

Solving the Paradox of Desire

SOLVING THE PARADOX OF DESIRE:

LIBIDINAL LOCATIONS

AND

MISSING CONDITIONS

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A QUESTION OF DESIRE

Back in the last century, I was thinking about the paradoxical nature of desiring to overcome desire, or desiring to be desireless.

There are, of course, the first-order, specific desires, for this or that. Then, the second-order desire to overcome those first-order, specific desires, is really no less of a desire.

I knew, anyway, how to solve the seeming conundrum. Because escalating or inflating the concept of desire to an absolute, left only a pan-libidinal cartography with no room for its opposite, so therefore became essentially meaningless. It was just the habitual application of a libidinal grid to everything.

But I wanted to solve the paradox, and solve it *on its own terms*. I thought a bit more about it, and then solved it, at least to my satisfaction. It works, both logically and existentially.

Around five years ago, I thought I ought to write about the paradox and its solution. I was wondering whether it had appeared in academic literature, to do with Buddhism, which would be the most likely area. I did a Google search, and found a few things. But none of them really produced a strong, wide-ranging solution. If I remember correctly, one of them sort of suggested the pan-libidinal cartographic point, as some kind of hazy, mystical realisation, to be obtained through the seeming impossibility of solving the paradox. But it didn't go beyond that. It didn't address the paradox, 'itself'.

In any case, I thought recently to go back to the task of writing about it, thinking that I'd only written a couple of notes. But it looks as though I wrote considerably more than that, sometime between 2014 and 2016. It looks like I've covered everything that the solution requires.

Since writing the above, and after various, social media discussions, concerning the paradox of desire, additional sections have been produced, as well as a couple of extensions of the original sections, as in the following:

'A QUESTION OF DESIRE'

'THE STRUCTURE OF INTENTIONAL MYSTIFICATION'

'A CULTURAL NOTE'

Considerable extension of 'INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM', beginning with the line, "This essay on desire is structural"

Considerable extension of the 'MY ANSWER' section.

These additional sections and extensions address what seem to be contours of interpretative blockage that seem to disperse, displace, or otherwise alienate, the correct conditions of understanding necessary to the solution into various forms of strained mystification. Because of the plurality of those forms and the reasons for them, a redundancy of repetition with regard to the same explanation seems to have

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arisen. But because each repetition is a different expression, evoked by a different form of strained mystification, as it were, it seems more prudent to retain the redundancy over any concerns for the frugality of the essay's economy.

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM

What is "desire" (see section on 'Etymology of desire')?

If someone like Nagarjuna would say that desire is 'dependently originated': then is not the concept of "desire" itself constituted? Is it not structurally dependent on objectifications, on reifications?

Does the 'logic of desire' have to be the dominant methodology? Does it have to be the master word, transcendental signified, or signifier?

This essay on desire is structural, dealing with the logic of desire, and the constitution of the paradox. It's not embroidered with any more existential, practical, or anecdotal detail, than is structurally necessary. The notion of overcoming desire is much easier than the practice of removing entrenched desire. But the notional constitution of desire can be as much of an obstacle as any of the more conventionally conceived, visceral challenges.

The paradox of desire, is the perspective, that attempting to attain desirelessness, is desiring, if at(tempting) is desiring.

This essay doesn't go into the question of the nature of what might be desired or not desired. It concerns the logic of the desire concept. It doesn't attempt a calculus of implemented or not implemented desires.

The essay is a straightforward consideration, it doesn't attempt to avoid or solve the paradox, through utilising any differential strategy between first and second order desires, as some of the academic literature on the paradox of desire seems to do.

It does not sidestep the paradox through the concept of satisfaction, and its dialectical interchange with the concept of desire, or through any other interim procedures of this type.

But it doesn't look as though anyone has focused on the paradox itself.

This is one of the articles on the problem -

<http://www.buddhismtoday.com/english/philosophy/thera/013-desire.htm>

My treatment is much simpler.

