

Guilt, Persecution and Atonement:  
Moral Responsibility in Loewald and Levinas

Gordon Louis Aronoff

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

Religion

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## Abstract

### Guilt, Persecution and Atonement: Moral Responsibility in Loewald and Levinas

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Concordia University, 2010

This thesis examines the question, what does it mean to be responsible for choices that we did not make? The theme of moral responsibility is traced through feminist and postmodern discourses, and through the thought of psychoanalyst Hans Loewald and philosopher Emmanuel Levinas. An examination of feminist ethics and the so-called caring perspective situates the (gendered) self within an interpersonal web of competing caring commitments. Postmodern analysis deconstructs the self and, like the feminist critique, inquires into the transpersonal, historical and institutional discourses that give rise to our experiences of interiority and individualism. This placing-in-perspective of the autonomous self undermines all moral systems that are founded upon a conception of the reason-centered "I" that conceal the influence of the realm of affect and the (so-called) irrational. The primacy of this affective realm is taken up in the developmental psychoanalytic account of Hans Loewald, who elaborates the central and ongoing role of guilt and atonement in the formation of a responsible self. Guilt and atonement are also central to the conception of subjectivity advanced by Emmanuel Levinas. Levinas's critique of the reason-centered "I" is every bit as radical as the de-centered postmodern self, and yet he posits an alternative conception that cannot but be ethical. This self is summoned to a (limitless) responsibility through proximity to the other, and this obligation is only mitigated by the presence of the third (i.e. a plurality of others). As in

Loewald's account, the ego is torn asunder via an experience of trauma. However, whereas Loewald (following Freud) seeks to identify the ultimate causes of this trauma, Levinas traces (literally, as they only exist as traces) their unfolding and assigns their origins to that which is always directed away from the self and can never be formalized in a system. In reading Loewald with and against Levinas, the themes of guilt, persecution and atonement are thus identified as salient to our understanding of what it means to be morally responsible.



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## Introduction

### The problem

What does it mean to be morally responsible? In traditional Western philosophy, responsibility has been regarded as an offshoot of autonomy. To the extent that an agent is autonomous and thus capable of rational deliberation, she is capable of being morally responsible. We might think of autonomy in this sense as the ability to abstract one's self-reflective, deliberative capacity from any desires or appetites that might otherwise impair our reasoning. On this account, autonomy derives from a first-person account of the subject.<sup>1</sup>

We may contrast this first-person account of the human subject with a third-person account that describes the subject's language or actions in terms that do not respect the integrity of her self-constitution. Third-person accounts cut across the action vocabulary of the agent so that her words and actions are determined by forces of which she is unaware. Whereas the first-person perspective has traditionally been associated with an agent's Reason (principles, deliberation) the third-person perspective has been the repository of all things irrational (appetite, inclination, desire, and so forth).<sup>2</sup>

In popular culture, it is also common to present this first- and third-person dichotomy as a stark, binary choice, between regarding people as agents and regarding

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<sup>1</sup> Meili Steele, *Theorizing Textual Subjects: Agency and Oppression* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> Hinde Lindemann Nelson, *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair* (Ithaca & New York: Cornell University Press, 2001). Martha Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

them as victims. Our received secular understandings of moral agency are largely informed and distorted by pressure from two truncated depictions of human action. We might call these the medical-biological (or environmental) model and the economic model. The former focuses upon what happens to us, either from the outside (that is, in terms of direct victimization by the environment or other persons) or from inside (for example, from innate drives or from hormonal or chemical imbalances). This account traces our motives and our agency to experiences in which we had no agency. Moral responsibility thus becomes impossible.<sup>3</sup> The contrasting economic picture describes the moral agent as a chooser of goods in the consumerist sense of that term, in which all of our important moral decisions are understood as heroic acts of will that are unconstrained by desires and appetites. On this account, making important, morally-salient life choices is no different from choosing a brand of deodorant at the pharmacy.<sup>4</sup>

If the medical picture seems tilted toward deterministic despair then the economic picture tends toward nihilistic consumerism, and neither model provides us with a satisfying account of how human beings actually exercise their moral responsibilities in everyday life.<sup>5</sup>

A great deal has been written about moral agents who know what they should do and do it, and about moral agents who know what they should do and somehow fail to do it. The academic literature abounds in stories of people who choose to exercise or ignore their moral responsibilities that they derive on the basis of rational deliberation with

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<sup>3</sup> David Healy, *The Antidepressant Era* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1997). Herb Kutchins and Stuart A. Kirk (*Making Us Crazy*, New York: The Free Press, 1997).

<sup>4</sup> Emily Hauptmann, *Putting Choice Before Democracy: A Critique of Rational Choice Theory* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996). Kenneth Shepsle and Mark Bonchek, "Rationality: The Model of Choice," in *Analyzing Politics: Rationality, Behavior, and Institutions* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1997).

<sup>5</sup> Charles T. Matthews, "Agency, Nature, Transcendence, and Moralism: A Review of Recent Work in Moral Psychology," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 28, no. 2 (Summer 2000): 296-328.



reference to clear principles. Very little has been written, comparatively speaking, about what we might term good moral agents with bad principles, and moral agents who seem to lack clear principles and yet still manage to act in a morally responsible way.<sup>6</sup> A good account of moral agency and responsibility must be able to evaluate and treat as morally salient those features of our everyday moral lives (moral actions that are not deliberated upon, affect and unconscious motivation) that have been overlooked or deliberately ignored in the existing literature. In particular, the role of emotions such as guilt and the desire to atone (both of which have strong moral overtones) require elaboration.

### **The method**

The objective of this project is to bring together feminist theory, postmodernism, modern Jewish philosophy, and post-Freudian psychoanalysis in order to reconfigure our understanding of what it means to be morally responsible. These distinct discourses have not been selected arbitrarily. Rather, they each challenge the traditional philosophical account that posits an autonomous “I” as the sole locus of meaning and the basis of our moral responsibility. This project is therefore framed as an interdisciplinary conversation among these theoretical perspectives, and each discipline will be read critically against the others. My reading of these distinct discourses will be strategically focused on the theme of moral responsibility, and this will facilitate the identification of common ground as well as questions and concerns that are not shared. The project is thus critically

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<sup>6</sup> Nomy Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue: An Inquiry Into Moral Agency* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

comparative in its method, but it is also reconstructive in the sense that it will not merely take stock of the shortcomings identified with each discipline. Once these shortcomings have been identified, a model of moral agency and responsibility will be advanced that overcomes the false, binary dichotomy of the agent and the victim.

### **Outline**

The traditional philosophical account of the autonomous “I” as the sole locus of meaning and basis for moral responsibility has come under assault from a number of quarters, and this project is structured in such a way as to evaluate and, ultimately, offer a coherent response to these various critiques. Once the research problem, method, and parameters of the project have been addressed in the introduction, there will be a chapter on the feminist critique of philosophy and feminist ethics; a chapter on postmodernism; a chapter on Hans Loewald and post-Freudian psychoanalysis; a chapter on Emmanuel Levinas and modern Jewish philosophy; and a concluding chapter in which these different disciplines are read critically against each other.

### **Defining the Parameters of the Project**

The goal of this project is to broaden our understanding of what it means to be a morally responsible self. However, in order to achieve this objective, the scope of the

examination has been pragmatically circumscribed via engagement with a select group of important thinkers. These thinkers were not selected haphazardly. Rather, I sought to identify and engage with thinkers who were influential within their respective disciplines, and who were representative of both the historical developments as well as the contemporary debates within these discourses. Although specific thinkers have been privileged, an effort has thus been made to situate them within the larger set of voices and concerns within each discipline.

Within feminist discourse, the ethics of care represents the most significant challenge and contribution to contemporary theorizing about what it means to be morally responsible, and I have therefore focused on the thought of Carol Gilligan and Nel Noddings. Luce Irigaray and Jane Flax have also been cited extensively, since both have made productive use of psychoanalytic (and, in the case of Flax, postmodern) insights in their respective feminist critiques. More than twenty years after his death, Michel Foucault continues to be among the most widely cited and influential post-modern (or perhaps “post-structuralist”) thinker, and his radical critique of the self and of the ethical made him an obvious choice for inclusion in this project. Within psychoanalytic discourse, the choice of Hans Loewald is, at first glance, less obvious. I selected Loewald not only because his thought is incredibly rich and subtle, but also because he deals explicitly with the theme of moral responsibility in his work. Furthermore, he is not well known outside of psychoanalytic circles (although this is starting to change), and he therefore remains a largely untapped resource for theorizing about what it means to be a morally responsible self. Like Michel Foucault, Emmanuel Levinas remains incredibly influential more than a decade after his death, and his examination of what it means to be

responsible has redrawn the parameters of inquiry concerning subjectivity and ethics.

Levinas's inclusion in this project is therefore essential.

### **Key Questions**

This project is structured around a number of key questions. Broadly speaking, I am inquiring into what it means to be a responsible moral agent. More specifically, I am examining the role of affect and the unconscious in the development of a responsible self. In juxtaposing the thought of Levinas and Loewald on the question of responsibility, I am seeking to elaborate the role of guilt and atonement, which both figure very prominently in their respective accounts. In this light, and with reference to Levinas, I am also seeking to clarify what he means when he states that we are responsible even for the persecution that we undergo at the hands of the Other.

### **Description of Chapters**

#### Chapter: Feminist ethics

In reading for gender bias, the feminist critique has exposed the extent to which the human ideal in Western philosophy is merely a repository for those values that have traditionally been associated with the masculine. This includes the ideal of a deliberating, autonomous agent as a locus for moral agency and responsibility. In a similar vein, feminist critiques have identified false, hierarchically-arranged dichotomies in philosophy in which a stereotypically male quality (Mind, Reason, Universal, Reality) is

juxtaposed with a (derivative or secondary) stereotypically female quality (Body, Emotion, Particular, Appearance). Feminist theory exposes the lacunae in traditional philosophy and posits a gender-conscious grounding for an ethics of responsibility. The autonomous “I” of traditional philosophy is de-centered in favor of a conception of a self that is situated within and responsive to a relational web of mutual obligations.

### Chapter: Postmodernism

The moral agent of traditional philosophy has come under an even fiercer assault from postmodernism. The post-modern critique also entails a radical de-centering of the first-person account of the self upon which the autonomous moral agent of philosophy is grounded. According to this critique, there is no self as such, and what is mistaken as a self is nothing more than an effect or by-product of the prevailing linguistic and power-structures in a given social and historical context. On this reading, ethics and moral responsibility are illusory. The best that one can do is to resist complicity with the oppressive power structures and gesture towards some (as yet) inarticulate future.

Both the feminist and postmodern critiques of moral agency are important and must be addressed in any coherent discussion concerning the meaning of moral responsibility. However, both critiques present truncated accounts of moral agency. In order to complete the picture, it is necessary to introduce two additional accounts of responsibility and bring them into a constructive dialogue with feminism and postmodernism.

## Chapter: Hans Loewald and Post-Freudian psychoanalysis

The post-Freudian psychoanalytic thought of Hans Loewald offers a very rich and largely unexplored account of moral agency and responsibility. Loewald's elaboration of Freud's conceptual framework allows us to discuss, in a meaningful way, the affective sources of moral agency and responsibility. Of particular importance in Loewald's account is the centrality of guilt and atonement in the development of a responsible self. Loewald articulates a human moral agency that derives from both first-person and third-person sources, thus addressing an important feature of the feminist critique of traditional philosophy. At the same time, Loewald provides a compelling account of the creative interplay between the first- and third-person accounts that is missing in feminist ethics. It is this interplay that infuses a life with a sense of meaning, and it is only through owning up to those third-person accounts that we did not choose in the usual sense of the term, that one becomes morally responsible. Loewald regarded consciousness as a developmental achievement, in which the individual gradually differentiated herself from an original (and undifferentiated) infant-mother matrix, and subjectivity is constituted by the ongoing interplay between these differentiated and undifferentiated ways of experiencing reality. Loewald's insistence on the continuing importance of this undifferentiated (i.e. transpersonal) source of subjectivity situates him as a transitional figure between modern and postmodern thought. Moral agency is not illusory for Loewald. Rather, the self is a fluid structure that must continuously revitalize itself through renewed contact with the transpersonal, undifferentiated context from which it arises.

## Chapter: Emanuel Levinas and modern Jewish philosophy

The thought of the modern Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas is an important well-spring for any examination of moral agency and responsibility. In positing ethics as first philosophy, Levinas articulates an account of the self that is every bit as radical as the postmodern critique of the same. However, Levinas's agent is constituted by the extent to which she meets the responsibilities that precede and call-forth her existence. As such, and in contrast to the de-centered self of post-modernism, she is inescapably ethical (although she may evade her responsibilities). According to Levinas, merely saying "I" (i.e. asserting my freedom and autonomy) already entails doing violence to the other, and his phenomenology of the face-to-face relation reveals, as it were, the affective traces that this violent act leaves behind in our consciousness. Reading Levinas for what he has to say about responsibility thus brings into sharp relief the importance of guilt, persecution and atonement in his account of subjectivity. Examining Levinas with and against Loewald, thus highlights important and difficult aspects of their accounts of what it means to be a morally responsible self. Levinas's thought also articulates the inherent difficulties when one attempts to discuss ethics using the language of being. This is one of the areas in which Levinas's account can expose difficulties in Loewald's model. Any systematic account of what Loewald terms "primary process" (the third-person perspective) is going to have to rely on a vocabulary that derives from the "secondary process" (or first-person perspective). Reading Levinas and Loewald for what they have to say about the themes of moral agency and responsibility, bring important insights into focus that might otherwise remain obscured.

## **Chapter One: Feminism, Gender, and Caring**

This chapter examines feminist conceptions of moral responsibility. There are many different types of feminism, and they are often differentiated from each other on the basis of their approach towards contemporary Western culture. For example, liberal feminists seek to recover Enlightenment ideals and apply them with the aim of reforming society along more egalitarian lines. Radical (Marxist and non-Marxist) feminists tend to reject reform in favor of a complete restructuring of society, since they feel that patriarchal norms are too deeply embedded to be removed without, killing the patient. There are further divisions within Liberal and Radical feminisms, as well as an entire constellation of distinct “feminisms” between these two poles.<sup>7</sup> However, all feminisms are concerned with praxis, i.e. with effecting real political change in order to overturn oppressive patriarchal norms, and it is this overarching concern that unites feminists of different stripes and allows us to speak of “feminism” as a unitary theoretical and political project.

Given the enormous scope of feminist theory, I will begin by summarizing some of the central concerns that have shaped feminist criticism as a whole. As these concerns have typically been framed in terms of a critique of Western Philosophy, I will summarize those assumptions (for instance, gendered philosophical hierarchies) that have been the target of feminist criticism. Then I will proceed to a consideration of selective (representative, influential) feminist conceptions of moral agency and responsibility. In

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<sup>7</sup> Feminists are also divided in relation to the various theoretical perspectives within the academy, so that one may find modernist and postmodernist feminists; feminists who reject religion and those who embrace it; and so forth. Each of these groups can be further sub-divided in terms of their stances on particular issues relevant to their field, such as (among religious feminists) the status of revelation and the traditional (almost always male) authority figures within their religion.



particular, I will elaborate the so-called ethics of care, which has become closely linked with feminist philosophy as a whole. As Annette Baier has argued, “‘Care’ is the new buzzword,” and by advancing a conception of the human that is inherently relational, the ethics of care has profound implications for how we think about moral responsibility.<sup>8</sup>

### Gender and Biological Sex

Perhaps the single most important idea that has come out of feminist thought is the identification of gender as a distinct category for analysis and critique. We say distinct because gender is not the same thing as sex. Sex refers to biology, or the anatomical features with which one is born that (usually, but not always) identifies a person as either female or male. Of course there are important exceptions,<sup>9</sup> but when a child is born that child usually has either exclusively female or exclusively male genitalia or a chromosomal structure that identify him or her as female or male. The critique of gender has been extended to include the physical body as well, in the sense that the body itself is now regarded by many as a construct, at least insofar as the meaning assigned to its functioning varies from culture to culture and in different historical periods.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Annette Baier, *Moral Prejudices* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 19.

<sup>9</sup> The recent case of a female South African runner who was subjected to humiliating and invasive gender testing after winning a gold medal at an international track meet, underscores the extent to which gender and biological sex are fuzzy concepts.

<sup>10</sup> One thinks in this connection of Aristotle’s assignation of specific purposes to the various parts of the human body, which would eventually come to form the basis of the Catholic Church’s Theory of Natural Law. Today, this theory has few advocates outside of the Church, in part because of its conflation of the logically distinct notions of what is the case and what ought to be the case.

