

Beyond Poststructuralism and Gender-Free Thought

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IV. Jacques Lacan

(1) The thought of Jacques Lacan

Poststructuralism learned much from Freud's theory of psychoanalysis. Particularly, Jacques Lacan (1901-81), who specialized in psychoanalysis, issued the appeal for us to "Return to Freud."

① Language and Human Beings

According to Jane Gallop, Professor of Humanities at Rice University in the U.S., "Lacan teaches that language, which one speaks, is the subject, that the speaker is subjected to language rather than master of it."¹ He says that language manipulates and rules human beings rather than human beings manipulating language. In this context, Lacan says that the origin and development of sexual difference is within the field of language.² In other words, "language created man and woman."

Linguist Ferdinand de Saussure introduced the terms "signifier" and "signified" as the two elements (the binary opposition) of the sign: the signifier is the sound image of a word, and the signified is the concept corresponding to it. In contrast, Lacan gives primacy to the signifier, arguing that the signified (meaning) is the effect of the "play of signifiers."³ In other word, the signifier is what creates the signified.

② The Mirror Stage and the Formation of Ego

Lacan became interested in Freud around 1930, and he began to study Freud. In 1936, he introduced the theory of the mirror stage.

An infant cannot unite the senses of his/her hands and legs. His/her senses are split into pieces and he/she cannot distinguish himself/herself from others. Then, he/she obtains a self-image, or ego, through looking in a mirror. However, the ego as a mirror image is nothing but an image, and it is in the mirror; namely, it exists outside of himself/herself. As a result, the ego is not oneself: it is what is reflected in the mirror outside oneself. Thus, the mirror image and the self of oneself do not correspond one to one, and there are always conflicts between the self-image and oneself. The ego that originates in the mirror image is glorious at first, but it will lose its dignity before long. Jane Gallop states:

But the mirror stage is only the first step in the “dizzy Ascent.”...The ego is only just being formed The mirror stage is a fleeting moment of jubilation before an inevitable anxiety sets in. The mirror stage is thus high tragedy: a brief moment of doomed glory, a paradise lost.⁴

She says that “the ego finally becomes rigid, becomes a painful, encumbering armor that constricts the psyche.”⁵

③ The Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real

Lacan presented the theory of three realms; the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real. The imaginary is the realm of the image and the imagination, the symbolic is the realm of language into which an infant is compelled to enter, departing from the imaginary, and the real is the realm that cannot be symbolized; that is, what is outside of the boundary of language. The real is what is unknown and causes difficulty to anyone seeking to control it, just as in the case with Freud’s Es: It cannot be explained with words, nor with images. Catherine Clement compared Lacan’s theory of three realms with Freud’s structure theory: the imaginary with the ego, the symbolic with the superego, and the real with the Es (libido).

The symbolic, which is constructed with language and law, imposes a castration on the subject. According to Elizabeth Wright, who was a Fellow of Girton College, Cambridge:

The symbolic order for Lacan is that pre-existing order of language and law which forms the ground for the emergence of the subject. Its pre-established linguistic and cultural rules provide the distinctions that create the subject from the chaos of early experience, but also impose the castration that marks the subject as irremediably split, unable to link its imaginary identifications, the real that invades them, and the demands of the symbolic law.⁶

The law of the symbolic is paternal law, and a child necessarily enters under this law when he/she enters the symbolic. Sophia Phoca, a British critic, says:

According to Lacan, the infant child’s primary relationship and radical dependency on the maternal body, termed the **Imaginary**, is repressed when the child enters the **Symbolic** order. The Symbolic is the order of paternal law which structures all

linguistic signification. The Symbolic can only become possible by the child's rejection of its libidinal drives towards the maternal body. The Symbolic represses the **libidinal multiplicity** and chaos of the Imaginary into a **univocal language** structured by the law.⁷

Lacan tried to separate the symbolic from the delusions of the imaginary. That is, he aimed at the direction of science (the symbolic) rather than literature (the imaginary). According to Jane Gallop:

The structure of Lacan's account of the dream—privileging “the sentence,” subordinating the pathos—embodies a certain direction in his work which prefers linguistic structures (the symbolic order) over the juicier, more dramatic figures of the imaginary register. This is the direction that would gladly separate the phallus from the penis,...gladly free the symbolic from the delusions of the imaginary,...Psychoanalysis would move in the direction of science—first, linguistics and later, mathematics—by ridding itself of the dramatic, the figural, and the anecdotal, in short by ridding itself of literature.⁸

Lacan tried to explain Freud's psychoanalysis mathematically, and logically. However, it can be said that because of that effort, Lacan's theory became too confusing to understand.