What most of the treatments seem to do, is to rush off into their respective assumptions of worldly reference and cosmological exemplification, all of which are relevant to practical concerns, but not necessarily to the paradox, as stated. The treatments can be quite clever, in their shufflings of worldly assumption, but they forget the core assumptions around which the paradox revolves.

My solution is purely formal, it only uses the logic of desire, 'itself'. Nothing else is necessary. It could work in any universe that has structures of desire. No other assumptions other than the logic of desire, 'itself', are necessary.

This is the rationale behind the solution, it is actually the solution, but without application to, or use of, the paradox -

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One knows that *absolute desire* becomes meaningless, but that doesn't satisfy the intuitive force of the paradox. It's easy enough to transcend all specific desires, but to do so as a deliberation, still leaves that deliberation within the economy of its desire, and thus within desire, generally; and thus, within the paradox.

Just think about the logic of it.

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BUDDHA'S CHARACTERISATION OF DESIRE

- 1) Buddha says that the root of suffering (*dukkha*) is desire.
- 2) Desire leads to the cycles of rebirth, etc., the circular economies of a relentlessly evaluative existence (to evaluate; to choose; to prefer; to avoid; etc.).
- 3) One becomes 'caught up' in this libidinal dialectic. But is a "libidinal dialectics" the only possible characterisation of the realms of 'world'; 'experience'; 'vitality'; etc.?

STRUCTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. Some Conditions of the Problem

I was aware that what one can call first order desires, specific desires pertaining to empirical objectivity ('states of affairs' in the 'world'), grouped together and rejected in toto, nonetheless could constitute a libidinal position.

If we are to speak of 'worldly' desires, whether concerning worldly constituents or a 'totality', all are, equally, reifications susceptible to the play of attraction and aversion, to the logic of desire.

Considered in a conventional way, it would seem that there is no way out of such a logic. One can transcend specific desires, even for the 'totality', but how does one transcend the play of the logic of desire? Is not the desire for desirelessness, a desire?

I was aware that allowing 'desire' to drift away from specificity, into being an un-explanation of everything, left no place for its negation, 'desirelessness', and thus risked meaninglessness. In order for 'desire' to be significant (and not merely a "transcendental signified", as Derrida would say), 'desirelessness' must already be in operation. On reflection, it can be seen that 'desirelessness' is everywhere.

As soon as there is *any* reification, *any* differentiation, it becomes possible to *signify*. Possibilities of meaning occur: notions of 'entity', 'plurality', 'totality', etc., come into play, as necessary corollaries of the 'entry' into this system of differential objectification.

'Desire' can only occur if there is some *thing*, whatever its ontological status, to 'desire'. This *thing* is an objectification of some sort, whether an 'object' in the conventional sense or a 'state of affairs' (delimited process). The very assertion of such an objectification is only significant if there are other possible objectifications that could be signified, from which the 'desired' objectification requires selecting or indicating. If there were no other objectifications (the possibility of otherness), assertion would be redundant, signification unnecessary, indication would not be required.

Given that the inalienable concomitant of any desire is meaningful selection of one *thing* among other *things*, it follows that these *other things* are not desired. Thus, any desire can only occur over a general background of 'desirelessness', as it were. For there to be any desire at all, there have to be undesired possibilities.

So it can be seen that the logic of desire requires a radical desirelessness to function at all, that 'desirelessness' is a structural concomitant and component of this logic.

2. The Topological Distributions of Desire

The structural topology of the logic of desire being established, it becomes apparent that the 'subject' is the locus or site at which the distributions of the 'desirable' ('desire') and the 'undesirable' ('desirelessness') occur. Furthermore, it can be seen that 'desire' occurs as a corollary of 'intention' or 'intent'. Intention is a 'being-

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toward', a directedness toward the object of desire. So long as the structure of intention is directed towards the object of desire, it is wholly governed by it, nothing, no operation, not even negation, can escape its absolute semantic governance. Its negation is 'its' negation, the operation sustains its intentional presence. So long as intent is teleologically bound by the selected objectification, all operations can only occur as fetishistic repetitions of it, as appropriations of its governing dialectic. This absolute inflationary presence then overwhelms the possibility of electing alternative possibilities (the formerly 'undesirable'), which have become increasingly *absent*, as it were. The original selection has turned into an invariable and ceaseless election.