Gender is different, in the sense that one is not born with a distinct gender. Rather, gender is a social construct.<sup>11</sup> That means that gender is a product of a particular culture in a particular location and at a particular period in history. In other words, gender refers to what a particular society thinks about what it means to be female or male, how women and men are expected to behave, what kinds of activities and roles are appropriate to them, and so forth. Of course, there are feminists (such as Jane Flax) who question the sex/gender division, and who seek to elaborate the influences of biological forces on the formation of gender identity. Nevertheless, analyzing gender remains among the most significant philosophical advances of the last century.<sup>12</sup>

Who gets to define gender roles? In male-dominated (Patriarchal) societies, it is the men who have assigned the gender roles for men and women. As we shall see, in many contemporary patriarchal societies (and I include North American societies within this definition, even if we are moving toward more egalitarian models) women have been re-defining gender roles for themselves. Feminist criticism has revealed the extent to which these gender roles in patriarchal systems reflect an imbalance in power between the sexes, as well as a truncation and (hence) distortion of what it means to be human. As women have redefined gender roles along more egalitarian lines, many men have also sought (and embraced) masculine gender roles that are more flexible and inclusive, and less aggressive and domineering.

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<sup>11</sup> Contemporary theorizing about gender within the disciplines of Gender and Queer studies, identify a number of distinct sex/gender categories, represented by the acronym LGBTTIQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered, Transsexual, Intersex, Queer).

<sup>12</sup> This remains the case even when such analysis is overlooked or deliberately avoided in philosophy departments throughout the world.

### Gendered Philosophical Hierarchies

In the discipline of philosophy, feminist critique has exposed the theoretical biases and divisions that have traditionally been defended as natural. This is important, because philosophy has – until very recently- claimed to be about the search for truth, for what it means to be a human being, for the reality that underlies appearances – in short, for (supposedly) objective knowledge. These assumptions in philosophy have also been extremely influential in Western society and the roles that have been assigned to women and men.

The feminist critique has revealed a number of significant dichotomies or divisions that philosophers have, at least since Plato— defended as natural.

Here are some examples:

Mind-Body  
Reason-Emotion  
Universal-Particular  
Reality-Appearance  
Objective-Subjective  
Nature-Culture

The first member of each of these pairs has traditionally been associated with the male and the second with the female. The relation between the members of each dichotomy is hierarchical: The first member of each pair was deemed superior and thus dominant over the second. The feminist critique has exposed the misogynist bias of Western philosophy, and feminists have shown that when western male philosophers

talked about the most desirable generic human traits, they were really just presenting a composite of those traits that have historically been associated with the male.

For the purposes of this examination, it is the dichotomy between reason and emotion (or irrationality) that is most significant. Western philosophy has traditionally championed reason as the basis for good philosophizing. According to this perspective, it is through the cultivation and employment of reason that one discerns the truth behind mere appearances; determines how one ought to live; uncovers the beautiful; and determines legitimate ways of knowing. Furthermore, it is our rational nature that distinguishes us from non-human creatures and serves as the basis for an inherent human dignity. In the contemporary West, there is a related liberal tradition of the morality of rights and formal reasoning associated with John Locke, Immanuel Kant, and (more recently) John Rawls that has come to be known as the “justice perspective.” This approach posits an autonomous moral agent who uncovers and applies a set of fundamental rules through the use of (allegedly) universal and abstract reason.<sup>13</sup> Male philosophers have traditionally denied to women the reasoning capabilities of men, and women were thus regarded as incapable of acting as fully functioning moral agents. For instance, Immanuel Kant denied to women the ability to reason impartially (i.e. without contamination from emotions) and thus concluded that they could not be moral:

Women will avoid the wicked not because it is unright, but because it is ugly...Nothing of duty, nothing of compulsion, nothing of obligation! They do something only because it pleases them, and the art consists in making only that please which is good. I hardly believe that the fair sex is capable of [moral] principles.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Eva Feder Kittay and Diana T. Meyers, eds., *Women and Moral Theory* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1987), 3.

<sup>14</sup> Immanuel Kant, “Of the Distinction of the Beautiful and the Sublime in the Interrelation of the Two Sexes,” in *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime*, trans. John T. Goldwaite (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 81.

By extension, women were denied political independence and were thought to require the protection of males who could exercise moral and political autonomy on their behalf.

Aristotle thus argues that

The element [i.e. the male] which is able, by virtue of its intelligence, to exercise forethought, is naturally a ruling and master element; the element [i.e. the female] which is able, by virtue of its bodily power, to do what the other element plans, is a ruled element, which is naturally in a state of slavery...<sup>15</sup>

### Reason and Autonomy

What is “autonomy” and why is it important in this line of thinking? For Immanuel Kant, autonomy is a characteristic of the will of every adult human being:

So far as morality is based upon the conception of man as a free agent who, just because he is free, binds himself through his reason to unconditioned laws, it stands in need neither of the idea of another Being over him, for him to apprehend his duty, nor an incentive other than the law itself, for him to do his duty.<sup>16</sup>

For Kant, having autonomy therefore means considering principles impartially (i.e. detached from blind adherence to tradition or authority, by unreflective impulse, and so forth). As impartiality, autonomy is also a component of

an ideal for moral legislation, or general debate about moral principles and values. (It is) an ideal feature of a person conceived in the *role* of a moral legislator, i.e., a

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<sup>15</sup> Aristotle, *The Politics of Aristotle book 1 chapter 1, 1252 a 15-b 9*, ed. and trans. by Ernest Baker (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), 3.

<sup>16</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, trans. by Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), 3.

person *reviewing* various suggested moral principles and values, *reflecting* on how they may conflict and how they might be reconciled, and finally *deciding* which principles are most acceptable, and whether or how they should be qualified.<sup>17</sup> [italics in the original]

Because Kant regarded reason as universal, his model of moral autonomy does not posit any contradiction between individual autonomy and social cooperation. We become morally autonomous by following rules that we have chosen for ourselves through reason, and everyone chooses the same rules on the basis of the same universal (non culture-bound) reason. In this model of autonomy, we can each govern ourselves because we are all rational beings and thus share the same underlying, potentially-benign (i.e. purged of affect) true self.

To say that human beings are autonomous is to extend to them a right to control certain matters for themselves. A right of individual autonomy may be described as

a right to make otherwise morally permissible decisions about matters deeply affecting one's own life without interference by controlling threats and bribes, manipulations, and willful distortion of relevant information.<sup>18</sup>

Because humans are capable of moral autonomy, they are morally entitled and ought to be legally entitled to conduct their lives as they see fit. The justice perspective's doctrine of human dignity is based on this idea of personal liberty, and, more specifically, human rights. For this reason it is sometimes called the "rights perspective." These rights serve to protect people from external interference, but, since they may conflict with each other, they must be qualified and given a hierarchical arrangement. In this model, morality

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<sup>17</sup> Eva Feder Kittay and Diana T. Meyers, eds., *Women and Moral Theory* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1987), 131.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

entails uncovering and following an ordered set of generally applicable, yet highly differentiated rules.

Within the rights perspective, moral agents treat moral problems as analogous to mathematical equations, and moral reflection therefore consists of impartial, rational choosing of principles and the application of these principles.<sup>19</sup> We will revisit the so-called “rational-choice” perspective and its implications for moral agency, later in this paper.

### **Kohlberg and the stages of moral development**

The psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg privileged a justice perspective when conducting his research into moral development. Kohlberg pioneered a model for moral development that elaborates six stages that every person (allegedly) moves through on his or her way to moral maturity. According to the model (which may be grouped into three levels), children initially obey authority in order to avoid punishment, but in time, they come to recognize that the rules they are expected to follow serve to maintain a mutually-advantageous social arrangement. The next two stages see the development of loyalty and trust with partners, conceived initially as those people with whom one has a direct relationship, and then the members of the larger social group. The last two stages entail increasing levels of abstraction, in which personal relationships are subordinated to universal principles of justice. Full moral maturity (the postconventional level) is achieved via fidelity to universal, abstract principles. This final stage is consistent with the justice perspective, and the picture of moral autonomy that follows from it is

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 141.

consistent with the Kantian view. Kohlberg describes this final stage (the “universal ethical principle orientation”) as follows:

Right is defined by the decision of conscience in accord with self-chosen ethical principles appealing to logical comprehensiveness, universality, and consistency. These principles are abstract and ethical (the Golden Rule, the categorical imperative); they are not concrete moral rules like the Ten Commandments. At heart, these are universal principles of *justice*, of the *reciprocity* and *equality* of human *rights*, and of the respect for the dignity of human beings as *individual persons*. [italics in the original]<sup>20</sup>

Note that the final stage of moral development in Kohlberg’s model celebrates those principles that have traditionally been associated with the male: reason, objectivity, impartiality, and universality. By extension, the traits that have typically been associated with the female (the particular, the ‘subjective’ emphasis on personal relationships) are relegated to a lower stage of development. This gendered, hierarchical ordering of the moral stages of development is not merely implicit in the study; rather, the moral dilemmas that he used when studying the moral development of children (i.e. “Heinz’s Dilemma”) reveal a difference in the ways that male and female children responded to the problems. Male children were more likely to reason in terms of increasingly abstract principles, while female children appeared to be stuck at a (allegedly) lower stage of moral development.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Lawrence Kohlberg, “From Is To Ought,” in *Cognitive Development and Epistemology*, ed. Theodore Mischel (New York: Academic Press, 1971), 165.

<sup>21</sup> James Rachels and Stuart Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy sixth edition* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2010), 163.



### The Care Perspective

Feminist thinkers have widely criticized Kohlberg's theory, and Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* has been especially influential. Gilligan noted that, although differences could be observed in the ways that male and female children reasoned with regard to moral problems, the approach of the female subjects was not inferior to the male. Rather, it represented a different— and typically feminine— mode of moral reasoning that was especially responsive to the particular and relational aspects of moral dilemmas.<sup>22</sup> Gilligan elaborated this basic female moral orientation into what has come to be known as the “care perspective,” and it has been juxtaposed against the justice perspective. In her critique of Kohlberg's hierarchical ordering of the stages of moral development, she noted that

Women's moral weakness, manifest in an apparent diffusion and confusion of judgment, is thus inseparable from women's moral strength, an overriding concern with relationships and responsibilities.<sup>23</sup>

In a later article, Gilligan used an analogy from Gestalt psychology to illuminate the relationship between the caring and justice perspectives. Just as a well-known image can appear to be either a vase or two faces— but not both at the same time— so can a moral dilemma be framed in terms of justice or in terms of care. The distinction between these alternative moral perspectives

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<sup>22</sup> The type of feminist ethics pioneered by Gilligan is often referred to as feminine ethics.

<sup>23</sup> Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 16-17, 26, 28, 31.

is based empirically on the observation that a shift in the focus of attention from concerns about justice to concerns about care changes the definition of what constitutes a moral problem, and leads the same situation to be seen in different ways. Theoretically, the distinction between justice and care cuts across the familiar divisions between thinking and feeling, egoism and altruism, theoretical and practical reasoning. It calls attention to the fact that all human relationships, public and private, can be characterized *both* in terms of equality and in terms of attachment, and that both inequality and detachment constitute grounds for moral concern.<sup>24</sup> [*italics in the original*]

Perhaps the most comprehensive articulation of a care perspective is to be found in Nel Noddings's *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*. Noddings distinguishes between natural caring, which arises without effort on the part of the caretaker (think of a mother's caretaking efforts on behalf of her child) and ethical caring, which does require an effort and is thus morally salient. The latter arises in response to a reflection on the former. In other words, when faced with an ethical demand that does not immediately evoke a natural caring response (for instance, when a stranger asks us for help), Noddings argues that we ought to respond by remembering what it was like when we ourselves were cared for (for instance, by our mothers). This reflection on the "caring ideal" leads to a requirement to respond to the demands of the concrete other:

I commit myself either to overt action on behalf of the cared-for (I pick up my crying infant) or I commit myself to thinking about what I might do. In the latter case...I may or may not act overtly in behalf of the cared-for. I may abstain from action if I believe that anything I might do would tend to work against the best interests of the cared-for. But the test of my caring is not wholly how things turn out; the primary test lies in an examination of what I considered, how fully I

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<sup>24</sup> Eva Feder Kittay and Diana T. Meyers, eds., *Women and Moral Theory* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1987), 20.

received the other, and whether the free pursuit of his projects is partly a result of the completion of my caring in him.<sup>25</sup>

The caring perspective is thus relational, in that it is with reference to our specific relationship with a concrete other, and not to abstract principles, that the ethical course of action is determined. The autonomous and isolated “I” is thus no longer to be regarded as the sole (or even the primary) locus of meaning and the basis of what it is to be human. Rather, to be human is to be cared for by and to care for others, within the context of a nexus of (potentially reciprocal) relationships. When the other makes a demand that I am initially inclined to ignore or reject, “the source of my obligation [to respond] is the value I place on the relatedness of caring. This value itself arises as a product of natural caring and being cared-for and my reflection on the goodness of these concrete caring situations.”<sup>26</sup>

The relational character of the caring perspective also guides our moral choices in terms of how we ought to respond to competing demands, and which demands ought to receive priority. Although we may (theoretically) develop a caring relation with anyone, Noddings argues that we should arrange our caring priorities hierarchically in relation to the potential for reciprocity and mutuality. These criteria are themselves (at least potentially) limited by proximity. In other words, caring for the other in front of me takes priority over caring for the other that is outside my immediate realm:

We are not obliged to summon the “I must” if there is no possibility of completion in the other. I am not obliged to care for starving children in Africa,

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<sup>25</sup> Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 299.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 301.

because there is no way for this caring to be completed in the other unless I abandon the caring to which I am obligated. I may still choose to do something in the direction of caring, but I am not obliged to do so...<sup>27</sup>

In the caring perspective, the extent of my obligation to the other is a function of the potential for the cared-for to respond to my caring. My obligation to the other increases in direct proportion to the potential for reciprocity and mutuality of relation. I would therefore have a stronger obligation toward my child, whose potential for increased response is enormous, than toward my pet goldfish, whose potential for response is static.

### Criticisms of the Caring Perspective

Arti Dhand has criticized the emphasis on proximity as a determinant of the priority of relation from the perspective of Hindu ethics. Her critique is important because, in drawing upon the sources of the Indian epic tradition, it exposes the (unexamined) Western presuppositions of the caring perspective. Dhand looks to the ideal of the Indian family, which is extended in the epic sources to include all beings, including animals. According to this vision of the family,

all older women are recast as mothers, aunts, elder sisters. All younger are cherished as daughters, all peers are indulged as sisters. Similarly, all older men are respected as being representatives of one's father; younger men are guided as one would guide one's own sons, peers are treated as one's brothers.<sup>28</sup>

What emerges from this reading of the Indian epics is a universal ethics within a relational framework, within a concentric vision of family. Such a social organization is moral because it stresses self-negation,

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 302.

<sup>28</sup> Arti Dhand, "The Dharma of Ethics, the Ethics of Dharma: Quizzing the Ideals of Hinduism," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 30, vol. 3 (Fall 2002): 367.

an ethic that is moreover ultimately consistent with the soteriological goals of the Hindu tradition, which stress ego-effacement. In the reverse of what one is conditioned to do in ordinary Western-style modern life, where one places high importance on individualistic goals, according to the ideals of *Ramayana*, one should sacrifice one's own interests for the sake of one's nuclear family. One should sacrifice the interests of one's nuclear family for the sake of a more extended notion of family. Finally, one should sacrifice the interests of all narrow notions of family for the sake of broader notions of family, for *dharma*.<sup>29</sup> [italics in the original]

Dhand juxtaposes her relational *dharma* ethic with the ethics of care. As we have seen, the latter posits proximity as the means for prioritizing our relationships, and Dhand sees this as a prescription for partiality towards our most immediate family and friends. She notes that such partiality is presented, at least according to Hindu ideals, as selfish favoritism towards one's own. Hindu ethics denies this approach in favor of generosity towards others.<sup>30</sup>

Daryl Koehn has criticized the caring perspective as well, albeit from a different direction. While generally sympathetic to the relational dimension of this approach, she wonders if the exclusive emphasis in the work of Gilligan and Noddings on the positive dimensions of caring might lead them to defend female ethics "that reproduce the same violence, silencing, and manipulation that they discern in the 'male' ethics of Immanuel Kant, John Rawls, and John Stuart Mill."<sup>31</sup> After all, it is possible for people to care too much, so that the caring that emerges from such a relationship is smothering and

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 367.

<sup>30</sup> Many feminists have argued that Noddings's emphasis on proximity and reciprocity are too extreme. For a summary of such criticisms, see James Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2010), 154. Other feminists have sought to modify or supplement Noddings's approach. For instance, Virginia Held has sought to apply care ethics to public (rather than merely private) concerns with the introduction of her notion of degrees of care. See Virginia Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>31</sup> Daryl Koehn, *Rethinking Feminist Ethics: Care, Trust and Empathy* (London & NY: Routledge, 1998), 3.

