneself, what one is and not another.³⁰ Within Levinas’ philosophy, then, there is a constant transformation of ontological categories into ethical ones, a feature not to be discovered in Lacan’s thought or that of Deleuze and Guattari.

Rather than ethical responsibility, Lacan thinks that one’s relationship with the other enables one to become aware of oneself as a body, which is especially true within the context of exchange with the other.³¹ This is also true with respect to desire for Lacan because one’s desire is recognized in the body of the other, a process that enables one to assimilate the body of the other and to also recognize oneself as a body.³²

In contrast to Lacan, Levinas views the body as an intersection of physical forces that allows one to grasp hold of the world by laboring in it, even though he also acknowl-

edges the ambiguity of the body that he equates with consciousness.³³ Deleuze and Guattari, for their part, try to conceptualize a body without organs:

The body without organs, the unproductive, the unconsumable, serves as a surface for the recording of the entire process of production of desire, so that desiring machines seem to emanate from it in the apparent objective movement that establishes a relationship between the machines and the body without organs.³⁴

This imageless body possesses an energy that runs through it. When it enters into relationship with desiring-machines it gives birth to the paranoiac machine.³⁵ This anonymous configuration makes any certain self-identity impossible because the body without organs simply presents a smooth, slippery and opaque surface that functions as a barrier.

As for Levinas' and Lacan's emphasis on the importance of the other, Deleuze and Guattari find these thinkers leading readers astray from the centrality of desire around which everything revolves for them. For Deleuze and Guattari desire produces reality: "If desire is productive, it can be productive in the real world and can produce only reality."³⁶ Although not having anything to do with acquisition or lack as we previously noted, Deleuze and Guattari view desire as productive and coextensive with natural and social activity. In fact, the social nature of desire is prior to its becoming individual. Thus besides the multiple personalities of schizophrenics, other components of desiring production include catatonic states in which individuals apparently inhabit bodies without organs and psychotically experience various parts of their bodies as separate elements, and often times as invading machines that persecute them.

Liberation of Desire

As we have seen, for Levinas, by satisfying one's needs a person enjoys life, which renders one independent, at home in the world, and constitutes a person as the same in contrast to the heteronomous. This suggests that enjoyment makes a person solitary, separate from others, and confirms the subject in its own identity in which it is comfortable with itself, although this autonomy is dependent upon the satisfaction of one's needs.³⁷ Even though it is possible to satisfy such needs, it is impossible to satisfy desire because it can never be fulfilled for Levinas, a feature that radically differentiates it from needs because it wants the infinite. Since desire is intensified as it moves closer to the desired, which is something with which it is impossible for one to become familiar, and since the desired cannot be integrated, desire assumes the character of exteriority and height, which suggests that one cannot convert it into something that one can own. There is always an unbridgeable distance between the desired other and the desiring subject, which Levinas traces to the lack of an intentional structure within desire, a line of thinking indicative of the paradoxical nature of desire: separation and relation.³⁸

In contrast to this, with their method of schizoanalysis, Deleuze and Guattari take apart the ego and suggest that there is no individual man or woman because everything is a machine functioning within a mechanical process that "produces the one within the other and couples the machines together."³⁹ This process itself and its manufactured products give birth to desiring-machines and schizophrenic machines without any meaning. The method of schizoanalysis therefore is not intended to resolve the Oedipus complex or to deny its existence. What Deleuze and Guattari deny about the Oedipal complex is its origin and production in the unconscious.⁴⁰ In fact, they think that psychoanalysts produce an abstract person by means of such talk about Oedipus, which it is

their responsibility to dismantle. In order to reach real human problems, the necessary goal of schizoanalysis therefore is to de-oedipalize the unconscious and to reach those areas of the unconscious untouched and untainted by the problem of Oedipus.⁴¹ From this perspective, if we can break down the abstract conceptualization behind the Oedipus complex, it will be possible to emancipate desire.

This liberation of desire, which is by its very nature revolutionary, is only possible by means of schizoanalysis. But this radical method is destructive: “The task of schizoanalysis goes by way of destruction—a whole scouring of the unconscious, a complete curettage. Destroy Oedipus, the illusion of the ego, the puppet of the super-ego, guilt, the law, castration.”⁴² Schizoanalysis therefore is a functional process with the schizoanalyst functioning like a mechanic working on a machine, where the initial task of this mechanic is to discover the nature and functioning of the desiring-machine in the subject.⁴³ A second positive task is to recognize the social machines that form the context for the individual desiring-machines.⁴⁴ These various machines are interrelated in a social field constituted by desire. This is why these authors view schizoanalysis as potentially revolutionary, a topic that will be discussed shortly.

