

## **I in the Eye: Situating Narcissistic Drive in a Sociology of Functional Governance**

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### **Abstract**

This tries to theorise the idea of ‘self-love’ or ‘narcissistic drive’ by placing it side-by-side with the social life of humans. Human Subject and that subject’s image of itself has always been a problem in the field of theoretical analyses. Departing from the de facto negativity associated with the term in the contemporary epistemology, this paper tries to make a move towards associating this drive with the fundamentals of governance of life and social cohesion. Then, it is argued that this drive plays a vital role in the systems of governmentality with a functional aspect inscribed into it.

**Keyword -** *Narcissism, Narcissistic Drive, Self-Love, Governance, Life, I And Other*

Human Subject and that subject’s image of itself has always been a problem in the field of theoretical analyses. Bringing the idea of ‘beauty’ into this field takes this to even more complex levels. The idea of ‘narcissism’ where the subject not only confronts its own image but also invest desires over it is hence of foremost importance. Talking about narcissism, generally it has been taken (arguably) as a kind of ‘abnormality’ or ‘aberration’ where one falls in love with oneself. In psychology it amounts to be even a personality disorder. Narcissism (with this negative undertones) has always been one of the charges against ‘attending oneself’. On the one hand there is this prudish fear at ‘over-attending’ while on the other hand there is the problem of ‘not-attending-enough’. Beginning from the critique of ‘selfie cultures’ of the current young generations, the idea of ‘narcissism’ has been an undertone to the sociological discourses concerning human subjects and their interactions.

An enquiry into the base of the ‘self-love’ would lead us to one unique faculty that humans possess—reflection. What sets the human species apart and unique from the rest of the living beings is the faculty of reflective thinking. Humans alone are capable of distancing the self from the rest of the world as ‘I and Other’. Beginning from Descartes, we can see that this idea of I and other, or the idea

of alterity, has been haunting the philosophical insights. When Descartes stated “I think therefore I’m” it was a testification of one’s being on the basis of one’s faculty of this distancing of the self from the other. My observation is that it is in this faculty of human life that we can trace out the roots of the narcissistic drive. Narcissism may even be described as an investment of desire over a frame of this “I-Other” relationship. It is hence utmost fundamental to the very status that we acquire in this world—the status of a unique species that is capable of thinking and advancing in life. Lacan would talk about this in terms of I and Other where the other is constitutive of the I while Foucault would locate the same in terms of subject/object relations of force.

If this faculty of distinguishing the self/ I from the Other is very much basic and foundational to humans, the idea of ‘governance of life’ germinates from the social structuring of human life. Sociology is hence the unique feature of the human species that lives and thinks about life and make progress according to such faculties. ‘Governance of life’ implies the way one’s life or actual living is regulated, organised and defined in certain ways based on certain common standards to make a predictable order prevailing between the individuals of a social group. For Foucault it is the set of organized practices determined by the regimes of truth, knowledge and power with corresponding mentalities, rationalities, and techniques, through which subjects are constituted as individuals or citizens and are governed accordingly. This governance is thoroughly based on ‘functionality’ where, as Foucault would say, individual subject is not only set as an object of the functional power-relations of the society, but also is set to constitute a functionally determined mode of actual living. So the individual as well as the life that this individual leads is constituted, defined, validated, maintained and regulated within a system of the sociology of the ‘I and the Other’ where the I and the Other varies from case to case.

Lacan’s discussion of the I and the Other was usefully insightful when it suggested that the self or the I is available only through an Other. When he discussed the Mirror Stage, he noted that it was at the separation of the self from the other—the world, mother, or the ‘mirrored’ image—in an age of 6 months that the individual begins his/her search for the self. this search leads him/her through an array of Others, all of which are equally partial and invested. That is where we can see ‘binaries’ as utmost fundamental to human faculties. In speech, in thought, in signs or anything of a certain signifying function necessarily relies on a structure of binaries. This binary is representative of the I and the Other which we are incapable of resolving unless we abandon all systems of signification, reflection and representation. Our life is structured like a signifying system with an I and an Other at the opposing poles.

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Now, my point is that what makes us follow this binary-structure of sense and signification is unambiguously the intention to attend to oneself: first as part of the biology, then as part of sociology. What else is this liking to attend oneself but that fixes the drives for sustenance of life and survival! So, this love for the self or the desire to attend oneself, for the well-being of oneself is necessarily coded to our biology. Here is where we can distinguish some primordial shades of what now we call the narcissistic investment of desires. As we have already mentioned, the intention for attending to oneself is first a biology and next sociology. Aspects of sociological life such as concept of beauty, sense of justice, codes of morality and ethics, and codes of appearances are all part of the sociology of the intention to attend oneself. In other words, such aspects as mentioned above are all part of a sociologically mediated primordial narcissistic drive that are on the other side more biological than sociological. The question now is: How does this mediation take place? How is it related to governmentality?

As we have already seen, our life is structured in a social order on the basis of a binary—I and the Other. As the only way to access the I is the Other, what we consider to be our subject ‘I’ is what the society constitutes through the Other. When we ‘make up’ ourselves against the ‘social mirror’ we are constituting a subject that is a functionally relevant object of the social system. This is the idea that Foucault also shares in varying technical terminologies. This constitution—subject and life of both the individual as well as the collective—is the basis of all movements towards governmentality. The prevailing power structures, constituted and maintained by (and constitutive of) the corresponding systems of truth, knowledge, and functional movements, determines the sociological Other in terms of its own norms and standards thereby determining the ‘I’ that we falsely think we freely constitute of ourselves. The truth and qualities of the subject that we become is that set of truth and qualities that the sociological Other present before us. What is the role of Narcissism or self-love here? It is nothing but this intention for attending to the self that aligns us in pursuit of the ‘desirable subjects’ that we aspire to become. The concept of beauty, justice, ethics and righteousness are all such mediated aspects that determine the constitution of the subject ‘I’ as the object of the sociological Other. if we plan to draw a line-diagram to demonstrate these points, it will begin from the indistinguishable ‘enunciating-subject’ and move to the Other, and return to the Self/I which is but the subject of enunciation. Our desire, not only to constitute the self, but also to constitute it ‘better’, is our intention to attend our self which is mediated by and through a sociological Other. This means that by altering the standards and truths of the Other, the society can constitute and reconstitute the individuals. Individuals never fail to respond to that because it is one of the fundamental drives that biologically sustains them by attending to the self. But, what we seek to know, or build, is the

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enunciating subject, while what we actually constitute is the subject of enunciation that is a product or object of a system of functional governance. Hence, this love-for-the-self, this Narcissistic drive, is effectively mediated in a system of functional governance to make such governance seamless and apparently normal.

So, rather than approaching narcissism or self-love as a point of deviance, this paper tries to look at it to see how biologically-bound it is to human beings. Then I proceed to see how the system of governance of life in a social order mediates this self-love by placing it over the binary of I and the Other. Narcissism in this sense is definitely one of the biological fields of life over which the systemic frame of constitutive relations and functional governmentality of the society deploys its strategic plans to create, normalise and seamlessly maintain a functional system of power relation and corresponding subject positions. Beauty, ethics, morality and all such aspects of social norms and standards are examples of such strategic deployment by which one's love-for-the-self is seamlessly mediated to produce a predictable field of functionally regulated life and normalised sets of subjects.

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