(ultimately) destructive. One can easily imagine a parent who is over-involved in the child's life, so that the caring takes on an oppressive quality, and the child is denied the separation and independence required for adequate emotional growth and development to occur.<sup>32</sup> On this reading, the care perspective can place too much emphasis on the perspective of the caregiver, to the detriment of the viewpoint of those who are on the receiving end of the care:

To the extent that an ethic of care or empathy provides no incentive to self-reflection, the caregiver may easily slip into a self-righteous anger. Care (trust, empathy, etc.) and manipulation are not necessarily mutually exclusive. What appears to an empathic trustor as a "betrayal" may be a healthy distancing in the eyes of the person who is resistant to the other's care or trust.<sup>33</sup>

Koehn worries that the absence of regulative principles (a prominent feature of the justice perspective) in these ethics means that they tacitly sanction a dangerous self-righteousness. They also mislead, at least potentially, because we can never be fully certain that we understand what the other is trying to convey. Rather, we inevitably filter what we hear through our own pre-conceptions of the issue under discussion:

they [i.e. Gilligan and Noddings] make it seem as though if we are just open enough to others we can grasp exactly what they are thinking. No such mind-meld is possible, however. We always mediate what others are saying through some conception we have of the issue under discussion. To the extent that these ethics fail to address this problem of mediation, they prove every bit as rigid and exclusionary as traditional ethics.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Naturally there is widespread disagreement as to what constitutes adequate, as opposed to excessive or deficient, separation and independence from parental caring.

<sup>33</sup> Daryl Koehn, *Rethinking Feminist Ethics: Care, Trust and Empathy* (London & NY: Routledge, 1998), 3.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

The caring perspective also lacks any vision of the human good toward which we can strive when organizing our lives. People are counseled to engage in generic practices of caring, but these are defined solely in terms of formal operations. The form of care is morally salient, and yet we cannot assess its moral character without some notion of the good around which our relationships are organized. Koehn provides the example of a doctor who refuses to heal a patient because she wants to care for her patient by writing her patient's will. Clearly, the type of caring outlined in this example would not be considered ethical, and yet the caring perspective does not provide us with guidelines for making that determination.<sup>35</sup>

The relational conception of the self that emerges from the caring perspective also presents some difficulties for Koehn. The caring perspective glosses over the question of limits (recall that the autonomous "I" of humanism is separate and distinct), because it envisions a world in which everyone is maximally nurturing and understanding and thereby has a chance to achieve self-fulfillment. She asks how we are to make sense of virtues such as integrity, much less maintain a sense of it in our lives,

if the self is nothing more than the product of random trusting encounters with others or if the self is totally constituted by prevailing social relations of nurturance, trust, etc.? If we are morally bound to empathically apprentice ourselves to every person we encounter, how can we ever get around to achieving our own goals and to executing our plans?<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 15. In a footnote, Koehn points to Noddings's suggestion that we simply abandon professionalism as symptomatic of these lacunae in the caring perspective. The professionalism of doctors and lawyers is usefully constrained by particular goods (health and legal justice, respectively).

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 15.

### Emotions and Relationality

More recent scholarship has sought to provide an account of feminist ethics that fleshes out this notion of a relational self. The philosopher Martha Nussbaum has challenged the hierarchical dichotomy between reason and emotion in her book, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (2001). She argues against the view that emotions are akin to forces of nature completely outside of our control, which erode and impair our capacity to reason soundly (i.e. impartially) concerning moral matters. Rather, emotions should be regarded as morally salient because they are cognitive and evaluative (i.e. they are directed towards and evaluative of objects), and they inform us about the importance of such objects as elements in our own scheme of goals.<sup>37</sup> I love my parents because they are important to me, and my life will be very different once they are gone. I fear for my stepson's safety when he boards an airplane to take him away for the summer. What distinguishes these different emotions is the way in which their object (my parents or stepson) is seen:

In fear, one sees oneself or what one loves as seriously threatened. In hope, one sees oneself or what one loves as in some uncertainty but with a good chance for a good outcome. In grief, one sees an important object or person as lost; in love, as invested with a special sort of radiance.<sup>38</sup>

These emotions inform us about the importance of their objects because they embody (often highly complex) beliefs about them. For instance, in order to have anger I

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<sup>37</sup> Martha Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 4. Nussbaum tries on p.133 to distinguish between emotions, which always have an object, and moods (such as general depression or anxiety), which appear to lack such an object. However, she is forced to admit that the distinction is somewhat arbitrary: "The fact that these distinctions are difficult to make in many particular cases and that even the theoretical distinction is a somewhat imprecise one...should not be seen as a problem for the account: for what would be a problem in an account of emotion would be an excessive rigidity or definitional dogmatism."

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.



must have a complex set of beliefs that includes some idea of significant damage that has occurred to me or to someone close to me, and that the damage was inflicted deliberately. Disentangling the beliefs that make up our emotions is often a difficult process that involves time and effort. However, as our emotional responses often help to clarify how we understand our own flourishing, scrutinizing them can be very beneficial. Nussbaum's account therefore has a notion of the good—in this case, human flourishing (a translation of Aristotle's *eudemonia*)—that is absent in Noddings.

Nussbaum's account also affirms the role of diverse social norms in constructing the emotional repertory of a society. By examining the role of social construction in the emotional life, Nussbaum shifts the emphasis from the individual agent to socio-political orders that produce our emotional lives.<sup>39</sup>

Finally, Nussbaum's account is developmental in the sense that it takes seriously the insights of psychoanalysis, which trace the foundations of adult emotional life from early infancy (and, in some instances, even earlier). Taken together, these features of Nussbaum's theory can be seen to value the individual in her particularity. Emotions are not regarded as a hindrance to an otherwise fully rational and isolated self. Instead, they are understood in the context of a given social environment and personal history.

Nussbaum does not deny that our emotional lives can conflict with our capacity for detached, abstract rational thought. In fact, she asserts the positive value of emotions and the helplessness that they entail:

insofar as they involve acknowledgement of neediness and lack of self-sufficiency, emotions reveal us as vulnerable to events that we do not control;

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 6. Nussbaum's socio-political critique culminates in her capabilities approach. Please see Martha Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

and one might hold that including a large measure of uncontrol in one's conception of a good life compromises too deeply the dignity of one's agency...I proceed on the assumption that at least some things and persons outside one's own control have real worth.<sup>40</sup>

Nussbaum's neo-Stoic theory challenges us to evaluate the moral salience of our emotions, leading perhaps to a reevaluation of our understanding of our flourishing. Where Western philosophy has traditionally viewed the emotions as inferior to (and in competition with) reason, Nussbaum sees them as the wellspring of the uncertainty and vulnerability that characterize every worthwhile human life. Our emotions reveal our relational character, and the extent to which these relationships are necessary in order for us to flourish.

### **The Relational Self and Narrative**

Other feminist thinkers have taken up the concept of a relational self and explored its implication, from a postmodern/poststructuralist perspective, for our notions of moral agency and responsibility. For example, Hilde Lindemann Nelson argues in her *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair* that personal identity can be understood as a complicated interaction of one's own sense of self and other's understanding of who one is. On her view identity

functions as a lever that expands or contracts one's ability to exercise moral agency. The way in which others identify us establishes what they will permit us to do; if they identify us as morally defective, our freedom to act will be restricted. How we identify ourselves establishes our own

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<sup>40</sup> Martha Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 12.

view of what we can do; if our self-conception marks us as morally defective, we will mistrust our own capabilities and so treat ourselves with suspicion or contempt, or exempt ourselves from full responsibility for our actions. This too restricts our moral agency.<sup>41</sup>

In other words, an important component of our self-worth is connected to recognition. In order to be held responsible, persons must be recognized as having a certain moral status, of being eligible to participate in moral exchanges (i.e. by providing suitable responses such as giving good reasons, admitting faults, and so forth). When we internalize oppressive norms that deny us the status of fully accountable moral agents, we may then feel unworthy to take responsibility for our actions.

The connection between identity and agency poses a serious problem when the members of a particular social group are compelled by the forces circulating in an abusive power system to bear the morally degrading identities required by that system. These mandatory identities set up expectations in terms of the behavior, knowledge, and accountability (by and towards others) appropriate to group members. Here Lindemann Nelson speaks of damaged identities, and one thinks for example of the restrictive range of (subordinate) identities that have been available to women<sup>42</sup> in traditional patriarchal societies.

An individual's identity is damaged when a powerful social group views the members of her own, less powerful group as unworthy of full moral respect, and in consequence unjustly prevents her from occupying valuable social roles or entering into

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<sup>41</sup> Hilde Lindemann Nelson, *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair* (Ithaca & New York: Cornell University Press, 2001), xi.

<sup>42</sup> Restrictive identities have of course also been assigned on the basis of age, race, class, ethnicity, religion, sexual preference, and so forth.

desirable relationships that are themselves constitutive of identity. Lindemann Nelson refers to this harm as deprivation of opportunity. Further, infiltrated consciousness occurs when a person endorses, as part of her self-concept, a dominant group's dismissive or exploitative understanding of her group, and loses or fails to acquire a sense of herself as worthy of full moral respect.<sup>43</sup> As we have seen, either injury to identity may constrict a person's ability to exercise her moral agency.

Lindemann Nelson argues that it is useful to conceive of identity as consisting of a synthesis of the stories that others tell about us, and that we tell about ourselves. The self is therefore not single and isolated, as postulated in the justice perspective. Rather, it is very much a product of our relationships to individual persons and groups within a particular social context. Furthermore, if identities are understood to be narratively constituted, and if they can be damaged through harmful narratives, then it is possible to conceive of their narrative reparation. The morally pernicious stories that construct identity according to the requirements of an abusive power system can be at least partially dislodged and replaced by identity-constituting counterstories that portray group members as fully valued or worthy moral agents.

Lindemann Nelson identifies two ways in which counterstories resist the evil of diminished moral agency. First, by uprooting the harmful stories that constitute the subgroup members' identity from the perspective of an abusive, dominant group, counterstories aim to alter the dominant group's perception of the subgroup. The dominant group might then be less likely to deprive subgroup members of the goods and

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<sup>43</sup> Hilde Lindemann Nelson, *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair* (Ithaca & New York: Cornell University Press, 2001), 7. The term "infiltrated" connotes a clandestine, unwanted, and ultimately hostile entry, as when a soldier infiltrates enemy lines with the goal of sabotaging their operations. The term "infiltrated consciousness" also recalls Marx's notion of false consciousness.

opportunities that are on offer in the society, and this would allow the members of the subgroup to exercise their moral agency more freely.

Second, by uprooting the harmful identity-constituting stories that have shaped a person's own sense of who she is, counterstories aim to alter a person's self-perception. If she replaces the harmful stories with a counterstory, she may come to see herself as worthy of moral respect. She might in that case be less willing to accept others' degrading representations of her, and this too would loosen the constraints on her moral agency.

Counterstories may therefore be regarded as tools designed to repair the damage inflicted on identities by abusive power systems. They are purposive acts of moral definition, developed on one's own behalf or on the behalf of others. Note that a person with a severely diminished sense of her own moral worth may be incapable of initiating the construction of a counterstory on her own.<sup>44</sup> These counterstories then set out to resist, to varying degrees, the stories that identify certain groups of people as targets for ill treatment. Their aim is to re-identify such people as competent members of the moral community, and in so doing, to enable their moral agency.

Lindemann Nelson provides a very precise and useful conceptual vocabulary, in addition to some careful analysis and distinctions. However, she presents the counterstory as a normative concept (which it is not), and fails to adequately explain what makes a counterstory truer (or more compelling) rather than simply more idealized or friendly. Even false renditions may enhance our agency, and Lindemann Nelson does not address the question of identities that are damaged through genuine misconduct (i.e.,

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<sup>44</sup> This need for sympathetic groups (i.e., of women) is a common feature in feminist theorizing and practice.

through violent crime). As earned identity-damage can also be understood to restrict agency, so it can be repaired. However, this can have problematic consequences, as when what is evil is retold so as to make it sound good or acceptable. An alternate method of repair might be repentance (the beginning of a new story), accompanied by forgiveness (the acceptance that a new story has begun). The counterstory may thus involve a new start, rather than re-adjustment of identity already earned. Furthermore, while Lindemann Nelson touches upon the notion of unconscious forces in her discussion of the harm of infiltrated consciousness, she fails to give an adequate account of the operation of such forces in the construction of narratives designed to enhance agency. Stated succinctly, in what ways are unconscious forces involved in this process?

### **Feminism and Psychoanalysis**

The philosopher and psychotherapist, Jane Flax, has explored the role of unconscious forces in the formation of gender and identity. This is an important task, because the relationships between gender systems and knowledge, power and theory have become increasingly controversial among feminist theorists. Feminist thought has problematized gender and exposed the (previously unexamined) gender biases in traditional philosophy, revealing a host of assumptions that have served to maintain male dominance in patriarchal societies. However, the discovery of gender as a category for analysis begs the question: in what ways does gender operate “behind the scenes” among feminist thinkers in the formation of feminist theory? How does one account for gender if

there is no abstracted, gender-neutral perspective from which one can gain a critical purchase for reflection?

Flax identifies psychoanalytic and postmodern theories as useful in working out these questions:

If both men and women are formed in and through gender systems, then the thinking of women (or feminists) as well as that of men (or nonfeminists) must be shaped in complex and sometimes unconscious ways by gender relations. How can such stories in any sense be more true, more accurate, less distorted, or more 'objective' than others?<sup>45</sup>

The development of female identity in Western culture is typically influenced and structured "around conflicts between and about sexuality, differences, power, autonomy, and attachment or sociality" and these conflicts are reflected in feminist theories.<sup>46</sup> As these conflicts are major subjects of psychoanalytic theorizing, a psychoanalytic theory that is sensitized to gender can contribute a great deal to the development of feminist theory.

Given the large scope of feminist theorizing that employs psychoanalytic concepts, we must narrow our focus to that material that is most germane to the topic of this paper.<sup>47</sup> As we have seen, responsibility is conceived by feminists such as Gilligan and Noddings as consisting in human practices of responsiveness to particularity and context, of being accountable to others. It is a feature of our relational character, i.e. we are responsible to and for the others whose interests are vulnerable to our choices and actions, and with whom we are in perpetual relation. This is an expansion of the concept

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<sup>45</sup> Jane Flax, *Thinking Fragments: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, & Postmodernism in the Contemporary West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 139-40.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>47</sup> Among the feminist theorists who have employed psychoanalytic concepts are Juliet Mitchell, Dorothy Dinnerstein, Nancy Chodorow, Helene Cixous, Jessica Benjamin and Luce Irigaray. Each of these thinkers has been cited extensively in Flax's *Thinking Fragments*.

as it has been employed in traditional Western philosophy, according to which responsibility derives from our free will as autonomous and isolated agents and is thus focused on holding other (separate) people to account. Given the relational character of the concept of responsibility as it is employed by feminists, we are especially interested in post-Freudian psychoanalytic theories that privilege our earliest (pre-oedipal) relationships and explore their role in our subsequent development.

### **Psychoanalysis and the pre-Oedipal period**

The emphasis of the post-Freudian thinkers on the pre-oedipal period (when the relationship of the infant— or in some cases, the fetus— and the mother is of central import) serves to illustrate the enormous and continuing impact of the mother/mothering on the adult psyche. By stressing the centrality of the oedipal event, Freud tended to minimize the importance of the mother in favor of the father-child (especially the father-son) relationship. Luce Irigaray has drawn on some of these Freudian and post-Freudian insights in order to demonstrate what she believes to be the innate psychological differences between men and women. For example, her studies of language use reveal that adult women maintain closer ties to the pre-oedipal relationship. Unlike men, who often deny and/or suppress the ongoing psychic importance of the feminine, women tend to be more ambivalent towards the pre-oedipal experiential realm, which is in turn reflected in the kinds of relationships they are liable to form. Irigaray explored and revealed many of these differences through a linguistic analysis of the responses given to



questions concerning relationships and self-conceptions, provided by male and female subjects. Her findings revealed that, among other things,

women appear to be more capable [than men] of listening to, discovering or accommodating the other and the world, of remaining open to *objective* invention or creation, provided that they can also say *I*.<sup>48</sup> [italics in the original]

This insight is consistent with Gilligan's view, rooted in her observations, that women have a distinctive way (i.e. the caring perspective) of approaching moral dilemmas.

### **The Feminist Critique of Freud**

Feminist critique of Freud has revealed the extent to which his theories are phallogentric. The privileging of the oedipal to the near-exclusion of the pre-oedipal, as well as the use of binary oppositions (antinomies) that conceal androcentric biases (i.e. nature versus culture, other versus self, body versus mind, primitive versus mature, patient versus analyst) are revealed via a gendered analysis of his thought. Irigaray traced these otherwise unexamined (and hence, "unconscious") binary oppositions to the very ways that languages (and especially reflective languages such as her French mother tongue) are structured. Through an analysis of basic linguistic structures, she reveals the extent to which the masculine gender is taken for granted as the norm.<sup>49</sup>

Jane Flax argues that Freud's phallogentrism is largely unconscious, and reflects the social context in which Freud wrote. In other words, Flax employs the very

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<sup>48</sup> Luce Irigaray, "The Three Genres," in *The Irigaray Reader*, ed. Margaret Whitford (Cambridge, Mass: Basil Blackwell), 146.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

techniques and concepts of psychoanalysis to reveal the gaps and omissions in Freud's own thought.<sup>50</sup> Flax has noted that many of the post-Freudian thinkers resolve the antinomies evident in Freud's thought by suppressing or denying one of the two poles. For instance, the vicissitudes of the body and the power of sexuality is often minimized or ignored in object-relations theory. Object-relations theorists such as Fairbairn and Winnicott provide an account of the infant-mother dyad that is told almost exclusively from the perspective of the infant. The mother is either good enough or not good enough, solely in terms of the extent to which she meets the infant's developmental requirements. In other words, she disappears as an individual in her own right, with sexual and relational needs that are not centered on her child. In their account, the "body" pole of the mind-body antinomy is obscured or repressed.<sup>51</sup>

While the post-Freudian thinkers provide an account of development that is useful to feminists in its affirmation of the centrality of mothers/mothering, they fail to account for the social context in which mothering takes place. In other words, they fail to treat gender as a salient category for inquiry, even though its effects on development are profound. This enormous oversight is likely due to the fact that the social arrangements in which parenting take place are largely taken for granted by these thinkers. The power of Freudian theory as a social critique is thereby blunted in subsequent theories that fail to examine how phallogocentric social structures come to be in the first place.