In contrast to Deleuze and Guattari and Levinas, Lacan connects desire with the unconscious, where the unconscious is characterized by discontinuity and a vacillation that is equated with language.⁴⁵ Within this metonymic system of signification, the unconscious plays the role of a signifier that reveals itself to consciousness, a signified, by means of substitute representations, which are not related to the unconscious. And since the unconscious is merely arbitrarily connected to consciousness, there is an ontological gap between them that makes it extremely difficult to recover the unconscious, even though it does become manifested in speech in ways that are still difficult to dis-

cern, because it takes the form of a chain of signifiers. It is for this reason that Lacan equates the unconscious with the Other, whereas Levinas does not think that desire aims at the unconscious region, because whenever a world exists there is consciousness. In contrast to Lacan, it is also the Other that renders desire possible for Deleuze and Guattari. In one of his essays, Deleuze puts this as follows:

In all these respects, my desire passes through Others, and through Others it receives an object. I desire nothing that cannot be seen, thought, or possessed by a possible Other. That is the basis of my desire. It is always Others who relate my desire to an object.⁴⁶

Since desire so conceived by Deleuze and Guattari is indifferent to personal identities or images of the body that are so important to Lacan, they stress its pure multiplicity and irreducibility to a unitive state, whereas Lacan’s theory presses desire into serving the individualization process itself.

Indeed, not only does desire, which serves as a means of structuring the human world, connect with the unconscious for Lacan, it also represents the foundation of language. Lacan does not think that desire, a phenomenon of linguistic displacement, is simply connected with external objects because it cannot be concretized by language, rather it can only be indicated by the intervals of language or what it cannot represent. What makes this more complex is the fact that desire, as a basic discrepancy between biological need and demand, wants nothing that it can name.⁴⁷ So since desire represents the foundation of language, it cannot be fully disclosed. Contrary to this, Deleuze and Guattari argue instead that desire is independent of linguistic expression or interpretation. By standing contrary to Lacan’s symbolic order, they intend to affirm that desire is not psychological or philosophical, but is

rather a form of economic and political discourse.

Revolution and Desire

The active and productive nature of desire manifests its revolutionary nature for Deleuze and Guattari. Since they equate desire with the Rousseauian natural person (i.e., something unconscious), there is an inevitable conflict between the person who desires and society. It is society, or mostly capitalistic society in their analysis, that represses desire, even though capitalism proclaims a more libertine message because its hierarchical nature is willing to risk its inherent structures of exploitation and subjection. But because it cannot tolerate desire, society attempts to repress it. Yet its incompatibility becomes acceptable when society disfigures, distorts, and transforms it into Oedipal desire. This line of argument indicates the limits of the Marxism of Deleuze and Guattari because they consign class struggle to a museum curiosity.⁴⁸ Although some members of society dominate others, there is really only a single class of slaves, and it is only a few desirers that will eventually escape from their servitude.

From the perspective of Deleuze and Guattari, then, their method of schizoanalysis can operate in a revolutionary way when it is directed at the coercive nature of capitalism and the ideology of psychoanalysis, which are both responsible for repressing life-affirming desire. But what could possibly be wrong for someone who wanted to remain schizophrenic? Would this not be a proper desire? Deleuze and Guattari indirectly answer these hypothetical questions when they write about the schizophrenic:

He is and remains in disjunction: he does not abolish disjunction by identifying the contradictory elements by means of elaboration; instead, he affirms it through a continuous over flight spanning an indivisible distance. He is not simply bisexual, or be-

tween the two, or intersexual. He is transsexual. He is trans-alive/dead, transparent/child. He does not reduce two contraries to an identity of the same; he affirms their distance as that which relates the two as different.⁴⁹

The schizophrenic is a fragmented, divided, and false person because such a person can only become himself/herself by being someone totally foreign to him- or herself. Yet because the schizophrenic is a desiring-machine that is subject to a binary law governing its associations, it is desire that brings such binary machines together with other desiring-machines by means of its continuous flowing.

Desire is revolutionary for Lacan, on the other hand, in the sense that it moves beyond the pleasure principle, after finding its limit and being sustained by it, because pleasure is limiting in the sense that it restricts the scope of human possibility due to the homeostatic nature of the pleasure principle.⁵⁰ Desire is thus the nodal point where the pulsation of the unconscious is linked to sexual reality.⁵¹ This can be seen with the phallus, a privileged signifier of *Aufhebung* that joins the *logos* with desire: "The fact that the phallus is a signifier means that it is in the place of the Other that the subject has access to it."⁵² In fact, Lacan uses the phallus as an organizing principle for all kinship and language that shapes all signification and meaning. And by connecting lack with psychosis, he argues that the psychotic person becomes an object (phallus) that his mother lacks and in her perversity seeks in her child. It is the signifier (language) that introduces this lack among human beings, which may drive human beings mad. Yet within the dialectic of desire, the phallus embodies *jouissance* and symbolizes the location of *jouissance*, not in itself, but as a lack in the desired image.⁵³ As indicative of the alienation between desire and its signifier, this alienation can be witnessed in the fundamental rupture in the life

of each human subject from which desire develops.