④ The Other

“Self” is formed through one's relationship with others, according to Lacan. Therefore, the self is not given by birth: It is an artificial product created by others.

The other consists of the ‘other’ and the ‘Other.’ Elizabeth Wright argued, “the first ‘other’ stands for the image that the child sees in the mirror, the flattering picture of wholeness that belies the actual fragmentary nature of the subject. This narcissistic completeness nevertheless is what enables the subject to found an ego,...The ‘Other’ stands for the symbolic itself, the presupposed locus of all desire, determining the speaking subject.”⁹

The ‘other’ is the mother as a mirror. A baby establishes himself/herself, directed by his/her mother. On the other hand, the ‘Other’ is the father. The father who gives the symbolic order is not what really exists but is a symbolic father, which Lacan calls “Name-of-the-Father.” It is the law, the rule, the order, or the language. The Name-of-the-Father means the function of a symbolical prohibition by the father, and is what

imposes a castration by language.

⑤ The Object *a*

Elizabeth Wright explains Lacan's object *a* as follows:

The entrance into language produces the separation from the primordial lost thing, the mother, an experience of loss driven by the fact that the attempts of the symbolic to bring the real within its boundaries always leave a hidden remainder which endlessly re-inscribes the failure to achieve identity. To hide this failure, which the symbolic ignores, the subject pursues a fantasy of a lost object, the object *a*. A particular thing or happening in the subject's very early life starts the fantasy off, which offers the illusion of what will finally make up for the lack.¹⁰

The object *a* is a *plus du jouir* or "surplus *jouissance*" left over from the originally existent subject, and is something that the subject desires passionately to get hold of. As Kazushige Shingu, a psychiatrist at Kyoto University, mentions, *plus de jouir*, and the subject's desire for it, are caught up in a varied web of social relations, and drive individual subjects as they move through that web.¹¹

⑥ Sexual Difference and the Phallus

According to Lacan, the origin and the development of sexual differences are within the area of language, and therefore sexuality has nothing to do with biological sex. Elizabeth Wright states as follows:

This implies that a biological male can inscribe himself on the female side and a biological female on the male side. Each speaking being can choose to inscribe itself on either side, although this will be a "forced" choice, imposed by the parameters of the history of the subject's unconscious.¹²

What is sexuation? Lacan says that it is the process by which we unconsciously "choose" our mode of being as either feminine or masculine. Entrance into the symbolic inevitably produces a split in the subject, and the splitting of subjectivity produces a sexual division and bestows symbolic gender.

A phallus cannot be equated with the penis. It has, however, played the role of the penis in the cultural fantasy and the imagination of Western Europe, and therefore it is a symbol of the penis. According to Lacan, the difference between man and woman is

the difference in the function of the phallus. Elizabeth Wright explains Lacan's theory of sexuation as follows:

In these formulae, it becomes evident that the phallic function, the function of castration—the sacrifice demanded by the symbolic—applies in different ways to both sexes, that it is not the case that the woman has lost something which the man does not have to lose, and that neither sex can have or be everything.¹³

Judith Butler, professor at the University of California, Berkeley, explains Lacan's theory of sexuation as follows:

Women are said to “be” the Phallus in the sense that they maintain the power to reflect or represent the “reality” of the self-grounding postures of the masculine subject, a power which, if withdrawn, would break up the foundational illusions of the masculine subject position. In order to “be” the Phallus, the reflector and guarantor of an apparent masculine subject position, women must become, must “be” precisely what men are not and, in their very lack, establish the essential function of men. Hence, “being” the Phallus is always a “being for” a masculine subject who seeks to reconfirm and augment his identity through the recognition of that “being for.”...On the other hand, men are said to “have” the Phallus, yet never to “be” it, in the sense that the penis is not equivalent to that Law and can never fully symbolize that Law. Hence, there is a necessary or presuppositional impossibility to any effort to occupy the position of “having” the Phallus, with the consequence that both positions of “having” and “being” are, in Lacan's terms, finally to be understood as comedic failures, that are nevertheless compelled to articulate and enact these repeated impossibilities.¹⁴

In sum, man, who has a Phallus is not the Phallus, and woman, who does not have a Phallus, is the Phallus.