This suppression of the importance of gender in Freudian and much of post-Freudian theory represents an enormous theoretical lacuna. For example, Winnicott discusses the formation in early infancy of a self that is either 'true' (when the mothering

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<sup>50</sup> Jane Flax, *Thinking Fragments: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, & Postmodernism in the Contemporary West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 77-78.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

is good enough) or 'false' (when the mothering is inadequate). Since feminist theorists have shown that gender identities are instilled at approximately the same period, a consideration of gender would have significant consequences for Winnicott's developmental account.

Feminist theorists have often been guilty of many of the same omissions as Freud and the post-Freudians. A deconstruction of feminist discourses in light of the effects of gender, are often missing in these theories. The developmental models posited by psychoanalysis, when supplemented with a consideration of the formation of gender, serve to undermine the idea that there exists a neutral, genderless perspective from which to launch a critique of phallogentrism. Freud's notion of ambivalence and our attempts to resolve the resulting anxiety via premature closure and totalizing modes of thought is a central component of Flax's work. Flax argues that in many instances feminist theorizing is guilty of the same ambivalences as the patriarchal perspectives that it criticizes.

### **Conclusion**

Feminist theory offers some important insights concerning moral responsibility. Feminist critiques of philosophy call into question the model of the human as an autonomous and isolated "I" that reasons abstractly without social or emotional constraints. On this account of the human, responsibility is tied to knowledge and the free exercise of the will, in that we are responsible for the choices that we (knowingly) make (usually after a cost-benefit calculation of the potential consequences).

In its place is advanced a relational conception of the human, in which the person is conceptualized within a complex web of pre-existing and overlapping social networks. This relational conception of the human brings into focus salient features that are characteristic of relationships, such as the requirement for responsiveness to the needs of the other and her vulnerability to our choices and actions. On this account, responsibility consists in being accountable to others.

The following chapter will continue the critique of the atomistic and autonomous “I” with reference to postmodern thought. The so-called postmodern critique entails a methodological “pulling back” in which the frame of inquiry is broadened in order to analyze and deconstruct the linguistic and institutional power-structures, now considered within historically situated (and thus contingent) contexts, that give rise to allegedly universal (i.e., foundational) truth claims. Postmodern insights into what it means to be a responsible moral agent will be examined and read with and against feminist insights.

## Chapter Two: Postmodernism and the De-centering of Reason and the Self

The terms postmodern, postmodernity, and postmodernism are highly problematic. Many so-called “postmodern” artists, writers and theorists have refused the label, and the terms have been used for so many different purposes that it can be difficult to arrive at satisfactory definitions. Nevertheless, I believe it possible to trace the historical developments of this trend; to identify some of the key figures associated with the movement; and to isolate and examine the salient ideas and themes that have come to be associated with postmodernism. Once this is done, we will be able to assess what postmodernism can contribute to our understandings of moral agency and responsibility.

At its most basic level, postmodernism refers to a set of artistic and literary practices that first emerged after the Second World War in the 1950s, grew in strength during the 1960s, and dominated many artistic disciplines throughout the 1970s and early 1980s. In the realm of the arts, postmodernism initially referred to a radicalizing of the self-reflexive tendencies in modernism, along with a return in some cases to (political, ironic, self-reflexive) representational practices that had been rejected by an anti-representational modernism.<sup>52</sup>

On a theoretical level, postmodernism refers to a set of philosophical propositions that critique realist epistemology and the Enlightenment project founded upon it. Among the most salient propositions are the rejections “of the Cartesian autonomous, and self-

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<sup>52</sup> Hans Bertens and Joseph Natoli, eds., *Postmodernism: The Key Figures* (Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), xii. Andreas Huyssen in *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986), 184, identifies Irving Howe and Harry Levin as among the first postmodern literary critics of the 1950s.

identical subject, of the transparency of language, of the accessibility of the real, [and] of the possibility of universal foundation.”<sup>53</sup> Instead, postmodernism emphasizes the primacy of the other, desire, contingency, change, difference, and the absence of a non-contingent self and (ultimately) of objective meaning itself.

This theoretical postmodernism borrowed heavily from the French poststructuralism of (initially) Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida, and later from the writings of Jacques Lacan, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Gilles Deleuze, and, especially, Michel Foucault. In its later stages, the movement began to share Foucault’s concern with the relationship between knowledge and power and to accept his argument that the two are inextricably linked. Foucault is perhaps most responsible for the focus in theoretical postmodernism with the “other,” and it is this focus that makes postmodern theory difficult to distinguish from the post-colonial thought of such theorists as Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.<sup>54</sup>

A number of postmodern critics have sought to elaborate a “postmodern condition” that (in their view) characterizes life in the late-twentieth/early twenty-first century Western world. For instance, Jean-Francois Lyotard identifies the failure of the so-called grand-narratives that legitimized modernity. Frederick Jameson equates postmodernism with the global victory of capitalism and the collapse of the Marxist distinction between the mode of production and culture. Elaborating the Marxist notion of alienation, Jean Baudrillard argues that postmodernity is characterized by a pervasive

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<sup>53</sup> Hans Bertens and Joseph Natoli, eds., *Postmodernism: The Key Figures* (Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), xii.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii.

sense of inauthenticity, while the social scientist Ronald Inglehart identifies a shift from materialist to so-called “postmaterialist” values.<sup>55</sup>

These separate accounts of the postmodern began to be clustered together from the middle of the 1980s onward and what gradually came to seem important was a vigorous syncretism in thinking of the postmodern. Starting in the 1990s “the concept of the ‘postmodern’ was ceasing to be used principally in the analysis of particular objects or cultural areas and had become a general horizon or hypothesis.”<sup>56</sup> By the middle of the 1990s “postmodernism” became the name for the activity of writing about postmodernism, and thus passed from the stage of accumulation into a more autonomous phase.<sup>57</sup>

Jane Flax has identified a number of major themes within postmodernism, and her list is helpful. These themes include the following: the nature of contemporary Western culture; the construction of knowledge and its relations to power; the critique of philosophy and totalizing thought; the identification and dismantling of forms of domination; subjectivity and the self; and the valorization of difference and the other.<sup>58</sup> Flax regards postmodernism, and in particular the theoretical variant that is directed against traditional philosophy and the Enlightenment project, as

a valuable form of discipline philosophers impose on themselves...In the realm of knowledge, postmodernism represents philosophic attempts to come to grips with the displacement of philosophy from any privileged relation to truth and knowledge.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., xiii.

<sup>56</sup> Steve Connor, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 2.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>58</sup> Jane Flax, *Thinking Fragments: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, & Postmodernism in the Contemporary West* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 188.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 189-190.

This form of discipline is crucial, because, from a postmodern perspective, the history of the West and the philosophy that underpinned it has been one of domination, in which difference has been reduced to the same or violently eradicated altogether. The philosophic enterprise has, at least since the time of the ancient Greeks, been characterized by the search for a singular truth that is knowable through reason and underlies and explains the apparent diversity of phenomena. Anything that failed to conform to this singular truth was relegated to the realm of the irrational. Postmodern critiques have sought to reveal how, through its various permutations, philosophy has led to totalizing modes of thought that have— sometimes indirectly— facilitated the most violent forms of oppression.

The displacement of philosophy by the sciences in the last century from its previous place of privilege has led both modern and, later, postmodern theorists to adopt a number of strategies. Among them is the equation of thought and language, in which the world is textualized. Language is no longer regarded as transparent. Rather, thoughts must be transcribed into writing or texts that are then disseminated within the world, and there is no world outside texts. In other words, there is no access to a single “truth” that is unmediated by language. As theoreticians of writing or texts, philosophers could thereby reclaim their place, and by demonstrating the indeterminacy of textual interpretations, postmodern theorists could displace any given (and, especially, dominant) truth claim as but one among many. An important feature of this strategy is the identification and privileging of marginal and subjugated voices— of the so-called “other”— within the dominant narratives.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 191.



Various postmodern critiques are related. However, for the purposes of this paper, the critique of philosophy, the relationship between language and power, and the critique of the self; are especially germane. I will summarize these various critiques and examine their relevance to how we think about moral responsibility.

### **Critique of foundational claims**

Theoretical postmodernism has called into question the foundational claims of western thought and has sought to unmask its philosophical corollary, humanism, as a form of covert oppression. Realist epistemology is undermined, and philosophy is relieved of the task of providing knowledge of the true. There is a radical de-centering of the human subject as the locus of knowledge and agency. Narrative logic is turned on its head and thereby deprived of its power as an organizing principle. Even the notion of a so-called real world is called into question. The “real”

is permanently encased in quotation marks, and even such an (apparently) uncomplicated matter as sexual difference is rendered illegitimate and misleading, while newer, more difficult ways of theorizing gender are opened up.<sup>61</sup>

These moves have been undertaken by postmodern theorists in order to undermine the possibility of so-called totalizing thought, of teleology, and of any kind of final closure. In other words, they are directed against the entire western philosophic tradition. For example, Rene Descartes’s radical skepticism is most commonly associated with the foundationalist claim that a correct beginning could be established for philosophy, while G.W.F. Hegel’s dialectical approach sought to organize the entirety of

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<sup>61</sup> Paul Sheehan, “Postmodernism and Philosophy,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism*, ed. Steve Connor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 21.

western thought within an all-encompassing and purposive whole that had (supposedly) reached its final expression in his philosophy. In undermining these claims, theoretical postmodernism seeks to uncover the gaps, inconsistencies, and shortcomings of the modernist project in order to bring it to a close along with its (allegedly) oppressive legacy.

### **The linguistic turn and the end of metaphysics**

Another important theme in theoretical postmodernism is the critique of the idea that philosophical thinking can be conveyed in the language of proposition and logical argument. In negating this key aspect of the philosophical tradition, the method of metaphysical speculation and argument elaborated by Immanuel Kant in his *Critique of Pure Reason* is resisted, thereby undermining the traditional basis for such foundational philosophic (and metaphysical) claims as the transcendental character of man and his or her (alleged) separation from nature.

This rejection of metaphysics was set in motion by the so-called linguistic turn in philosophy, the origins of which can be traced to the philosophies of Ludwig Wittgenstein and Martin Heidegger. The former introduced a new thinking and terminology (“language games,” “family resemblance,” “forms of life,” “the private language argument”) whereas the latter urged a return to creativity and the language of (especially German) poetry as an antidote for the modern malaise.<sup>62</sup>

In Wittgenstein’s analytic tradition, this linguistic turn represented a shift in focus from ideas to words and from an idealist perspective to a language-centered

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 23.

philosophy. If Descartes, with his famous dictum *cogito ergo sum* initiated a move towards the contents of the mind, then Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* reversed this trend. In the analytical tradition, the linguistic turn contended that the limits of philosophy, and of what is understood to be "reality," could manifest themselves only within language. It was a turn from ideas to words, from an idealist philosophical focus to a language-centered one—a reversal, in short, of what Descartes had inaugurated with his inward turn towards ideas and the contents of the mind.<sup>63</sup> Instead of concentrating on the kinds of human practices that made language possible in the first place, Wittgenstein

came to see it [language] as a purely human product and attempted to define the limits thereof. The focus was thus on the social perspective of linguistic analysis, and the ways in which everyday communication takes place.<sup>64</sup>

The theoretical postmodernism that emerged from the continental tradition presents a different perspective. It stresses the connotative aspect of language and argues that it is incapable of representing the world with any degree of accuracy, and certainly not in the (allegedly) transparent manner assumed by much modernist thought. As words rely on other words for their meaning, and not on some extra-linguistic foundation, human identity is a construct of language. Martin Heidegger denied human beings the instrumental command of language upon which humanism relies when he wrote that

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<sup>63</sup> See, for instance, Lyotard's reading of Wittgenstein's notion of "language games:" "What he [Wittgenstein] means by this term is that each of the various categories of utterance can be defined in terms of rules specifying their properties and the uses to which they can be put- in exactly the same way as the game of chess is defined by a set of rules determining the properties of each of the pieces, in other words, the proper way to move them...every utterance should [therefore] be thought of as a 'move' in a game." Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 10.

<sup>64</sup> Paul Sheehan, "Postmodernism and Philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism*, ed. Steve Connor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 23.

“man acts as though *he* were the shaper and master of language, while in fact *language* remains the master of man.”<sup>65</sup> [italics in the original]

Both Wittgenstein and Heidegger (along with John Dewey) have influenced the philosopher Richard Rorty. Rorty is interested primarily in epistemology and the history of philosophy and his neo-pragmatic approach rejects the claim of a privileged insight into the foundations of knowledge assumed by western philosophy since Kant. In place of epistemology, Rorty recommends that philosophers engage in an open-ended conversation that continuously seeks improvement, what he terms “edification.” Edification refers to a project “of finding new, better, more interesting, more fruitful ways of speaking...edifying discourse is *supposed* to be abnormal, to take us out of our old selves by the power of strangeness, to aid us in becoming new beings.”<sup>66</sup> [italics in the original]

### **Michel Foucault and the death of the subject**

The post-modern critique entails a radical de-centering of the first-person account of the self upon which the autonomous moral agent of philosophy is grounded. In the western tradition, the transcendental subject was the primary locus of meaning, and the strict separation of the human and the animal could be asserted on the basis of the former's supposed “metaphysical” nature. According to theoretical postmodernism, there

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<sup>65</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (London: Routledge, 1978), 348. Cited in Paul Sheehan, “Postmodernism and Philosophy,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism*, ed. Steve Connor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 23.

<sup>66</sup> Cited in Paul Sheehan, “Postmodernism and Philosophy,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism*, ed. Steve Connor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 24.

is no self as such, and what is mistaken as a self is nothing more than an effect or by-product of the prevailing linguistic and power-structures in a given social and historical context. On this reading, (traditional) ethics and moral responsibility are illusory. The best that one can do is to resist complicity with the oppressive power structures and gesture towards some (as yet) inarticulate future.

Michel Foucault is responsible for the most influential and sustained critique of the modernist notion of an essential subject or self. Since his death in 1984, a widespread critical consensus has arisen regarding the historical development and thematic trajectory of his thought. Beatrice Han's division of his work into an early "archaeological" period; a middle "genealogical" period; and a late "history of subjectivity;" is representative of this consensus.<sup>67</sup> This essay will seek to elaborate both Foucault's critique of the autonomous, humanistic self, and his advancement of what I will refer to as his "ethics of resistance." Foucault's critiques of phenomenology and psychoanalysis will also be examined, in order that his thought may be brought into a dialogue, in the concluding chapter of this project, with Emmanuel Levinas and Hans Loewald.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Beatrice Han, *Foucault's Critical Project: Between the Transcendental and the Historical*, trans. Edward Pile (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), xiii. The early period includes *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963), *The Order of Things* (1966), and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969). The middle period includes *The Order of Discourse* (1970), *Discipline and Punish* (1975), and Volume I of *The History of Sexuality* (1976). The late period includes *The Use of Pleasure*, Volume II of *The History of Sexuality* (1984) and *The Care of the Self*, Volume III of *The History of Sexuality* (1984).

<sup>68</sup> While Han's division of Foucault's work into separate periods is valuable from a heuristic point of view, Foucault himself had a tendency to recast, in his later years, his earlier so-called "archaeological" and "genealogical" work in light of his concern with ethics and the formation of subjectivity. One concern that remains consistent throughout all three of these periods is the critical aim of unmasking the contingency of that which is allegedly universal: "in what is given to us as universal, necessary, obligatory, what place is occupied by whatever is singular, contingent, and the product of arbitrary constraints? The point, in brief, is to transform the critique conducted in this form of necessary limitation into a practical critique that takes the form of a possible transgression." Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?", in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 45.

### Foucault and Phenomenology

Foucault's profound opposition to the phenomenology of the 1950s that was (along with Marxist thought) the principal theoretical approach in the French Academy is a consistent theme throughout his work. In recalling the phenomenology of the 1950s, Foucault noted that it was "academic and university-oriented. You had privileged objects of phenomenological description, lived experiences or the perception of a tree through an office window."<sup>69</sup> In other words, he consistently thematized and mocked phenomenology as "a kind of bankrupt, bourgeois subjectivism, the last gasp of 'depth' hermeneutics on the nineteenth-century transcendentalist model."<sup>70</sup> Although Foucault's work went through various methodological changes, he was consistent in always defining himself against phenomenology.<sup>71</sup> What is the theoretical basis of Foucault's rejection of phenomenology? At the heart of this rejection is the founding role played by subjectivity.