Although Levinas, for his part, does not view desire as revolutionary, he does agree with Lacan that a person cannot integrate it. Yet in sharp contrast to Lacan's position, Levinas claims that the reason it is impossible for desire to be satisfied is due to the fact that the closer one comes to the desired, the more one realizes the prodigious distance between oneself and it, and one then also becomes more aware of the huge separation that belongs to the essence of the alterity of the Other. By so calling attention to the exteriority, transcendence, and radical height of the infinite, Levinas wants to call attention to the absolute alterity of the Other, a transcendent wholly Other that surpasses our intellect's power of comprehension, whereas Deleuze and Guattari call attention to the subject's oscillating between the two poles of desire: the revolutionary pole of schizophrenic delirium and the repressive pole of paranoid delirium. In the former case, desire flees the social realm and in the latter case it switches to power and hierarchical institutions of control.⁵⁴

A Critical Look at Desire

Within the context of moving from a negative to an affirmative and productive notion of desire, Butler is correct to indicate that Deleuze and Guattari have politicized the theory of Lacan, "arguing that productive desire, *jouissance*, is accessible to human experience, and that the prohibitive laws governing this desire can and must be broken."⁵⁵ Deleuze and Guattari intend to politicize Lacan, for instance, in order to initiate radical social, economic, and political change. Their philosophical writings are meant to function as their revolutionary weapons and these leftist philosophers even challenge Marxism. By bringing together the notion of desire with production, they problematize "the Marxist distinction between use-value and exchange value."⁵⁶

As for Levinas' thought about desire, which is not meant as a direct challenge to Marxism, Edith Wyschogrod identifies two contradictory standpoints.

The first assumes that need is not demolished with the satisfaction of need, that there is a pressure that we experience when need is satisfied, a pressure whose source remains inexplicable; the second assumes the adequacy of intention to what is given, of desire to the desirable, and therefore presumes genuine satiety.⁵⁷

As long as they belong in the world, objects cannot be characterized as mysterious. Within the world, they have form, stability and finitude, but objects cannot satisfy the intention directed toward them.

In contrast to this philosophy of Levinas, the use of desire by Deleuze and Guattari is intended to remove any possibility of transcendence. The differences that Deleuze and Guattari want to call to our attention are non-transcendable surfaces. These thinkers, unlike Levinas and Lacan, are content to trace planes of immanence in order to demonstrate their lack of depth and/or source beneath the surface planes. This type of a philosophical approach can be seen, for instance, in Deleuze's conception of the subject as a series of flows, energies, movements, and fragments that are capable of being linked together in ways other than that representing an identity. Besides resisting any movement towards transcendence, desire disrupts any potential underlying principle for Deleuze and Guattari. Hence unlike Lacan's philosophizing from the depths of the psyche or Levinas' reach toward transcendence, Deleuze and Guattari are content to philosophize from the surface. And their affirmation of the surface is a manifestation of their attempt to think difference, whereas Lacan attempts to think difference by examining the unconscious and Levinas the ontology of the other. For Deleuze and Guattari, then, philosophy is the art of surfaces that are

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formed by a series of flows. And as a manifestation of difference, desire eludes reason, which tends to function in terms of the logic of identity. Yet unlike Lacan, Deleuze and Guattari refuse to reduce philosophical thinking and experience to language.

Although the philosophical approaches of our postmodernists are diverse, there are dangers associated with their respective approaches to the subject of desire. If it is true that Lacan develops a psychology of difference, and Deleuze and Guattari develop a philosophy of difference, I agree with Butler that it is necessary to “distinguish between *kinds* of difference, some of which are dialectical and always reinstate identity subsequent to any appearance of ontological difference, and others of which are nondialectical and resist assimilation into any kind of synthetic unity.”⁵⁸ From another perspective, Lacan, Deleuze, Guattari, and Levinas are all henophobic because they reject the possibilities of any unity or oneness serving as the foundation of thought and being. Wyschogrod expands on this criticism: “The attack on unity is bound up with postmodernism’s antifoundationalism, its antipathy toward the notion that there is a privileged source of truth and meaning, whether a transcendent divine Other or human consciousness.”⁵⁹ Another problem with these philosophies of difference is that sameness is forgotten or neglected. Because of this, there is a danger inherent within them that could undermine these philosophies of difference. If there is only difference, there can be no real difference with sameness.⁶⁰ In other words, if there is only difference, all distinctions disappear resulting in a total identity or monism. Moreover, a danger that is especially evident in the works of Lacan, Deleuze, and Guattari is the potential for their grasp of desire to fall into a solipsism of desire. Similarly, a special danger associated with an emphasis on the limitless nature of desire is that it represents the discourse of decadence and even depravity. Fredric