⑦ Lacan and Feminism

Elizabeth Wright says: “No division is ever going to fall neatly between masculine and feminine: each subject's desire will do it differently. Sexual difference always exceeds, is more than, gender difference...That is why for Lacan, there is no such thing as a sexual relationship.”¹⁵ Lacan's statement, “there is no such thing as a sexual relationship,” or “woman does not exist” is what has been expected by feminism.

(2) Critique of Lacan as seen from the viewpoint of Unification Thought

① Language and Human Beings

According to Lacan, language manipulates and rules human beings: “language created humans.” This is exactly the same idea as Marxism’s notion that “labor created humans,” and is also the same idea as Darwinism’s concept that “natural selection created humans.” In addition, Lacan says that signifier (sound and sign) creates signified (meaning) in language.

From the viewpoint of Unification Thought, in the dual characteristics of *sungsang* (nature and function) and *hyungsang* (form and matter), *sungsang* is subject, and *hyungsang* is object. That is, *hyungsang* is the carrier of *sungsang*, and *hyungsang* is the means or the material by which to manifest *sungsang*. As a matter of fact, when a painter draws a picture, he or she expresses beauty with paints; Beauty does not appear spontaneously from paints.

Also, from the viewpoint of Unification Thought: language doesn’t manipulate human beings, but rather human beings use and manipulate language, and the signified does not come out from the signifier, but rather the signified is expressed by the signifier.

② The Stage of the Mirror Image and the Formation of the Ego

Lacan says that the ego is not one’s self, and that it is what is reflected in the mirror outside of oneself. He also says that there are constant conflicts between the self-image (mirror image) and oneself.

However, I (myself) am myself from the beginning forever, and it is not true that the mirror image creates myself. The mirror image is merely a secondary, symbolical image of oneself. I (myself) am not in conflict with the mirror image. I (myself) grow up while watching the mirror image. Lacan says that the stage of the mirror image filled with joy will encounter tragedy, and paradise will be lost before long. What Lacan said should be considered as part of the growth process of an infant, who is embraced by his/her mother and will be weaned off the mother at an appropriate age.

③ The Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real

According to Catherine Clement, Lacan formulated the three realms of human cognition: “the real” → “the imaginary” → “the symbolic,” based on Freud’s formula, “libido” → “ego” → “superego.” The real is the realm wherein a baby’s senses are not

developed, and is what lies outside the boundary of language. The imaginary is the stage wherein one discovers oneself by watching a mirror and integrating the divided senses, and it is the realm of conscious or unconscious images and fantasies. The symbolic is the realm which is regulated by language.

From the viewpoint of Unification Thought, in a baby soon after its birth, the spirit mind of the spirit self is immature, and the baby lives by the demand of its physical self. As the spirit mind grows, intellect, emotion and will begin to develop gradually. As for the intellect, it develops from sensibility to understanding, and then to reason. It can be said that Lacan considered such a conscious growth process of the infant as the real (unconsciousness)→ the imaginary (sensibility)→ the symbolic (understanding and reason).

Lacan says that the symbolic imposes castration on the subject, but this is not the case. Reason develops as an infant grows, and it comes, naturally, to control the desire of the physical self. Therefore, it is wrong to regard such a process as castration or suppression.

④ The Other

According to Lacan, the other is a mirror in which a child sees himself/herself, and what one considers as “oneself” is an artificial being made by the other. He also says that the Other is the symbolical father, the law, the rule, the order, which has the function of the prohibition. An infant has to come under the law of the Other. It is regarded as the castration of language.

He says that the “child’s self” is made by the other, but this is not the case. A child’s self grows, embraced in its mother’s love. Lacan also says that an infant will be castrated by the Other, and comes to be under the law.