The phenomenological approach seeks to understand human experience within its own parameters, thereby rejecting those (prior) approaches that sought to reduce that experience via explanatory categories. Only by taking the experience of the subject as a serious focus of inquiry— by describing, rather than explaining it— are we able to avoid the trap "of objectifying the subject into misleading or oppressive explanatory categories."<sup>72</sup> However, this phenomenological emphasis on description privileges the category of the experiencing subject, and it is precisely the authority of the subject that

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<sup>69</sup> Michel Foucault, "What Our Present Is," in *The Politics of Truth*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer (New York: Semiotext(e), 1997), 149. Cited in Jeffrey T. Nealon, *Foucault Beyond Foucault: Power and its Intensifications since 1984* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 82.

<sup>70</sup> Jeffrey T. Nealon, *Foucault Beyond Foucault: Power and its Intensifications since 1984* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 82.

<sup>71</sup> Todd May, "Foucault's Relation to Phenomenology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, ed. Gary Gutting, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 285.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 302.

Foucault (following Nietzsche) rejects.<sup>73</sup> Foucault thus subjects this subjective experience to historical critique, thereby placing it in perspective and unmasking its contingent character. In other words, instead of undertaking an internal, phenomenological reflection on the constitution of experience, he “subjects the categories of knowledge of experience to historical (archaeological, genealogical) analysis.”<sup>74</sup>

The object of Foucault’s methodology is no longer the experience of the experiencing subject, but rather the categories within which that experience is constructed and articulated. There is a methodological stepping back from, or placing in perspective of, the content of subjective phenomenological experience, thereby taking as its own content that which phenomenology already takes for granted (i.e. the experiencing subject). If subjective experience is the object that is described via phenomenology, then Foucault takes as his object phenomenology (and other human sciences) and subjects it to his historical method.<sup>75</sup>

In order to understand who we are, we are thus no longer required to grasp the ontological nature of the human. Rather, we must understand how, historically, “we came to embrace one set of ontological categories [rather than alternative formulations] as answering the question of who we are.”<sup>76</sup> Foucault expressed the goal of his historical approach in a late interview (conducted two years before his death), in which he noted that

it is one of my targets to show people that a lot of things that are a part of their landscape— that people think are universal— are the result of some very precise

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 302.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 305.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 306.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 306.

historical changes. All my analyses are against the idea of universal necessities in human existence.<sup>77</sup>

### Foucault and Psychoanalysis

Foucault's career-long preoccupation (obsession?) with Sigmund Freud and psychoanalysis was noted by Jacques Derrida in his critical essay, "To Do Justice to Freud: The History of Madness in the Age of Psychoanalysis."<sup>78</sup> One possible explanation for this struggle was rivalry, because both thinkers examined much of the same theoretical terrain: "the normal and the pathological, rationality and irrationality, the modern subject, the human sciences, sexuality and techniques of self-transformation."<sup>79</sup> Joel Whitebook has speculated that Foucault's rivalry with Freud and his rejection of psychoanalysis derives from his profound discomfort with the type of prolonged introspective exploration that is required by psychoanalysis.<sup>80</sup> Indeed, Foucault's historical examinations of subjectivity sought to demonstrate that the psyche itself, along with our experiences of interiority, were themselves contingent historical constructs. In this vein, Patrick H. Hutton has noted that Foucault's work is "heavy with Freud's unstated presence," and that their respective methods of approaching the mind are diametrically opposed:

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<sup>77</sup> Michel Foucault, "Truth, Power, Self: An Interview with Michel Foucault," in *Technologies of the Self*, eds. Luther Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick Hutton (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 11.

<sup>78</sup> Jacques Derrida, "To Do Justice to Freud": The History of Madness in the Age of Psychoanalysis," *Critical Inquiry* 20 (Winter 1994): 242, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault et al. Cited by Joel Whitebook, "Foucault's Struggle with Psychoanalysis," in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, ed. Gary Gutting (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 312.

<sup>79</sup> Joel Whitebook, "Foucault's Struggle with Psychoanalysis," in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, ed. Gary Gutting (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 313.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 313.



Whereas Freud provides a method for investigating the internal workings of the psyche, Foucault seeks to show how the method itself is an ancient technique of self-fashioning that has over the centuries shaped the mind externally. Our conception of the psyche...has been sculpted by the techniques that we have devised to probe its secrets, to oblige it to give up hidden knowledge that will reveal to us the truth of who we are.<sup>81</sup>

If Freud believed himself to be an archaeologist of the (repressed) psyche, in a manner analogous to the physical excavations of Troy and Mycenae that were undertaken by Heinrich Schliemann (one of Freud's inspirations), then according to Foucault he was rather a highly skilled (and yet unwitting) architect of the psyche.

### *Le Regard and the Care of the Self*

What is the basis of Foucault's objection to the inwardly directed gaze of psychoanalysis? In his examination of Classical and (especially) Hellenistic and Roman philosophy, Foucault identified the notion of *epimeleia heautou* (translated as "care of oneself" or "care of the self") and sought to differentiate it from the more philosophically ubiquitous *gnothi seauton*, or "know thyself."<sup>82</sup> The former was not concerned with discovering one's limits or in discovering that which was true or real within the self. Rather, it consisted in an attitude toward the self as well as toward others and toward the world; it entailed turning one's attention away from the outside and directing it inwardly (and in particular toward what we think and what takes place in our thought); and it

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<sup>81</sup> Patrick H. Hutton, "Foucault, Freud, and the Technologies of the Self," in *Technologies of the Self*, eds. Luther Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick Hutton (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 121.

<sup>82</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France 1981-1982*, ed. Frederic Gros, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), 2-5.

designated a variety of actions “exercised on the self by the self, actions by which one takes responsibility for oneself and by which one changes, purifies, transforms, and transfigures oneself.”<sup>83</sup> This turning of one’s attention away from the outside and towards a form of self-monitoring represents, for Foucault, a benign form of the inwardly directed gaze. One directs the gaze inward in order to care for the self in the service of a larger teleological aim, such as being able to conduct oneself properly in order to govern the city-state (as in the case of Alcibiades being instructed by Socrates) and in order to be concerned with justice.<sup>84</sup> The gaze that is directed inwardly in the service of the care of the self thus has an ethical dimension as well, because it has implications for how we relate to others. While this is a necessarily simplified treatment of Foucault’s examination of *epimeleia heautou* (which he traces in detail from Plato through the various Hellenistic and Roman philosophical schools), it is important to emphasize that the self-monitoring associated with this practice is self-directed (it is not imposed from without) and it does not seek to uncover the “true” or “real” self, but rather seeks to keep one on the right track (however this is defined).

In order to understand Foucault’s objections to the inwardly directed gaze of the human sciences (including psychoanalysis), we must briefly consider his examination of why this ancient practice of self-care has disappeared today, and what has taken its place. Foucault identifies four main factors that have transformed the culture of the self away from the ancient model of self-care. All of these factors have a strong authoritarian dimension in that they are now imposed on us from without, instead of being self-directed. The first factor that he identifies is the rise of Christianity (with its attendant

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 10-11.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 71-72.

confessional practices) in the Roman world, which introduced what Foucault calls “the ethical paradox of Christian asceticism,” in which the monitoring of the self gave way to a renouncing or sacrificing of the self. Second, the older techniques of self-care<sup>85</sup> have been integrated into psychological/medical authoritarian structures (and into the mass media) and are imposed upon us by others. Third, the human sciences and the relationship to the self are now defined in terms of knowledge, which means in turn that they are inextricably linked with power. Fourth, and in light of the previous three factors, we now think that we have to “disclose, to excavate, to liberate the hidden reality of the self, but [the] self is not a reality that can be hidden.” Instead, Foucault argues that the self is a “correlate of technologies built and developed through our history,” and we should thus “consider how it could be possible to elaborate new types of relationships to ourselves.”<sup>86</sup>

### The Psychoanalytic Gaze

If for Freud the analysis of the psyche was the source of uncovering hidden meanings about our true natures, for Foucault the psyche is a mirror rather than an archive. In other words, to search the psyche for truth about our natures would be futile,

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<sup>85</sup> For a discussion of these techniques, see Foucault’s examination of the ancient Greek notion of *therapeuein*, from which is derived the (more restrictive) modern notion of therapy. In Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France 1981-1982*, ed. Frederic Gros, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), 98-99. A more comprehensive examination of the practical applications of Hellenistic and Roman philosophy can be found in Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994). When Foucault first lectured on these sources, there were very few systematic treatments available.

<sup>86</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Culture of the Self: Introduction and Program, part 1*, April 12 1983: Berkeley Language Center- Speech Archive SA 1456 (audio recording). Searched and downloaded at <http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/MRC/onlinemedia.html>

because it can only reflect the images that we have constructed to describe ourselves. These images that we have constructed, which include our received notions of interiority and moral agency or conscience (in psychoanalytic terms, the Ego, Id, and Superego) are for Foucault part and parcel of the overarching linguistic and societal power structures with which we police (and thereby limit) ourselves. In other words, they are forces of oppression that must be resisted, and the psychoanalytic technique is itself a vehicle for the construction and transmission of these forces.<sup>87</sup>

Foucault therefore objects to the inwardly directed gaze of psychoanalysis because he regards self-observation itself, when undertaken in search of a hidden or “true” self, as inherently violent. In this sense self-observation is a corollary to the oppressive, institutionalized (i.e. psychiatric) gaze directed at one from without, and so there is no possibility in psychoanalysis of a form of benign self-exploration (i.e. of a non-objectionable division between an observing and an observed part of the self). In psychoanalytic terms, Foucault makes no distinction between an observing ego and “the continuous scrutiny of a sadistic superego.”<sup>88</sup>

In connection with this critique, Christopher Norris has noted that at the heart of Foucault’s critical project is a protest against the very idea of conscience. In other words, Foucault rejects the notion of an internal psychological moral agency (i.e. the Superego) that is created via the internalization of external authority, and through which the subject gains her autonomy.<sup>89</sup> We will see that the most pervasive critique of Foucault’s thought

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<sup>87</sup> For a discussion of Foucault’s notion of the psyche, see Patrick H. Hutton, “Foucault, Freud, and the Technologies of the Self,” in *Technologies of the Self*, eds. Luther Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick Hutton (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 121-144.

<sup>88</sup> Joel Whitebook, “Foucault’s Struggle with Psychoanalysis,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, ed. Gary Gutting (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 320.

<sup>89</sup> Christopher Norris, ““What is Enlightenment?”: Foucault on Kant,” in *The Truth About Postmodernism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1993), 67. Cited by Joel Whitebook, “Foucault’s Struggle with

results from his inability (or perhaps, unwillingness) to advance an alternative conceptualization of moral agency.

Foucault's opposition to psychiatry is well documented in his work, and particularly in *Madness and Civilization*. He characterizes the psychiatrist as a psychic stand-in for the bourgeois father-doctor, and the true goal of psychiatric treatment as the adjustment of the patient to the demands and norms of bourgeois society.<sup>90</sup> The psychiatrist is therefore an agent of oppression, in the sense that the norms of health and sanity that are brought to bear on the patient are themselves contingent constructs that serve (among other things) to circumscribe the range of permissible human experiences and to perpetuate the asymmetrical power relation between psychiatrist and patient. The asylum (along with the psychiatric profession that created and manages it) therefore

reduces differences, represses vice, eliminates irregularities. It denounces everything that opposes the essential virtues of society... [it] sets itself the task of the homogenous rule of morality, its rigorous extension to all those who tend to escape from it.<sup>91</sup>

Sometimes Freud is identified by Foucault as a central figure in opposing the aforementioned oppressive efforts of the medical-psychiatric establishment (for instance, Freud is praised for reintroducing the dialogue between reason and unreason), and at others he is situated squarely among the oppressors. If the psychoanalytic situation abandons the physical asylum in favor of the doctor-patient couple, according to Foucault this relationship has merely internalized what was previously an external confinement:

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Psychoanalysis," in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, ed. Gary Gutting (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 343 (footnote 47).

<sup>90</sup> "The physician could exercise his absolute authority in the world of the asylum only insofar as, from the beginning, he was Father and Judge, Family and Law- his medical practice for a long time no more than a complement to the old rites of Order, Authority, and Punishment." Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Madness in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), 272.

<sup>91</sup> Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Madness in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), 258.

Freud demystified all the other asylum structures...but on the other hand, he exploited the structure that enveloped the medical personage; he amplified its thaumaturgical virtues, preparing for its omnipotence a quasi-divine status. He focused upon this single presence- concealed behind the patient and above him- all the powers that had been distributed in the collective existence of the asylum...*to the doctor, Freud transferred all the structures Pinel and Tuke had set up within confinement.*<sup>92</sup> [italics mine]

Foucault's treatment of Freud in *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction* is also ambiguous. Freud is explicitly mentioned only a handful of times, and Foucault occasionally praises him for his genius and distinguishes psychoanalysis from psychiatry.<sup>93</sup> However, it is where Freud is not mentioned by name that psychoanalysis is situated squarely among the other human sciences and subjected to the most scathing critique. This critique occurs in part three of the text in the context of Foucault's discussion of *scientia sexualis*. Foucault identifies *scientia sexualis* and *ars erotica* as the two opposing procedures that have been used, historically, "for producing the truth about sex," and his preference for the latter is clear from the language he employs to describe it:

truth is drawn from pleasure itself, understood as a practice and accumulated as experience; pleasure is not considered in relation to an absolute law of the permitted and the forbidden, nor by reference to a criterion of utility; but first and foremost in relation to itself; it is experienced as pleasure, evaluated in terms of its intensity, its specific quality, its duration, its reverberations in the body and the soul.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 277-8.

<sup>93</sup> "It is very well to look back from our vantage point and remark upon the normalizing impulse in Freud; one can go on to denounce the role played for many years by the psychoanalytic institution; but the fact remains that in the great family of technologies of sex, which goes so far back into the history of the Christian West, of all those institutions that set out in the nineteenth century to medicalize sex, it was the one that, up to that decade of the forties, rigorously opposed the political and institutional effects of the perversion-heredity-degenerescence system." Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction*, New York: Vintage Books, 1980, p. 119.

<sup>94</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 57.

While the *ars erotica* involve a relationship to a master who holds its secrets, this relationship is not oppressive (although the master may be severe) and the teachings “are said to transfigure the one fortunate to receive its privileges: an absolute mastery of the body, a singular bliss, obliviousness to time and its limits, the elixir of life, the exile of death and its threats.”<sup>95</sup>

If the *ars erotica* consist in a life-affirming celebration of pleasure, then *scientia sexualis* are of a different order altogether. Foucault traces the origins of *scientia sexualis* to the codification of the sacrament of penance by the Lateran Council in 1215 “with the resulting development of confessional techniques... [and] the setting up of tribunals of Inquisition,” all of which served “to give the confession a central role in the order of civil and religious powers.”<sup>96</sup> Foucault identifies the confession as among the most highly valued techniques for producing truth in the West, and notes that it plays a role in many different facets of our lives.<sup>97</sup> The confession is also tied to coercion and torture:

One confesses— or is forced to confess. When it is not spontaneous or dictated by some internal imperative, the confession is wrung from a person by violence or threat; it is driven from its hiding place in the soul, or extracted from the body. Since the Middle Ages, torture has accompanied it like a shadow, and supported it when it could go no further: the dark twins.... Western man has become a confessing animal.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 57-58.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>97</sup> “It plays a part in justice, medicine, education, family relationships, and love relations, in the most ordinary affairs of everyday life, and in the most solemn rites...” Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 59.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 59.

The confession is not only tied to violence, but it is also linked to a search for that which is hidden and true in the self, a secret nature that must surface by overcoming the constraints that hold it in place. For Foucault, the production of truth via confessional techniques is inextricably tied to relations of power, and is thus inherently oppressive.<sup>99</sup>

Although the confession remains a “general standard” today in the production of truth discourse, it has undergone significant historical transformations since its initial association with penance. It is now employed in many different types of relationships, including “children and parents, students and educators, patients and psychiatrists, delinquents and experts” and its motivations and techniques are now varied.<sup>100</sup> How is the confession related to psychoanalysis? Without mentioning Freud by name, Foucault charts the ways in which the confession was made to function within the “norms of scientific regularity,” and it will become clear that he has Freud and psychoanalysis firmly in mind.

According to Foucault, the confession came to be constituted in scientific terms through a series of five interconnected steps, which included combining confession with examination, “the personal history with the deployment of a set of decipherable signs and symptoms; the interrogation, the exacting questionnaire, and hypnosis, with the recollection of memories and free association;” by positing a causal relationship between our earliest experiences and our adult life, so that “the most discrete event in one’s sexual

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<sup>99</sup> “The confession is a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement; it is also a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console and reconcile; a ritual in which the truth is corroborated by the obstacles and resistances it has had to surmount in order to be formulated; and finally, a ritual in which the expression alone, independently of its external consequences, produces intrinsic modifications in the person who articulates it...” Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 61-62.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.



behavior— whether an accident or a deviation, a deficit or an excess— was deemed capable of entailing the most varied consequences throughout one’s existence;” by introducing a principle of latency intrinsic to sexuality, in which what was to be confessed was hidden from the confessor, “being incapable of coming to light except gradually and through the labor of a confession in which the questioner and the questioned each had a part to play;” through the introduction of interpretative methods designed to decode an obscure truth that had to be interpreted and verified by the one who heard it in order to be scientifically validated; and via the “medicalization of the effects of confession” in which the sexual domain was placed “under the rule of the normal and the pathological” instead of under the notions of sin etc.<sup>101</sup> The five steps that Foucault identifies all involve theoretical strategies and techniques that are common to psychoanalysis, and some involve practices (i.e. free association) that were pioneered by Freud himself. Foucault’s hostility towards psychoanalysis is therefore clear, even if Freud is not directly mentioned by name in connection with *scientia sexualis*. The inwardly-directed gaze of psychoanalysis thus shares for Foucault many of the same oppressive and violent features of the ancient confessional practices of the Church, from which it supposedly originates.