Jameson, a self-acknowledged postmodern thinker, admits that decadence is characteristic of postmodern thinking.⁶¹ And Wyschogrod criticizes Deleuze and Guattari for their view of desire as material, productive, and unlimited. She summarizes her critique by stating: “The main thrust of my criticism is that, although desire is necessary to radical altruism, unlimited desire that has become productive is an expression of power and is incompatible with altruism because the Other, always already presupposed, constitutes a limiting condition of desire. The Other can never coincide with the desire that intends her/him.”⁶²

This criticism is confirmed when Deleuze and Guattari connect desire with the will-to-power. For them, desire is their rendition or alternative model of Nietzsche’s will-to-power, which is manifested as a heightened sensibility. They want to use desire to rearrange our perspective and to create a new world perspective by means of developing concepts, which can only be defined by their interrelationship to other concepts with their own field and that of surrounding areas. This understanding of desire suggests that philosophy is not a quest for truth, a misconceived pilgrimage that is at best secondary, but is rather an operation for the creation of concepts that are non-representational. The difference embodied in desire dispels all unifying forces within philosophy. Desire, therefore, which functions as a will-to-power, leads us to the simulacrum, a paradoxical entity contrary to common sense.

Within the context of one of his earlier works, Deleuze connects this notion of the simulacrum with the will-to-power and explicitly associates it with the eternal return. He claims that the simulacrum is the will to power as simulation.⁶³ But will-to-power cannot be understood apart from the eternal return, an expression of chaos itself. Representing the same and the similar in a simulated form, the cyclic eternal return func-

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tions in an excentric way in relationship to a decentered center.⁶⁴ As such, in place of the coherence of representation, the eternal return substitutes its own errant chaos and causes only phantasms to return. Writing on behalf of all human beings, Deleuze concludes, "We have become simulacra."⁶⁵ This type of thinking is intended to undermine the Kantian conviction that metaphysics is a natural disposition of the philosophical thinker because of the very nature of reason, which possesses the ability to unify the empirical cognitions of the understanding.

For Deleuze, on the contrary, thinking is not an expression of in-depth interiority or the enactment of transcendental models, it is rather a quest for finding new images, change, and transformation. If we apply this attitude toward thinking to the notion of desire, thinking is an attempt to establish connections between the multiple flows of impersonal forces. Deleuze, Guattari, Lacan, and Levinas thus all appear to share the conviction that desires are irrational, whereas someone like Robert Nozick, for example, views them as rational because desires are rationally coherent when they satisfy certain conditions and when there is a process which arrives at rationally coherent preferences and desires.⁶⁶ Within the context of such a theory of a rational possibility for desires, when we discover that desires are not possible to satisfy we change our desires, even though a particular desire may be retained as a preference. Beyond Nozick, I would go so far to say that we can only think the truth of desire in a retrospective way because all present moments contain an unknown element that can only be comprehended in the future. Deleuze and Guattari are committed, however, to a "Nietzschean attempt to free prerational mentality of its rational bonds and therefore as a reaffirmation of prerational values in modern culture."⁶⁷

There are some lessons to be drawn from the thinkers reviewed in this essay. The politics of desire given to us, for instance, by Deleuze and Guattari represents a challenge to reason. Lacan shares this anti-Enlightenment trend of postmodern thought, although Levinas does not share this distrust of reason to the same degree. This reflects a trend within postmodern thought to use philosophical or other kinds of writings as revolutionary tools. Within this scenario, when the claims of reason confront power of desire they are rendered problematic.⁶⁸

My own position would be that rather than simply aiming at obtaining something, desire is more akin to wanting. It is this wanting that fuels the motives behind many of our actions. Desire is related to past time and memory in the sense that we tend to want those things or experiences that gave us pleasure in the past. Being grounded in past experience and life itself, desire can lead to further pleasure, but it can never be completely satisfied. With our desires, we live at the margins of wanting and satisfaction. And wanting and satisfaction never reach a point of conclusion or termination. Our wanting and quest for satisfaction continually drives us and frustrates us, leaving us always at the edge.

Another lesson suggested by these thinkers is that by abandoning ourselves to desire, we risk eventual loss of self, or at the very least a loss of control over ourselves. If desire implies radical self-transcendence or a loss of self, it embodies an urge toward the annihilation of our identity. This connects it to death. This suggests why like death it can be frightening, unpredictable, an eruption into our lives, overpowering, overwhelming, and chaotic. Moreover, it shows why desire is often experienced as subversive, untamed, and unrestricted. Its reckless potency continually threatens to overcome us.

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