The paradox of desire, is that invariable and ceaseless election of desire referring back to itself, as the assumption of its own economy, and as a spell of the intentions caught in it.

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MY ANSWER

The solution, which is a positivist, non-solution, as it were, can be seen as based on the differential logic of Buddhist, apoha linguistics, where 'a cow is not a non-cow'; or in the language of the libidinal, 'a desire is not a non-desire'.

Whilst pondering the paradox, back in the twentieth century, this formulation suggested itself to me, fairly quickly.

‘I no longer *desire* to solve the paradox of *desire*.’

This is the only way to solve the paradox of desire, on its own, positive terms.

The escalation or inflation of desire to an absolute, leaving only a pan-libidinal cartography with no room for its opposite, with no room for desirelessness, renders Desire as limitless libido without any meaning. It cannot, then, even be considered as any determinate form of desire; that is to say, it is no longer desire. Because there is no defining negation of it, desire is then merely reduced to the pan-substantialist assumption of an absolutely conditioned responsiveness or urge, without determinate form.

Nowhere is left, to locate or distribute desirelessness, to. No relation has been left, which is not characterised as libidinal.

So, it is impossible to solve the paradox, whilst maintaining the pan-substantialist assumption of absolute desire. But to maintain such an assumption, is to render the concept of desire meaningless and no longer susceptible to even being considered as desire.

Thus, only one possibility is left. The *desire* to solve the *paradox of desire*, is the only point external to the scope of the paradox, at which a defining negation can be logically introduced; precisely according to, and without compromising in any way, the terms of; the assumption of the paradox's pan-substantialist, formal conditions.

Because the *desire* to solve the *paradox of desire* is still a *desire*.

The sequential ordering of levels of desire and desirelessness, articulating the ascending architecture of the paradox, proceeds thus -

- A) Specific or specifiable desires
- B) The desire to be free of all specific desires, to be desireless
- C) The paradox of desiring to be desireless

Specific desires, can be possessed or not possessed, without contradiction; because their specificity provisions delimitation susceptible to negation. The fact of desiring something is simultaneously the fact of not desiring something else, or other things.

But the conjoining of all desires, together, even those that might contradict each other, is the conjunction only, of the various sorts of possible desires from the

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perspective of positive desire or positive desiring. But positive desiring cannot simultaneously entertain contradictory desires. To do so, would be paradoxical, but this is the result of conjoining all possible desires according to the perspective of *positive* desiring. The condition of negation, with respect to which every act of positive desire occurs, is forgotten when the conjunction of all possible desires is seen only as the positivity of desire-in-general, and both the acceptance and refusal of which, seen only as another act or fact, of positive desiring. The tacit, background condition, of '*not desiring*', is neglected in the overwhelmingly *positivist* constitution of the *paradox of desire*.

The neglect is of a logical and structural necessity, an elision not noticed due to the obscuring spell of positivist and substantialist intuitions which immediately carry attention and intention over into the worldly and substantialist conventions of desire, therein to occupy themselves with the calculations and transactions of those conventions, and their overridingly positivist and immanentist assumptions.

Thus, because of the metaphysics of mundane substantialism, and its positivist chains and constraints of immanentist assumption, even the elision of negative necessity and conditioning is suppressed, and the paradox is produced on this assumed ground of absolutised positivity.