This linkage seems excessive. Freud’s hostility toward religion was well documented, and he was genuinely concerned with helping his patients, many of whom suffered terribly and were unresponsive to the other (far more invasive, i.e. surgical) medical techniques of his day. To liken Freud to an inquisitor, even indirectly, is to mischaracterize the nature of the “talking cure.” Nor is it clear that all of Foucault’s criticisms of psychiatric diagnostics are applicable to psychoanalysis. Analysts (at least

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 65-67.

within classical Freudian psychoanalysis) are concerned primarily with whether or not a given patient is analyzable— in other words, whether or not she can meet the difficult challenges that characterize the transference experience— rather than with the question of diagnosis.

Is a prospective patient capable of meeting the arduous and knotty demands that characterize the transference experience? Can he or she be an interlocutor in the analytic dialogue with unreason- working to understand archaic mentation and affective states and putting them into words?<sup>102</sup>

Foucault's criticisms of psychoanalysis do have some merit, particularly as they apply to the power relation within which analysis takes place. Starting with Freud, who argued that the positive transference to the father-doctor ought to remain unanalyzed, some analysts have resisted examining their own positions in the analytic context. Freud also believed that analysts could rid themselves of contamination by the countertransference (in other words, of their own wishes, conflicts, and pathology), in order that they could serve "as blank screens and neutrally observe their patients' transferences as they unfold."<sup>103</sup> However, these ideas have been largely abandoned in psychoanalysis as it is practiced today, and analysts recognize that the acknowledgement and examination of the countertransference does not undermine their authority or disrupt the asymmetry of the analyst-patient dynamic. There remains, of course, widespread disagreement within the field about what these concepts mean.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Joel Whitebook, "Foucault's Struggle with Psychoanalysis," in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, ed. Gary Gutting (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 327.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 330.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 331. Stephen Mitchell provides instructive examples of countertransference analysis in his *Can Love Last? The Fate of Romance Over Time* (New York: W.W. Norton Company, 2002).

### Foucault and Subjectivity

Through his so-called archaeological and genealogical examinations, Foucault has sought to demonstrate the historical origin and contingency of our received essentialist notions regarding “human nature,” and he located the constitution of the western subject and our experiences of subjectivity within confessional practices (i.e. the rise of Christianity in the Roman world) and disciplinary practices associated with the various human sciences that emerged over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (and later with psychiatry and psychoanalysis).<sup>105</sup> As a result of this placing-in-perspective of our (previously unexamined) understandings of personal autonomy and freedom, Foucault argues that what we have to come to regard as a self is, in fact, a fiction. In other words, there is no “I” as such, in the sense of a naturally occurring and self-contained entity that serves as the locus of agency and freedom. Rather, our sense of self is merely the product or effect of power:

The individual is not to be conceived as a sort of elementary nucleus, a primitive atom, a multiple and inert material on which power comes to fasten or against which it happens to strike... The individual is an effect of power, or precisely to the extent to which it is that effect, it is the element of its articulation. The individual which power has constituted is at the same time its vehicle.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Culture of the Self: Introduction and Program, part 1*, April 12 1983: Berkeley Language Center- Speech Archive SA 1456 (audio recording).

<sup>106</sup> Michel Foucault, “Two Lectures,” in *Critique and Power*, edited by Michael Kelly (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: The MIT Press, 1994), 36.

If individuals are merely the effects of power, then the proper line of inquiry concerns how that power came to be and why it was exercised in one way, rather than in another.

In other words, its contingent character must be unmasked and charted:

The critical question today has to be turned into a positive one: in what is given to us as universal, necessary, obligatory, what place is occupied by whatever is singular, contingent, and the product of arbitrary constraints?...that criticism is no longer going to be practiced in the search for formal structures with universal value, but rather as a historical investigation into the events that have led us to constitute ourselves and to recognize ourselves as subjects of what we are doing, thinking, saying.<sup>107</sup>

The discourses that emerge from these practices, which are presented as “truths” that reflect “facts of human nature,” tell us what it means to be human: “They ‘normalize’ the ‘individual’ who is constituted and named by these discourses. The individual that power has constituted becomes the vehicle of that power.”<sup>108</sup> Foucault thus argued for the inherent (though obscured) relationship between knowledge and power. Like Rorty, he stresses the historical and contingent dimension of knowledge, which is always generated by pragmatic questions oriented to action. However, whereas Rorty’s edifying conversation is conceptualized as occurring among mostly equal and homogeneous participants, Foucault understands Western culture as a continuing struggle between disparate elements that are mutually irreducible:

You are well aware that this research activity, which one can thus call genealogical,<sup>109</sup> has nothing at all to do with an opposition between the abstract

<sup>107</sup> Michel Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?” in *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 45-46.

<sup>108</sup> Jane Flax, *Thinking Fragments: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, & Postmodernism in the Contemporary West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 206-207.

<sup>109</sup> For a discussion of the genealogical method, see Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” in

unity of theory and the concrete multiplicity of facts... What it really does is to entertain the claims to attention of local, discontinuous, disqualified, illegitimate knowledges against the claims of a unitary body of theory which would filter, hierarchize and order them in the name of some true knowledge and some arbitrary idea of what constitutes a science and its objects.<sup>110</sup>

Jane Flax has noted that Foucault's genealogies of power are motivated by desires or interests that are themselves obscure. He has not explicitly accounted for the agency of his own discourse, which (if his central argument is correct) must merely be the by-product of historically-situated and contingent forces. If he is trying to free up the marginal voices that have been drowned out in the dominant western discourses,<sup>111</sup> then his notion of freedom or the possible locus of opposition "has an aesthetic or even romantic cast that by its nature excludes important social relations from further consideration."<sup>112</sup>

Jana Sawicki has taken a different view of Foucault's account of subjectivity. She attributes to his notion of the subject the capacity to critically reflect on the forces that

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*The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 81. "On the contrary, to follow the complex course of descent [i.e. the genealogical method] is to maintain passing events in their proper dispersion; it is to identify the accidents, the minute deviations-or conversely, the complete reversals-the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us; it is to discover that truth or being does not lie at the root of what we know and what we are, but the exteriority of accidents." The genealogical method is also described in Michel Foucault, "Two Lectures," in *Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate*, edited by Michael Kelly (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1994), 22-23.

<sup>110</sup> Michel Foucault, "Two Lectures," in *Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate*, edited by Michael Kelly (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1994), 22.

<sup>111</sup> The freeing up of marginal voices is one way of reading the stated aim of Foucault's genealogical studies: "And this critique will be genealogical in the sense that it will not deduce from the form of what we are what it is impossible for us to do and to know; *but it will separate out, from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think.* It is not seeking to make possible a metaphysics that has finally become a science; it is seeking to give new impetus, as far and wide as possible, to the undefined work of freedom." [italics mine] Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" in *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 46. See also Foucault's discussion of so-called "subjugated knowledges" in Michel Foucault, "Two Lectures," in *Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate*, edited by Michael Kelly (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1994), 20-21.

<sup>112</sup> Jane Flax, *Thinking Fragments: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, & Postmodernism in the Contemporary West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 209.

have composed it and to choose creatively among competing discourses; to “reflect upon the implications of its choices as they are taken up and transformed in a hierarchical network of power relations;” in short, to exercise real agency.<sup>113</sup> His subject is thus “neither entirely autonomous nor enslaved, neither the originator of the discourses and practices that constitute its experience nor determined by them.”<sup>114</sup>

Sergei Prozorov argues that the central ontological presupposition of Foucault’s philosophy is a particular kind of freedom “that requires neither a concept of the anterior subject nor a teleology of liberation.”<sup>115</sup> Rather, our experience of freedom represents for Foucault an always-present potentiality to be more than we have permitted ourselves to be in the present. We limit our own freedom when we fail to resist the forces that constrain it, and thereby become complicit in our own imprisonment:

This experience of the universal availability of freedom leads to a sobering realization of the full extent of our unfreedom in the past... Indeed, many of the practices we have previously engaged in under the assumption that there was ‘no alternative’ only succeeded in governing us because of the absence of our resistance to them.<sup>116</sup>

Foucault himself suggests that his “historico-critical attitude,” which represents “a historico-practical test of the limits that we may go beyond, and thus as work carried out by ourselves upon ourselves as free beings”— need not necessarily lead to our being determined by forces “of which we may well not be conscious [i.e. drives], and over

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<sup>113</sup> Jana Sawicki, “Foucault and Feminism,” in *Critique and Power*, edited by Michael Kelly (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: The MIT Press, 1994), 355.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 355.

<sup>115</sup> Sergei Prozorov, *Foucault, Freedom and Sovereignty* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2007), 25.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 149-50.

which we may have no control.”<sup>117</sup> In other words, we may identify the (contingent) constraints that have been historically imposed on us from without or that are self-imposed and may seek to transgress them, but these limits are not to be confused with the allegedly universal limiting structures of the human sciences (i.e. with the unconscious in psychoanalytic discourse). It is unclear, however, how such a radical refusal to accept closure of any kind can be consistent with the sense of value and (at least provisional) agency or control that provide us with meaning in our lives. While there is obviously great value in deliberating thoughtfully about the important choices that we face over a lifetime, sooner or later we must select options that foreclose alternatives. Pursuing one path to its conclusion, which usually entails making sacrifices, is often a sign of commitment and discipline, and not simply an acceptance of oppressive constraints on our freedom. For instance, a person who struggles to become successful in a chosen career (or who decides to start a family) will feel a sense of satisfaction once their goals are realized, in spite of the realization that they might have pursued very different goals. Alternatively, they may feel a sense of loss and disappointment if they pursued the wrong goals. Either way, the choices that we make (and those we do not make) serve to define who we are and who we are not, and to provide us with a sense of meaning. While Foucault does not deny the place of limits, it may be that the degree of freedom that he recommends requires a heroic degree of individual will and creativity (appropriate for a Nietzschean *ubermensch*?) that is unrealistic for most people.

Meili Steele echoes this critique of Foucault and the poststructuralist claims concerning a de-centered subjectivity. Foucault does not account for the agency of his

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<sup>117</sup> Michel Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?” in *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 46-47.

own statements. In other words, there is no theoretical account of the agent who recognizes or acts against oppression. Foucault's arguments (along with Derrida's and Lyotard's) derive their force by unmasking the networks of power inherent in discourse and by making an implicit appeal to negative freedom— we ought to resist oppression. However, resistance of oppression toward what end? As Nancy Fraser frames the issue:

Why is struggle preferable to submission? Why ought domination to be resisted? Only with the introduction of normative notions could he [Foucault] begin to answer such questions [and]...tell us what is wrong with the modern power/knowledge regime and why we ought to oppose it.<sup>118</sup>

Steele adds that there is no attempt to offer a hierarchy when it comes to resisting competing exclusions or marginalization. Are all cases equally bad, or should some be resisted more strongly than others? Foucault does not provide us with any answers to these questions. Nevertheless, Foucault's genealogical accounts trace the manner in which these practices serve to, in Habermas's words,

delimit heterogeneous elements out of that gradually stabilized monologue that the subject, raised in the end [to] the status of universal human reason, holds with itself through making everything around it into an object.<sup>119</sup>

In other words, Foucault's analysis unmasks the violence to which the other has been subjected via the triumph in Western culture of reason-centered rationality as the sole locus of meaning.

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<sup>118</sup> Nancy Fraser, *Unruly Practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 29. Cited in Meili Steele, *Theorizing Textual Subjects* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 28-31.

<sup>119</sup> Jurgen Habermas, "Critique of Reason, Unmasking the Human Sciences," in *Critique and Power*, edited by Michael Kelly (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: The MIT Press, 1994), 52.



### Foucault's Ethics of Resistance

In light of these critiques of Foucault's project, of what do ethics consist for him?

Foucault rethinks ethics as a practice and discourse of resistance, of transgressing the limits of the (contingent, historically situated) prevailing norms. One is to resist the oppressive, policing forces of morality in order to continuously fashion and re-fashion one's life as an artist creates new projects: "Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are...but to refuse what we are."<sup>120</sup> But to refuse what we are in the name of what? Todd May has constructed and defended a moral perspective that draws upon poststructuralist thought, including Foucault, and which attempts to answer this question.

As he puts the problem:

what motivates us to question what we previously took for granted? Why bother? And why should we consider the radical alternatives this particular perspective proposes to us? If poststructuralism is to answer these questions, it must appeal to us in terms with which we can in some way identify. We must be able to see ourselves in its proposals, or else it is nothing more than interesting fiction to us.<sup>121</sup>

May links the poststructuralist thinkers with a commitment to antirepresentationalism, and in the case of Foucault, with an "aesthetics of living" in which lives are to be judged in aesthetic terms, alongside moral terms. Thinking in aesthetic terms permits us to reflect upon how to live our lives "without introducing the burden—oppressive both to theorizers and to the objects of theory—of wondering which kind of lives ought to be

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<sup>120</sup> Michel Foucault, "Subject and Power," in *The Essential Foucault*, edited by Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose (New York: New Press, 2003), 134. Cited in Jeffrey T. Nealon, *Foucault Beyond Foucault* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 75.

<sup>121</sup> Todd May, *The Moral Theory of Poststructuralism* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 136.

universalized and in what ways.”<sup>122</sup> May cites the late jazz saxophonist John Coltrane as an example of someone whose life could be fruitfully evaluated using the aesthetics of living approach, and while the portrait that emerges is of an innovative, creative genius who succeeded in expressing himself in unique and authentic ways, it is unclear that Coltrane could (or should) serve as a model for how to live a life.<sup>123</sup> For one thing, most people are not, like Coltrane, enormously gifted creative geniuses. For another, such creativity frequently carries a heavy cost: Coltrane’s heroin addiction is believed to have contributed to his death at the age of 40. In any case, May argues that just as there is no single moral value that is ideal for every person, so there no single aesthetic value that is ideal for everyone. However, the aesthetics of living approach is useful because “everyone...ought to construct a life of some beauty— just as everyone ought to contribute to the moral good— but that construction can be different in different cases.”<sup>124</sup> Nevertheless, this approach provides little in the way of specifics about how one ought to live, beyond the general proviso to resist those (contingent, historical) forces that limit our creativity.<sup>125</sup>

Foucault appears to seek a type of ethical anonymity or invisibility that will free him up from the societal discourses and practices of power (for instance, the human sciences) that serve to restrict and delimit what it means to be human, as well as from what he has termed the technologies of the self,

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 137-138.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 138-140.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>125</sup> Foucault cites the examples of Baudelaire and Constantin Guys as artists who creatively embodied the “attitude of modernity” which is “indissociable from desperate eagerness to imagine it [the present], to imagine it otherwise than it is, and to transform it not destroying it but by grasping in it what it is.” Michel Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?” in *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 40-41.

which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality.<sup>126</sup>

In rejecting the definitions and demands made upon one from without (i.e. by the Other) or by the self (via the internalization and acceptance of a conception of a self that can examine itself as an object of knowledge), Foucault is advancing a conception of ethics that is (paradoxically) self-centered. The paradox lies in the fact that there is no stable self upon which this ethics can center. Whereas Foucault shares a concern with other (postmodern, post-structuralist, post-colonial) thinkers for freeing up those discourses that have been marginalized and suppressed via the consolidation of institutional power, there is nothing in his ethics that compels us to acknowledge and respond to the demands made upon us by other people. For instance, Foucault does not explicitly ground his ethics outside of the self, i.e. in the self-other relation. It is true that he argues that we must inquire as to “how we are constituted as moral subjects of our own actions” and that this emphasis (on what he terms the “axis of ethics”) is concerned with how we relate to other people.<sup>127</sup> However, Foucault does not tell us how we should relate to others in any detail. Why should I care about other people and honor their needs? Is it enough that I merely resist complicity with oppressive forces by rejecting any self-conception that is stable and (therefore) capable of oppressing the other? Is it possible to be responsible for others (for example, for one’s family) without circumscribing one’s identity in the name of reliability and stability? For Foucault, the benign form of *le regard* that was associated

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<sup>126</sup> Michel Foucault, “Technologies of the Self,” in *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, edited by Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman and Patrick H. Hutton (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 18.

