

# A Few Rudimentary Remarks About “The Little Logic of Need”

*Vincent Dachy, June 1993*

If you leave an ear lying around you will probably notice, especially in the field of Health, the omnipresence of the term “need”. It appears, moreover, very often in the commanding phrase “Meet the need”. Beyond this assonance, is it possible to discern the logic which sustains such a statement?

Meeting the need(s) of the client/patient seems to be what anyone who is in the “caring” profession has to submit to if he wants to be professional, skillful and well-endowed. What does this presuppose? It means considering the need as the object of care. In other words, if one takes the need as a lack which an appropriate response would complement, a pattern which is always the same emerges: a complaint which expresses a need, an assessment by one who knows, the appropriate response, provision, and finally, the “met need” fulfilled.

We could resort without further detour to the mother/child relation to give us a “symbolic image” of this approach to lack. Breast-feeding would accurately characterise the satisfaction of need. Consequently we should modify our assonance and transform the imperative into “feed the need”, which is in any case rather more appropriate in bringing out the equivocation at the heart of this question, while also taking on board in passing the elective primary link between need and the oral object.

When we satisfy the need with some adapted, ad hoc object, we aspire to silence, the silence of repleteness, appeasement, the quietness of completion, the return to a balanced state, the healing of the “damaged” body<sup>1</sup> (thinking that the body does not keep traces of what happens to it). What deductions can we derive from this model? First of all, the logic of need presupposes the possibility of satisfaction following the biological model, or the physiological one, or probably just plain “good sense”. Hunger, thirst, breathing...everything needed for the maintenance of life. This is satisfaction as conservation.<sup>2</sup>

Of course, the chief question remains: can one treat the hopes, feelings, wishes, and concerns of human beings according to the logic of “satisfaction of survival”?<sup>3</sup> For the logic of need, in tune, most of the time, with common sense, it looks more than possible. This confidence actually feeds off belief in the Pleasure Principle and normality. Ergo, satisfaction derives from alleviated tension, from the relief of “stress”. Thus, “being relaxed” becomes a master signifier with which to evaluate the right level of comfort. Not too much, not too little, in short, “not too”, just in the middle, well-balanced ...OK.<sup>4</sup>

This is the usual definition of normality, what is good for the norm, the average, what

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<sup>1</sup> Here one could broach the discussion of whether or not medicine goes along with that logic, happily or not, what tribute it pays to the Sciences and how pregnant, large that big brother looms in the minds of the “carers”.

<sup>2</sup> Which leads so quickly to conservation in terms of satisfaction, but that is another story Mr Kipling.

<sup>3</sup> Although we might discuss whether we can find a pure and incorruptible need for “survival”.

<sup>4</sup> Which fits with Aristotle’s notion of justice (cf Lacan, *Encore*, p.61).

is acceptable to all according to pears and pools.<sup>5</sup>

According to this endeavour of completeness, there is nothing beyond the Pleasure Principle, only perturbations of it. What seems to delineate a logic other than the “not too”, is a perturbation of the tendency to equilibrium.

Everything will return to normal if one can supply what is lacking and leads to discontent. By and large, the cause of such a lack is attributed to: —Detrimental (abnormal) situation currently experienced, —Traumatic episode(s) during childhood (the past). From there on, the possibilities of teaching seem unlimited. Teaching ways to satisfaction, how to transform useless dissatisfaction into useful well-being. The Providing and Knowing Other, alias the Good(‘s) Other, repairs, compensates, enlightens, guides, imparts, coaches, informs, advises, all in order to restore the damages caused by traumas and to readjust the disruptive present.

The configuration is different for each, but the solution is good for all: reestablishing a harmony beyond the environment’s perturbations (of the psyche).<sup>6</sup> Notwithstanding this, it appears inevitable to admit that the Good Other, and his good object, is never good or appropriate enough if we do not want to be asked where such an impeccably balanced and properly satisfied individual might actually be found.<sup>7</sup> Are the identification with the analyst or the retreat into “do what I say not what I do”, the only slips to circumvent?

In maintaining the logic of need against all-comers, we increase dissatisfaction, whether in children or in adults; in other words, the more one wants to satisfy the client with advice, objects or whatever, the more one abates the efficiency of the treatment and the more one augments the exactions of the Superego.

It still remains a surprise, always fresh, to state that the human being is not satisfied when one gives him what he needs or asks for. Why is this if not because another dimension subverts the need? Here, the distinction Lacan makes between need, demand and desire appears useful.<sup>8</sup>

In distinguishing desire and need Lacan reopens the question of the Other blocked in the impasse of the Ideal in the logic of need. That differentiation offers a ground on which to deploy seriously the question of love and desire which resists reduction to a supposed sexual need or a need for love.<sup>9</sup> The crucial step consists in taking into account the very act of speaking, the enunciation, its subject and its object, and not

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<sup>5</sup> At that point, and almost without a hiccup, a social discourse will relay and suggest, on the basis of the logic of need, solutions which are thought of in terms of comparison and balance, which is another way of putting the Discourse of the Master into practice. About difficulties encountered with social laws, see Antigone (e.g. Lacan, *Seminar VII*).

<sup>6</sup> Note the compatability of that logic with the theories of the good mother, the good object...Which throws light on why it is so conceivable to read and follow Freud’s work... up to a borderline.