Because the internal economy of the paradox has been positivised absolutely and according to the unvarying, libidinal assumption of desire, there is nowhere to put desirelessness or negation, within the internal economy of the paradox, in a way or fashion escaping libidinal presumption or assumption, when all *intentions* are necessarily characterised as positive ones and equated with desires.

Thus, there is only one place to go, in order to recover desirelessness and the suppressed negation. Outside of the paradox, outside of its economics of positivist assumption. That is to say, the positivist presentation of the paradox itself, as well as the injunction and desire to solve it, which are merely extensions of its positivist assumption.

That positivist desire to solve the paradox is the key to the paradox's solution. Because it is here, at the point of expected positivist solution, of the paradox; that desirelessness and the suppressed conditions of logical negation, can be reintroduced, by no longer *desiring* to solve the paradox of desire.

The solution is thus both logical, elegant, and existentially satisfying, because it uses the concept of desire and its logic, to solve the paradox of desire, in a meaningful way; both specifying the conditions of the paradox, and using the extension of the very positivist assumption creating the libidinal aporia of the paradox. Even extending that positivist assumption to the paradox, itself, revealing its *economic and positivist expectations of solution* as an instance of the very *desire* any solution is supposed to *overcome*! Thus, by refusing that *economic and positivist expectation*, by refusing the *desire* of its *expected positivist solution*, that twin refusal recovers the repressed conditions of negation, overcoming the illogical, positivist constitution, of the paradox, and desirelessness is achieved, through this recovery.

THE STRUCTURE OF INTENTIONAL MYSTIFICATION

This is why the Occidental habit of mystification occurs.

Intention becomes positively identified with the concept of desire in an essentialising and totalising way, causing its absolute inflation, in a positivist way. This absolute inflation, then, metonymically, produces an assumption and horizon of absolute positivity, which then obscures the corollary, constitutive context, of negation.

Given such an assumption, there is nowhere to go that isn't in advance characterised as a libidinal position within the horizon of absolute positivity. The constitutive context of negation is then reduced to the Occidental habit, and convenient positivist positioning, of transcendental mystification.

The solution is behind them, or so far in front of them, that it exceeds the narrative entirety of their positivist possibility; to the extent of exceeding all notion of positivist orientation; so much so, that positive positioning indexes of 'behind', 'in front' or 'ahead', are redundant and useless if positivist assumption is exclusively maintained.

But if we can say that metaphorically the solution is behind them, and has been forgotten, because its possibility resides at the beginning of their positivist journey; then it would be possible to say that if this positivist traveller were to merely look back and consider the beginning or inaugurating limitation of their positivist journey; then it might be possible for the positivist traveller to recover the suppressed conditions of the forgotten solution.

But when the positivist traveller looks only ahead, and only according to the same visions of libidinal expectation as have governed the rest of the traveller's exclusively assumed, positive itinerary, then those suppressed conditions are invisible to the traveller's assumed order of visible expectations.

The traveller can only dimly intuit the necessary suppressed conditions for the solution as mystical after-effects of vague, positivist culminations, and their relaxation, when looking ahead. Or the traveller experiences the same suppressed conditions, in a similarly uncanny way, as if being watched, from behind.

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A CULTURAL NOTE

There's a very simple and specific reason as to why the paradox cannot be solved, in positivist terms. It seems to be very telling, culturally, that that simple reason doesn't seem to have been given specific formulation, before, despite the paradox having received varying degrees of attention in the academic literature.

The lack of such specific formulation, together with the lack of academic realisation that the paradox has been approached in a fundamentally illogical way, suggests that either decades of academic consideration have been consistently insufficient; or even incompetent, considering the simplicity involved; in their logical approaches; or that there was insufficient motivation to address the problem of the paradox, in a serious and radical way.

It could, of course, be that the second reason of insufficient motivation, produced a condition in which the first reason of insufficiency or incompetence, was enabled? In other words, the problem of the paradox was not taken seriously enough to warrant proper investigation of its conditions.