<sup>127</sup> Michel Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?” in *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 48-49.

with the ancient practice of *epimeleia heautou* has been replaced by the authoritarian variant of the human sciences (including psychoanalysis) that defines us in the service of oppressive norms, and is therefore inherently violent and malevolent.<sup>128</sup> In the concluding chapter, we shall see how Foucault's ethics is distinguished from that of Emmanuel Levinas, who grounds his radical reformulation of subjectivity in a phenomenological analysis of the face of the other.

### The Narrative Turn and Psychoanalysis

Closely related to this questioning in theoretical postmodernism of human subjectivity is the investigation and unmasking of narrative logic. The philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre has described man as "essentially a story-telling animal," while Roland Barthes has described the past tense of narrative as "the ideal instrument for every construction of a world; it is the unreal time of cosmogonies, myth, History and Novels...The world is not unexplained since it is told like a story."<sup>129</sup> On this reading, narrative (and the type of knowledge it produces), which in the guise of storytelling requires no proof other than its own internal (language-game) consistency, is juxtaposed with science, which claims to produce knowledge that is universally valid (and thus authoritative). The postmodern critique has sought to unmask those dominant narratives

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<sup>128</sup> Joel Whitebook, "Foucault's Struggle with Psychoanalysis," in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, edited by Gary Gutting (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). See also Patrick H. Hutton, "Foucault, Freud, and the Technologies of the Self," in *Technologies of the Self*, edited by Luther Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick Hutton (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988).

<sup>129</sup> Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (London: Jonathan Cape, 1967), 30. Cited in Paul Sheehan, "Postmodernism and Philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism*, edited by Steve Connor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 28.

that have claimed universal (i.e. ahistorical) legitimacy by showing the extent to which they are the product of contingent, particular social practices.<sup>130</sup> Once such a narrative has thus been unmasked, it would presumably lose much of its power to legitimize oppressive practices.<sup>131</sup>

The psychoanalyst and philosopher Roy Schafer<sup>132</sup> has embraced the narrative approach as an efficacious method in the treatment of patients. His approach is helpful because he provides guidelines for assessing the life-narratives that are constructed between patient and analyst. What allows a particular narrative to impart meaning and (at least some measure of) stability?

First of all, Schafer proposes that psychoanalysis be understood in hermeneutic rather than (as Freud preferred) scientific terms. On this account, psychoanalytic understanding is a narrative process, and unavoidably so. As with good historical explanations, good psychoanalytic interpretations must make sense, pull together as much of the relevant detail as possible, and provide a coherent and persuasive account.

From the description of this new account, there follows a systematic project of constructing a psychoanalytic reality in which one retells the past and the present, the infantile and the adult, the imagined and the so-called real, and the analytic relationship and all other significant relationships. One retells all this in terms that are increasingly focused and coordinated in psychoanalytic terms of action. One achieves a narrative re-description of reality. This retelling is adapted to the clinical context and relationship, the

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<sup>130</sup> See Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984). See also Hilde Lindemann Nelson, *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair* (Ithaca & New York: Cornell University Press, 2001). Lyotard refers to these dominant narratives as the "Grand Narratives of Modernity," while Lindemann Nelson terms them "master narratives."

<sup>131</sup> An extreme example of such an oppressive narrative that masqueraded as science would be the so-called racial science of the National Socialists.

<sup>132</sup> Roy Schafer, *Retelling A Life: Narration and Dialogue in Psychoanalysis* (USA: Basic Books, 1992).

purpose of which is to understand anew the life and the problems in question. The patient joins in the retelling (re-describing, reinterpreting) as the analysis progresses.

The essential aim of this joint narrative is the increased possibility of change, of new and beneficial action in the world. The appropriate conception of change excludes randomness or personally ahistorical and discontinuous consequences, such as abrupt and total reversals of values or behavior—precisely the kinds of consequences that cannot be ruled out by Foucault's radical historico-critical critique. The joint narrative is judged by its fruitfulness in the patient's life with others. Finally, the analytic accounts achieved may be judged more or less valid by their ability to withstand further tough searching questions about the story that has now been told and retold from many different, psychologically non-contradictory though often conflictual, perspectives and in relation to considerable evidence constituted and gathered up within the analytic dialogue.

### **Postmodern feminist philosophy**

Postmodernist feminist thought provides a nexus point where post-metaphysical, anti-humanist, anti-essentialist and non-narrative critiques converge. Through the problematization of gender, feminists initiated the process of analyzing and dismantling the western notion of an essential "man," a task that was later taken up by postmodernists. For example, Luce Irigaray has characterized the modernist tradition as a site of endless conflict: "The philosophical order is indeed the one that has to be questioned, and *disturbed*, inasmuch as it covers over sexual difference."<sup>133</sup> [*italics in the*

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<sup>133</sup> Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 159. Cited in Paul Sheehan, "Postmodernism and Philosophy," in *The*

original] However, important differences exist between feminist and postmodern philosophy, and the two should not be conflated.

Whereas poststructuralists such as Foucault trumpeted the “end of man” and argued that subjectivity was an illusory construct that manifested and obscured relations of power, feminist philosophy of the 1970s regarded the constructed nature of subjectivity as an opportunity to recover a specifically female identity/subjectivity. Irigaray has argued that female subjectivity is a project to be realized— an ongoing process of becoming— rather than a closed, essentialized foundation upon which to erect a new totalizing metaphysics:

In order to become, it is essential to have a gender or an essence (consequently a sexuate essence) as *horizon*. Otherwise, becoming remains partial and subject to the subject... To become means fulfilling the wholeness of what we are capable of being. Obviously, this road never ends.<sup>134</sup> [*italics in the original*]

The postmodern feminist Judith Butler has criticized Irigaray’s attempt to rework the metaphysics of identity. Butler shares the postmodern mistrust of metaphysics and argues that Irigaray’s identification of a unitary, monolithic phallogentric signifying economy is itself a totalizing gesture: “The effort to identify the enemy as singular in form is a reverse-discourse that uncritically mimics the strategy of the oppressor instead of offering

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*Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism*, edited by Steve Connor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 32.

<sup>134</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (New York: Columbia University Press), 61. Cited in Paul Sheehan, “Postmodernism and Philosophy,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism*, edited by Steve Connor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 33.

a different set of terms.”<sup>135</sup> Even the use of the term “women” in feminist discourse is problematic for Butler.<sup>136</sup>

The absence of fixed identities complicates the praxis of gender politics, which is the principal aim of feminism. If the symbolic economy is not, as Irigaray maintains, unitary, then collective resistance to it is untenable. Party politics, which require a common front (directed against a common foe) in order to be successful, become hopelessly complicated. Feminist postmodernism has thus been criticized as apolitical or anti-political, and for undermining the goals proper to feminism. Jane Flax summarizes this view in her essay “The End of Innocence”:

“You cannot be a feminist and a postmodernist,” I was told. Postmodernists are a- or even antipolitical. They are relativists; if we take them seriously, any political stance will be impossible to maintain or justify... Since postmodernists believe meanings are multiple and indeterminant, if you write clearly and comprehensibly you cannot be a postmodernist.<sup>137</sup>

Flax ultimately resists this caricatured position, and argues— as I do here— that bringing the postmodern and feminist discourses into dialogue with each other is a useful and productive exercise. In particular, theoretical postmodernism serves as a valuable corrective to totalizing modes of thought in which all differences are glossed over or deliberately suppressed, and this includes any theory that appropriates the Marxist conception of false consciousness. Although it is true, as we have seen in Hilde

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<sup>135</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), 13. Cited in Paul Sheehan, “Postmodernism and Philosophy,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism*, edited by Steve Connor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 33.

<sup>136</sup> For a good discussion of the history and stakes of the feminism/postmodernism debate, see Bonnie Mann, *Women’s Liberation and the Sublime* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>137</sup> Jane Flax, “The End of Innocence,” in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, edited by Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (New York: Routledge, 1992). Cited in Bonnie Mann, *Women’s Liberation and the Sublime* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 75.



Lindemann Nelson's theory, that individuals living in oppressive societies have a tendency to internalize distorted norms that damage their self-conception(s) and inhibit their agency; this does not mean that such individuals should not be treated as fully responsible moral agents. Those who hold to the false-consciousness theory (whether that false consciousness is instilled through patriarchy, capitalist control of the means of production, unconscious infantile urges, or some other force or oppressive social order) run the risk of denying any agency to those who do not share their views. The opinions and aspirations of such people can therefore be ignored or dismissed, under the pretext that they do not know their own minds, let alone what lies in their best interests.

Postmodern critique reminds us of the potential dangers inherent in this perspective.

As we have seen, postmodern critique does a good job of unmasking the uneven social hierarchies and distributions of power that are hidden by references to a fixed (and metaphysically-grounded) human nature or essence. It is also useful for deconstructing historical accounts— so-called metanarratives— that have served to justify western hegemony while obscuring the often-violent suppression of difference in the history of the West. Postmodern critique has also revealed the manner in which modernist forms of writing reproduce and support totalizing systems of thought. However, postmodern criticism is often accused of presenting a view from nowhere, a perspective from which no person can actually live and flourish. We are constructed, but we are also constructing— we require a sense of our own agency in order to feel as though our lives are meaningful. Postmodern critique falls short when it comes to articulating the ways in which we construct meaning for ourselves and with others, and so it cannot, on its own, provide a satisfactory account of moral agency and responsibility. Rather, it must be

brought into dialogue with discourses that take the first-person perspective to be non-illusory and valuable.

The following chapter will examine the thought of the post-Freudian psychoanalyst and philosopher, Hans Loewald. Loewald provides a developmental account of subjectivity that takes seriously both first- and third-person accounts of the self, while bringing these accounts into a dialectical relation that incorporates many of the feminist and postmodern insights into the nature of moral agency and responsibility. Furthermore, Loewald's account brings into focus the centrality of the affective realm, and especially guilt and atonement, in the development of a responsible self.

### **Chapter Three: Hans Loewald and the (Counter-) Movements of Primary and Secondary Processes**

The psychoanalyst and philosopher, Hans Loewald, is arguably among the most important of the post-Freudian thinkers, and yet he is hardly known in the discourse about psychoanalysis that runs through the humanities and the social sciences. This is starting to change: Nancy Chodorow has referred to him as “perhaps the greatest and most wide-ranging contributor to American psychoanalysis”<sup>138</sup> while Thomas Ogden has labeled Loewald’s paper, “The Waning of the Oedipus Complex,” as “a watershed in the development of psychoanalytic thought.”<sup>139</sup> Nevertheless, his work remains an extremely fertile and largely untapped field for exploring a variety of philosophical subjects.

This chapter will focus on a number of facets of Loewald’s thought that are salient to his account of responsibility and moral agency. As his account unfolds via his analysis of various core psychoanalytic concepts (Repetition and Repetition Compulsion; the Transference; Memory; Repression and Internalization; the Oedipal Complex and superego formation) this chapter will examine Loewald’s understanding of these concepts. Particular attention is devoted to Loewald’s account of the Oedipal Complex and the development of the Superego. As the seat of our conscience and the locus of our sense of inner agency, the development of the superego is central to Loewald’s notion of what it means to be a responsible self. A central theme throughout Loewald’s work is his elaboration of the relationship between primary and secondary processes, and this idea will be examined as well. Loewald focuses on meaning (as opposed to positivist accounts

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<sup>138</sup> Nancy J. Chodorow, “The Psychoanalytic vision of Hans Loewald,” *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 84, vol. 4 (Aug 2003): 897.

<sup>139</sup> Thomas H. Ogden, “Reading Loewald: Oedipus reconceived,” *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 87, vol. 3 (June 2006): 651.

of normalcy and pathology) in the context of his developmental account of the origins of mental life, and a definition of Loewald's notion of "meaning" will be provided. The chapter will conclude with an examination of Loewald's thought in relation to postmodernism and the feminist critique of (Freudian) psychoanalysis.

### Meaning

Unlike many other psychoanalysts of his generation, Loewald has not shied away from writing about morality and meaning.<sup>140</sup> If Freud was primarily concerned with making the unconscious conscious and bringing the ego to be where there had formerly been id, Loewald was attentive to the larger meaning of life and integrated this into his conception of analytic goals:

For Loewald, a meaningful human life is founded not upon the replacing of unconscious life with consciousness or secondary-process thought, nor upon overcoming the influence of the unconscious, but upon the infusion of unconscious life into, and its integration with, consciousness. Unconscious fantasies expressed in dreams and transferences enrich life and give it meaning.<sup>141</sup>

What does Loewald have in mind when he speaks of "meaning?" Loewald framed the question himself as part of a panel discussion held by the American Psychoanalytic Association held in New York in 1977:

Is the psychoanalytic process one of objective investigation of psychological facts, or is it interpretation of meanings? If the latter, are the meanings there, to be uncovered by us as analysts, or are we, although not arbitrarily, providing

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<sup>140</sup> At least since the 1990s, there has been a shift in focus among many psychoanalysts away from considerations of pathology and towards an emphasis on meaning.

<sup>141</sup> Nancy J. Chodorow, "The Psychoanalytic vision of Hans Loewald," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 84, vol. 4 (Aug 2003): 905-6.

meanings? Are the patients providing the meanings, or the psychological facts, as a function of our active receptivity as analysts? Are “meanings” something that arises in the interactions between analysand and analyst?<sup>142</sup>

We will see that, in his theoretical writings, Loewald distances himself from the idea that meaning is derived from an examination of objective psychological facts, and instead affirms the second part of his query.

For instance, when he describes memorial activity (i.e. memory) as a “linking production and reproduction of experience” he notes that “the links of action and feeling [which are appropriate to the primary, undifferentiated mode of remembering] become links of meaning.”<sup>143</sup> In this context, Loewald has in mind the organizing function of the ego, which strives to produce (or re-produce) a sense of coherence and continuity. It is this sense of continuity— of having a history— that gives one a (relatively) stable and meaningful sense of self. In order for the present to be meaningful, one must have access to (in a manner that can be integrated in increasingly differentiated, complex, and often novel ways) the primary (i.e. unconscious) memorial processes, and in the analytic encounter, it is the analyst who facilitates this access: “As such, the repressed is a reservoir of primary memorial processes, which through interpretation (meaning-giving on the part of the analyst) may combine with or again become part of a context of meaning.”<sup>144</sup>

Elsewhere, Loewald discusses meaning with reference to language and primary and secondary modes of mentation: “What we call *meaning* comprises both the

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<sup>142</sup> Hans Loewald, “Reflections on the Psychoanalytic Process,” in Hans W. Loewald, *The Essential Loewald: Collected Papers and Monographs* (Hagerstown, Md: University Publishing Group, Inc., 2000), 375.

<sup>143</sup> Hans Loewald, “Perspectives on Memory,” in Hans W. Loewald, *The Essential Loewald: Collected Papers and Monographs* (Hagerstown, Md: University Publishing Group, Inc., 2000), 169.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

differentiating-linking of word and thing (their mutual reference) and that of presentation (memorial act) and percept.”<sup>145</sup> [italics in the original] In other words, language does not merely convey meaning denotatively or connotatively (i.e. on the secondary-process, differentiated level) but as part of a primary-process, undifferentiated global experience.

Loewald describes this global experience within the mother-infant matrix:

One might say that, while the mother utters words, the infant does not perceive words but is bathed in sound, rhythm, etc., as accentuating ingredients of a uniform experience. The distinction between sounds as ingredients of a total occurrence, and what the heard sounds refer to or signify- this is a slowly developing achievement to which we apply the term secondary process.<sup>146</sup>

Once again, meaning in this context refers to the existence of an ongoing and fertile, dialectical relation between primary and secondary processes:

The linking between thing-presentation and word-presentation in secondary process is a rejoining on a different level, by way of a creative repetition, of elements that had been at one; it is a reconciliation.<sup>147</sup>

We may thus conceive of meaning for Loewald as a reconciliation between primary and secondary ways of mentation<sup>148</sup> that provide the ego with a sense of coherence and continuity.

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<sup>145</sup> Hans Loewald, “Primary Process, Secondary Process, and Language,” in Hans W. Loewald, *The Essential Loewald: Collected Papers and Monographs* (Hagerstown, Md: University Publishing Group, Inc., 2000), 191.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

<sup>148</sup> “The various elements of action and feeling [primary process experiences] begin to encounter and ‘know’ each other [differentiate, i.e. become part of secondary process mentation]; they become a context of meaning, which is one way of describing the organizing function of the ego. Freud increasingly insisted on the ego’s character as a coherent organization.” Hans Loewald, “Perspectives on Memory,” in Hans W. Loewald, *The Essential Loewald: Collected Papers and Monographs* (Hagerstown, Md: University Publishing Group, Inc., 2000), 169.