For Lacan, the Other is the symbolical father, the law, the rule, the order, which has the function of the prohibition, but he does not clarify why such an “Other” exists. From the standpoint of Unification Thought, the Other, as Lacan mentions, is the Word of God (logos) which is latent in our mind. It does not castrate us, but rather it leads us to the realization of true love: It is the guideline to love.

⑤ The Object *a*

The object *a* is that which cannot be obtained. However, the symbolic may try to bring the real within its boundaries, and it is said that the desire for obtaining the object *a* moves people. In other words, the remainder of the real, which is from the undifferentiated unconsciousness, just like in a baby, can move people.

From the viewpoint of Unification Thought, the object *a*, which is like a fantasy, does not move people from the bottom of one's heart. What moves people is the impulse of heart to love or to be loved, consciously or unconsciously, and the creative vision which is established based on such heart.

⑥ Sexual Differences and the Phallus

What makes a sexual difference between man and woman? Lacan says that sexuality is unrelated to the biological sex, and that the origin and the development of sexual differences are within the area of language. According to Lacan, sexuation is the process whereby one unconsciously chooses one's mode of being as either feminine or masculine: One or the other is bestowed as a gender when one enters the symbolic.

Lacan also says that the function of the phallus, which is the symbol of the penis, appears both in man and woman, but it works differently in man than it does in woman. Therefore "there is no sexual relationship." Freud considered a woman as the being who lacks the penis, and thus, the one who envies the penis, and therefore in Freud, penis plays an important role in the formation of the sexual identity, but in Lacan the difference of sexual identity is the difference of the function of the phallus.

From the viewpoint of Unification Thought, that a man who has a phallus is not a phallus means that a man has a phallus in the *hyungsang* (body) sense, but he is not a phallus in *sungsang* (spirit). Also, that a woman who has no phallus is a phallus means that she has no phallus in *hyungsang*, but she is phallus in *sungsang*. What is the foundation for such illogic?

From the viewpoint of Unification Thought, a man is created with masculinity, both mentally and physically, and a woman is created with femininity, both mentally and physically. The relationship between man and woman is not the relation of ruler and ruled, but rather it is a harmonious relation of subject and object, and the two sexes are to build true love as a married couple. The beautiful love of a married couple is realized through the harmony of the solemn love of man and the graceful love of woman. It is the same thing as in the case of music. Beautiful music is realized through the harmony of yan and yin, such as high and low sounds, or strong and weak sounds.

⑦ Lacan and Feminism

The theory presented by Lacan was precisely the formula that feminism had expected. However, Lacan's theory was established through clever deception.

Lacan says, "there is no sexual relationship," and "woman does not exist," but he also says that there is a difference between man and woman in the function of the phallus.

After all, it is impossible to deny the sexual difference completely.

In addition, Lacan says that the phallus is not a real organ, but on the other hand, he reminds us of the penis when he mentions the phallus. As Kazuko Takemura, a professor at the Women's College of Ochanomizu, points out, this is exactly a trick that even Iago, who is the genius of the plot in Shakespeare's "Othello," cannot think of.¹⁶

Notes

1. Jane Gallop, *Reading Lacan* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1987), 43.
2. Elizabeth Wright, *Lacan and Postfeminism* (Cambridge: Icon Books Ltd., 2000), 23.
3. *Ibid.*, 4.
4. Jane Gallop, *Reading Lacan*, 85.
5. Jane Gallop, *Reading Lacan*, 86.
6. Elizabeth Wright, *Lacan and Postfeminism*, 74-75.
7. Sophia Phoca and Rebecca Wright, *Introducing Postfeminism* (New York: Totem Books, 1999), 156.
8. Jane Gallop, *Reading Lacan*, 160-61.
9. Elizabeth Wright, *Lacan and Postfeminism*, 71.
10. *Ibid.*, 70-71.
11. Shingu Kazushige, *Being Irrational: Lacan, the Object, and the Golden Mean* (Tokyo: Gakujū Shoin, Publishers Ltd., 2004), 159.
12. Elizabeth Wright, *Lacan and Postfeminism*, 31-32.
13. *Ibid.*, 21.
14. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 61-62.
15. Elizabeth Wright, *Lacan and Postfeminism*, 34-35.
16. Kazuko Takemura, An afterword to the Japanese version of *Lacan and Postfeminism* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2005) by Elizabeth Wright, 107.