<sup>7</sup> It seems to me that the clinical facts encountered in practice are not even necessary to moot the logic of need, the monstrous figure of a really normal individual does the job.

<sup>8</sup> Cf., among others, *The Direction of the Treatment...*, *The Signification of the Phallus*, *The Subversion of the Subject...* in Lacan’s *Écrits*.

<sup>9</sup> Love/desire, treated as need, opens up the drift towards the absurd, the fiasco, or... as it is observed in clinical work with children but also in mental anorexia, or in a parent explaining to his/her child that “they are not interested in anything but that”, “they just love it”, because she/he needs to know... Note the need is organised on a cyclical rhythm whereas the drive is a constant *Drang* which varies according to the vicissitudes of life, opportunities and the concourse of events.

only the content of the message.<sup>10</sup>

Following Freud, Lacan emphasises that the speaking subject asks for something (Else) beyond any declared object he demands to/from the Other. Any alleged need carried by language undergoes a transformation in becoming demand which entails the dimension of an address to the Other which one could summarise with the question “Che Vuoi?”. That is where the logic of desire begins.

Let us return to that of need. We could advance the following: the logic of need is Reason treating the demand, and its question, with satisfaction, normalisation, gratification and peace (return to happiness). There is a fascination with a blissful childhood and belief in the positivity of the object.

The logic of desire, on the other hand, approaches the question in demand via frustration, singularisation, invitation to speak, to say more in order to extract some knowledge from the insistence of demand (which is another name for desire). Belief in the structure of speaking and extraction of the object of fascination. The logic of unconscious desire articulated by Freud put the emphasis on the knowledge of the patient to which one has access through deployment of ignorance.

The logic of need stresses the knowledge of the therapist, but, in doing so, drives itself back to ignorance. What ignorance? Ignorance of the lack in the Other. The Other cannot succeed in being the omnipotent provider, thereby opening the disquieting question about what stops it being complete, stops it being the agency of completion. Psychoanalysis calls this the castration of the Mother. As manifested in clinical work, the logic of need protects or promotes the image of the phallic mother<sup>11</sup>, Mum knows, the “Mumastery”.

I remember the reply of a friend to a Professor when the latter said to turbulent students “...but I only want your good”, “You may want it Sir, but you won’t get it”.

Let me end with a suggestion/question. If the logic of need is common and widespread, and if it entails an ignorance of the Other’s castration we should find some resurgence of it somewhere. I think this resurgence exists, and its name springs up from the hollow of the imperative of needed satisfaction: abuse.

“Abuse”, one of the names of *jouissance*.

“Abuse”, a word which designates the remnants of the logic of need to an explanation for the fact that the word for “*jouissance*” is “omitted” in the English tongue?

## Appendix

An elementary difference in the topology of surfaces could perhaps give support to this.

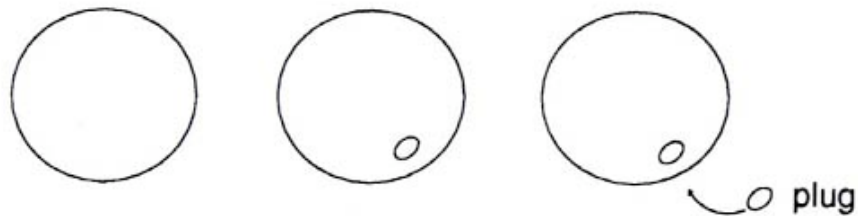
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<sup>10</sup> Cf. The Graph of Desire developed in Lacan’s seminar of 1958/59 (unpublished) and “*Subversion of the Subject..*” in the *Écrits*.

<sup>11</sup> To study that figure different occurrences of the mother’s image could be examined and compared: - The Nurse (F. Nightingale) -The Virgin Mother (and her debasement in Protestantism) -The Queen (Elizabeth I, Victoria) -Mrs de Sevigné -Lady Thatcher -The huge breast-feeding tits as a fashionable erotic attraction -The stepmother/mother-in-law -The spinster/schoolmarm.

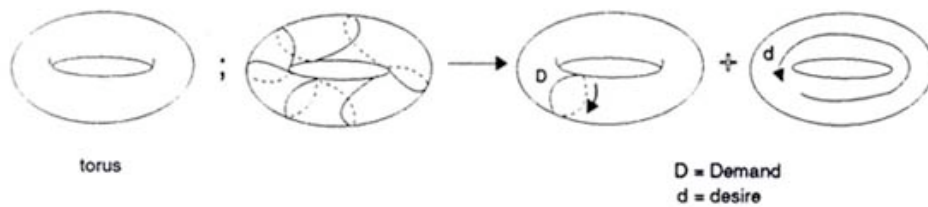
Need can be considered in the topology of the Sphere as a hole, an occasional lack (of *jouissance*) that the Other can plug.

Diagram 1



Desire, defined as a lack of *jouissance*, can be sustained within the topology of the torus as the lack constituted in the repetitions of demand.

Diagram 2



With our purpose in mind the main difference between the sphere and the torus is the status of the lack. Only in the second case is it constituent. This gives us an important clue: that that which is beyond the Pleasure Principle bears witness to the ex-sistence of a structural lack of *jouissance*.