Why this should be so, seems strongly indicative of prevailing cultural biases that strongly promote a certain kind of habituation to a certain kind of worldly mechanism, as it were, the routes of which are traced in unthinking, rote and robotic, ways.

Such a habituation and worldly mechanism unthinkingly revolves around the obscurity of its own motivation, an obscurity axiomatically assumed as the rubric of positive desire, but evidently no other relation of consideration seems to obtain, beyond the unilateral horizon of this axiomatic assumption. It is as if there is nothing else but this positivist horizon and the androids unthinkingly carrying out its injunctions and instructions.

It is this horizon and the cognitive limitations exercised by it, that, by all accounts, are evidently responsible for the lack of understanding regarding the paradox of desire, which lack of understanding, the horizon itself is the coercive and exclusive exemplification of.

The Occidental need to always positively define (one going back to the ancient Greeks and their hostility to the infinite and what they saw as the 'formless'), and yet to simultaneously suppress the background and negative implications of its positivist definitions, constitutes an unquestioned, libidinal centrism, and investment, the impositions of which always seem to be implemented and enforced according to this unquestioned centrism with no serious consideration of that which it exploits and is inextricably linked to through the economics of its own definitions.

There is a kind of disingenuous addiction to the economy of such positivist definitions and their libidinal centrism, one taking reactive forms in every cultural scenario, one that attempts to seek justification in the works of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, an increasingly populist haven of reactive, tangibility nostalgia.

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All of this, of course, is easily suggestive of the cultural biases responsible for the Occidental failure to adequately characterise its erroneous approaches to the paradox of desire. Because, as can be seen, the paradox is only an aporia from an exclusively, positivist perspective, one that the entire Occident, at least throughout its four-thousand-year history, as beginning with the ancient Persians and Greeks, seems to be more or less exclusively dominated and enslaved by.

That the Occident is unnecessarily reduced to vague gestures of mystification with regard to the paradox and its solution, is a symptom of its addiction to the unilateral horizon of its own unthinking, axiomatic assumption, which it characterises as reality.

It is this, so-called, 'reality', which in truth is merely the self-presupposing, militarised maintenance, of an order of addiction that cannot even characterise itself with any degree of adequacy, even on its own terms, that is merely another expression of the Occidental lack of understanding regarding the paradox of desire.

It is not unreasonable to suggest that regimes based on positivist exclusivism, whatever their surfaces of pluralisation might be, are apt to give rise to the various half baked, theatrics of exceptionalism, which are the result of cognitive, positivist confinement. Exceptionalist gestures of all kinds, often contradicting each other, arise as attention and advantage -seeking, micro-repetitions and recapitulations, of the positivist exclusivism belonging to the host regime, each one a micro-tyranny, of its own.

Such exclusivisms and their incessant micro-theatres of petty and vapid exceptionalism, constitute an ongoing contour of general exploitation. But the culture of this contour of general exploitation is obviously deficient, cognitively and in many other ways, in both recognising itself, as well as the problems which its own deficiency gives rise to.

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Etymology of desire

* **desire (v.)**

early 13c., from Old French *desirrer* (12c.) "wish, desire, long for," from Latin *desiderare* "long for, wish for; demand, expect," original sense perhaps "await what the stars will bring," from the phrase *de sidere* "from the stars," from *sidus* (genitive *sideris*) "heavenly body, star, constellation" (but see **consider**). Related: *Desired*; *desiring*.

desire (n.)

c.1300, from Old French *desir*, from *desirer* (see **desire** (v.)); sense of "lust" is first recorded mid-14c. (desire - Online Etymology Dictionary)

From Middle English *desiren*...

From Middle English *desiren*, from Old French *desir(r)er*, from Latin *desidero* ("to long for, desire, feel the want of, miss,

regret"), apparently from *de-* + *sidus* (in the phrase *de sidere*, "from the stars") in connection with astrological hopes. Compare

consider. Compare also *desiderate*. (desire - Wiktionary 2014)

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