Loewald's preoccupation with meaning is perhaps the result of his early training. Prior to turning to psychoanalysis, he studied philosophy with Martin Heidegger (and would feel betrayed by Heidegger's embrace of Nazism). Even after taking up psychoanalysis, Loewald continued to theorize in a manner that is more typical of a philosopher:

Heidegger believed that the riches of the philosophical tradition are sedimented in its vocabulary. He therefore constructed his own iconoclastic position through an idiosyncratic exegesis of basic terms from Greek philosophy and German Idealism. Similarly, Loewald believes that the basic terms of psychoanalysis are 'essentially contested concepts' (Gallie, 1956). That is, they have so much meaning condensed in them and are so centrally located in our conceptual schemes, that they constitute a virtually open-ended source for creative argumentation and theorizing.<sup>149</sup>

### **The Origins of Mental Life**

It is obvious that Loewald's conception of the origins of mental life differs in significant ways from the classical Freudian conception. For Freud, the infant is born as a basically self-contained entity that engages external reality only in response to an inner impulse or a perceived lack (i.e. the need for nourishment and the absence of the nourishing breast). Development towards emotional and psychological maturity then consists in "civilizing" our originally "bestial" nature via (usually highly conflicted) interaction with the so-called reality principle. In other words, our instinctual, "primitive" impulses are gradually tempered by the mitigating influence of the parents and, especially

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<sup>149</sup> Joel Whitebook, "Hans Loewald: A Radical Conservative," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 85, vol. 1 (Feb 2004): 99. Whitebook cites WB Gallie, "Essentially Contested Concepts," in *Proc Aristotelian Soc* 56 (1956), 167-93. Stephen A. Mitchell draws the same connection between Heidegger and Loewald in a footnote in "From Ghosts to Ancestors," *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* 8, vol. 6 (1998): 837.

for Freud, the father. This conflict finds its partial resolution in the drama of the Oedipus Complex, in which (in ideal circumstances) the child abandons his or her infantile fantasies and the Super-ego (which, along with Ego and Id, is one of the three basic Freudian mental structures) arises. In classical Freudian psychoanalysis, neurosis and more serious psychological problems are generally traced back to the Oedipal drama.

Hans Loewald has a very different understanding of the origins of mental life. For Loewald, consciousness emerges gradually from an original unity between infant and mother that is undifferentiated. The infant initially has no sense of inside and outside, self and other, past and present, reality and fantasy:

All the dichotomies, which we come to think of as givens, as basic features of the way the world simply is, are for Loewald complex constructions. They arise slowly over the course of our early years and operate as an overlay, a parallel mode of organizing experience that accompanies and coexists with experiences generated by the original, primal unity.<sup>150</sup>

This earliest, “primary process” way of experiencing the world never disappears, but continues to exist simultaneously with the differentiated, “secondary process” way of experiencing the world that characterizes adulthood and is necessary for the scientific perspective. For Loewald, mental and emotional health consists in the ability to continuously integrate and re-integrate primary and secondary-process ways of mentation (i.e. fantasy and so-called objective reality), and it is this dialectical relation that infuses an otherwise sterile and meaningless “objective” reality with meaning. According to this understanding of mental health, the neurotic is one who is locked into so-called objective reality and the psychotic is one who is locked into primary process ways of experiencing.

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<sup>150</sup> Stephen A. Mitchell, “From Ghosts to Ancestors,” *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* 8, vol. 6 (1998): 826.



As we shall see, Loewald takes the Freudian conceptual vocabulary and reinterprets it in a way that radically alters the meaning of many of Freud's key concepts. These reinterpretations make Loewald's thought germane to both feminism and postmodernism, and these theories will be examined as they relate in particular to his ideas about moral responsibility. In the following section, we will examine Loewald's reformulation of the Freudian notion of repetition and repetition-compulsion, for it is within the context of this reformulation that Loewald introduces the notion of moral responsibility as it relates to the task of psychoanalysis.

### **Responsibility and Repeating Knowingly**

Hans Loewald discusses moral responsibility within the context of his examination of the psychoanalytic concepts of Repetition and Repetition Compulsion. The challenge for the patient in analysis is to come to experience the contents/effects of her unconscious (dreams, repetitive patterns that are acted out) as her own, even if they are operating behind-the-scenes. This is a moral appeal, even though Freud did not make this explicit due to his aversion to imposing moral standards on the patient. It is an appeal to the patient to take ownership over what had previously been disclaimed, to take responsibility for that which was not (consciously) chosen:

To acknowledge, recognize, understand one's unconscious as one's own means to move from a position of passivity in relation to it to a position where active care of it becomes possible, where it becomes a task worthy of pursuit to make one's business and concern those needs and wishes, fantasies, conflicts and traumatic events and defenses that have been passively experienced and reproduced....Such appeal, to begin with, comes from the outside and becomes internalized as an aspect of the superego. *Psychoanalysis as a method of treatment, it seems to me, has this tension toward assuming responsibility for oneself, that is to learn by*

*being instructed in self-knowledge, in repeating oneself knowingly, to take over this function of active repetition: to become a self.*<sup>151</sup> [italics mine]

What does Loewald mean by “repeating oneself knowingly?” Here he speaks of repetition— the act of repeating certain formative psychical patterns, either knowingly or (more commonly) unknowingly— as an important yet somewhat obscure concept in psychoanalysis, inextricably linked with the notion of an unconscious.

It is, in fact, one of the most important issues confronting us in a psychoanalytic consideration of repetition to make the distinction between such relatively passive or automatic repetitions and active repeating, and to study the conditions under which transitions from one to the other take place...Any consideration of the relations between id, ego, and superego has to deal with the passivity-activity issue in terms of repetition, and so does any consideration of psychoanalysis as a therapeutic process.<sup>152</sup>

Primary process experiences— emotions, sensations, feelings of connection and/or separation between the so-called “inner” and “outer” worlds— that cannot be properly integrated into the increasingly differentiated secondary process realm, are acted out (i.e. are expressed without our being conscious of what we are doing). These psychic disturbances may lead to neurosis, psychosis, and other psychological problems. As long as these experiences remain un-integrated they are passively repeated, which is to say, the person is unaware of the patterns of behavior that she is repeating. However, once they become integrated with the present in the analytic situation (which is to say, are actively repeated together with the analyst) then the linking between primary and secondary

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<sup>151</sup> Hans Loewald, “Repetition and Repetition Compulsion,” in Hans W. Loewald, *The Essential Loewald: Collected Papers and Monographs* (Hagerstown, Md: University Publishing Group, Inc., 2000), 95-6.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 87. On pages 97 and 99-100 of the same essay, Loewald makes an interesting reference to the notion of repetition in the work of Kierkegaard.

processes is reestablished on a more highly differentiated level and the present gains or regains meaning.

To return to Loewald's discussion of repetition, he also distinguishes between repetition and remembering, although the two concepts do not stand in a strictly binary relation. Within the classical psychoanalytic context, repetition has typically referred to the experience of memorial content at the level of affect and action, while remembering has typically referred to the conscious recollection of the same content. In other words, when experienced unconsciously, the memorial content is acted out, whereas it is remembered (via the mediating activities of the therapist in the transference) once it is integrated into conscious reflection. Until such a time as this integration takes place, one is doomed, as it were, to continue repeating (acting out) the content. However, Loewald emphasizes that both repeating and remembering are forms of remembering- of psychic functioning- that occur on different levels of mentation (i.e. primary and secondary, respectively). In other words, a dialectical relation between unconscious (undifferentiated) and conscious (differentiated) ways of remembering/experiencing is maintained:

On the other hand, conscious remembering is a kind of repetition, a repetition in the mind. Repetition in the form of action or behavior and affect is a kind of remembering, albeit unconscious, and remembering as a conscious mental act is a kind of repetition. If one adheres, as psychoanalysis does, to the concept of unconscious memory, repetition and recollection can be understood in terms of each other, depending on whether we focus on the present act, in which case we speak of repeating, or on the past prototype, in which case we see recollection.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Hans Loewald, "Repetition and Repetition Compulsion," in Hans W. Loewald, *The Essential Loewald: Collected Papers and Monographs* (Hagerstown, Md: University Publishing Group, Inc., 2000), 88.

### The Transference Relationship

In classical psychoanalysis the transference is the cornerstone of the psychoanalytic relationship between analyst and analysand, since it is within the context of the transference relationship that unconscious remembering becomes conscious. The transference refers to the unconscious re-enactment, within the therapeutic context, of repressed infantile content, which is projected onto the person of the analyst (who functions as a stand-in for the parental figure). Once projected, the content can then be analyzed and (in successful analysis) reintegrated at the conscious level into the life of the patient. For Freud, the transference operated as a form of resistance to the attempts to uncover repressed memories— to sort out the past from the present as well as providing the energy to change things— that was at the heart of his form of therapy. For Loewald, “transference serves as a revitalization, a relinking of the past and the present, fantasy and reality, primary process and secondary process.”<sup>154</sup>

This relationship between repeating and remembering is central to the psychoanalytic project, as it provides a framework in which to initiate the excavation of the unconscious within the analytic context. As previously indicated, remembering may be understood as a form of repetition in the psychological field that occurs on a conscious (differentiated) level, whereas “acting out” or repeating by action may be understood as a form of remembering that occurs on an unconscious (undifferentiated level). The two forms are therefore related and this connection bridges the divide between “past and

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<sup>154</sup> Stephen A. Mitchell, *Relationality: From Attachment to Intersubjectivity* (Hillsdale NJ: The Analytic Press, 2000), 25.

present, the id and the ego, the biological and the psychological.”<sup>155</sup> If acting out is potentially destructive outside the analytic context (i.e. in one’s personal life), it represents a transference manifestation within the analytic situation and it “is a vehicle of the therapeutic process.”<sup>156</sup>

Within the transference relationship the analyst recognizes that the patient is recollecting unconsciously (i.e. repeating) and helps her to integrate the content at a differentiated (conscious) level. As we have seen, in order for the remembered content to be meaningful, it is necessary that the link between the primary and secondary ways of experiencing is maintained.

In Freudian psychoanalysis, the prototypical patterns that are repeated throughout ones life are fueled by the Oedipus Complex, and, in particular, the specific manner in which this drama is played out in the infancy of the individual. If there is a partial resolution of the Oedipal drama when the young child of five or six (temporarily) renounces his mother as a libidinal object in response to the castration threat, this drama is reawakened at puberty and there is a danger that it will be repeated passively (i.e. acted out) on an infantile level of psychic organization, instead of on a more differentiated level that is appropriate for a more developed ego. In short, it will be repeated “on approximately the same level on which the original conflict took place.”<sup>157</sup> The task of the analyst is to reactivate the conflict with the patient within the analytic context (i.e. in the transference relationship) in order that it may be repeated in an active (as opposed to purely passive) manner and thus remembered. In this way it is “actively taken up by the

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<sup>155</sup> Hans Loewald, “Repetition and Repetition Compulsion,” in Hans W. Loewald, *The Essential Loewald: Collected Papers and Monographs* (Hagerstown, Md: University Publishing Group, Inc., 2000), 88.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

ego's organizing capacity" and integrated into a more appropriately differentiated level.<sup>158</sup>

The super-ego arises as a result of the Oedipal drama, and is the seat of the conscience in the Freudian and Loewaldian accounts of the development of mental life. As such, the Oedipal drama is central to Loewald's understanding of what it means to be responsible. A brief elaboration of the Oedipal drama in psychoanalysis is therefore in order.

### The Oedipal Complex

The psychoanalyst Stephen A. Mitchell provides a coherent summary of the Oedipal phenomenon and its relation to guilt, in which he underlines the bi-phasic nature of our psychological lives in the Freudian account. In other words, prior to and underlying our "normal" life (i.e. the life that we know and remember) is an earlier, forgotten life of childhood sexuality:

That life was both wondrous and terrifying, body-centered and full of polymorphously perverse sexuality and phantasmagoric aggression. For each small child that earlier life culminates in reenacting the role of Sophocles' Oedipus. Our sexual ambitions lead us to alternately both desire our parents and plot their murder. Each of us becomes implicated in the most psychologically horrifying of crimes- incest and parricide. And each of us becomes a social, responsible being through fear of punishment and retaliation and the assumption of guilt for those forbidden impulses: the external objects of our desire and hatred are replaced by internal objects of conscience and surveillance [i.e. by the superego], and the darkness of repression falls across our earlier life.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>159</sup> Stephen A. Mitchell, *Can Love Last? The Fate of Romance Over Time* (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002), 156.

In the successful therapeutic situation, that which had been acted out and thus repeated passively (i.e. the reproduction of infantile unconscious prototypical experiences in neurosis) is re-experienced actively when

organizing ego activity is mediated by the analyst and his interpretations. [In these cases] repetition means reactivation on a higher level of organizing potential, which makes possible novel configurations and novel resolutions to the conflict.<sup>160</sup>

It is therefore the manner in which the early experiences and conflicts of infantile history are repeated that distinguishes a healthy life from one that is “blocked or stunted by excessive repression and ego restriction.”<sup>161</sup>

As previously indicated, the patterns that are repeated throughout a life are closely tied to the Oedipus complex (which for Loewald is itself a repetition of those experiences which preceded it, but on a new organizational level). This mixture of more or less passive reproductions is manifested in the ways in which our inner lives and personal relationships are configured. Ideally, these patterns will be re-created in the psychic field, i.e. actively repeated or remembered, as opposed to being repeated or acted out passively (where they may lead to a perpetuation of oedipal fantasies or pathological introjections). The erection of the superego may be viewed as a new differentiation within the ego, and as such it is

a prime example of re-creative repetition in the psychic field... Internal re-creative repetitions of external involvement and its dissolution enable the individual to

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<sup>160</sup> Hans Loewald, “Repetition and Repetition Compulsion,” in Hans W. Loewald, *The Essential Loewald: Collected Papers and Monographs* (Hagerstown, Md: University Publishing Group, Inc., 2000), 89.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

progress to progressive mastery of the Oedipus complex in the external arena of personal...involvements in later life.<sup>162</sup>

As the terms suggest, “active” and “passive” repetition are closely tied to the notion of volition. Loewald elaborates this connection when he speaks of the psychoanalytic understanding of the destiny of a person, in which a great deal more personal activity is assigned to the vicissitudes of life than has previously been recognized. Within the psychoanalytic account, inner, unconscious forces are assigned a much more active role in determining the things that befall me, and as manifestations of *my* unconscious, these forces may potentially be brought under the organizing control of the ego. By the same token, much of what I have been inclined to interpret as purposeful voluntary acts are actually determined by forces over which I exert little control. In both cases the role of unconscious forces are emphasized:

But while in the first case the emphasis is on the *power* of unconscious motivations, in the second case the emphasis is on their *potential for coming under the ego's organizing control*.<sup>163</sup> [italics in the original]

Simply put, we do not truly control what we think we control, and we have far more control in areas where we are normally inclined to disclaim any agency. In psychoanalysis, this situation is explicated with reference to the notion of the unconscious.

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 92.



### Agency and the Unconscious

In psychoanalysis, these unconscious motivations are understood, as motivations, to determine much of what had previously been characterized in an individual's life as chance occurrence, or conscious choice, or as caused by biological causes. In other words, these determining forces operate, as it were, behind the back of the person, seemingly curtailing their individual agency. However, this curtailment of agency is only part of the story. The main impact of this determinism lies in the fact that its origins are psychic, and the causes are conceived as potentially personal and unconscious forces that have an overt effect on our behavior. Furthermore, these causes are understood to be susceptible to influence and modification by psychological processes:

If this were not so, the whole idea that the reactivation of unconscious conflicts and their re-creation and working through in analysis could lead to change in present behavior would fall to the ground.<sup>164</sup>

As long as these unconscious patterns are subject to repression (i.e. insulated from the organizing activity of the ego), the compulsion to repeat will remain. Exposure to the ego's activity in the therapeutic context leads to what Loewald has identified as re-creative repression. Unconscious infantile experiences are repeated within the transference relationship, and as potentially active (conscious) repetitions, they may be taken up and transformed within the ego's organizing activity. These transference interpretations do not merely uncover unconscious infantile context, but they also communicate that these processes are personal experiences

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 92.

that reveal psychic activity of some kind, granted that this psychic activity had been or long since had become- not merely unconscious- but automatic, removed from intra- and extra-psychic influence, and thus a process passively reproduced.<sup>165</sup>

Bringing these unconscious forces to the light of consciousness is closely linked with the agency of the patient. In fact, the analytic process requires the patient to assume responsibility, to take ownership, for that which had previously appeared to be outside of her control. What had previously been experienced as passive, reproductive repetition, now (via the interpretations of the analyst) may take on the character of active re-creative repetition:

We try to make the patient see, or rather feel, that he as an actor is or can be involved, that he was compelled by his unconscious because it had been automatic and autonomous. The difference between automatic process and personal activity we convey to the patient when we point out to him that the unconscious he becomes aware of is *his* unconscious, or that *he dreamed* the dream he had.<sup>166</sup> [italics in the original]

The concepts of reproductive and re-creative repetition are closely linked to Loewald's notion of so-called primary and secondary-process. The former is connected to Freud's concept of the Id and, as we have seen, is characterized by a lack of differentiation. We might also say that this is the realm of affect. In primary-process experiences, there are no distinctions between inside and outside, the self and other etc; nor is there any sense of time. In contrast, secondary-process experiences are differentiated and connected to Freud's concept of the ego, and they also correspond to our usual notions of the intellect. Once again, Loewald sees the task of the ego as the re-integration of primary process

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 93.

experiences on a “higher” (i.e. increasingly complex and differentiated) level, so that those experiences may inform and impart meaning to the present.

The ego repeats, on a new level of organization which in our subjective experience and to our observation appears as heightened psychic activity as compared with the antecedent level, the processes which we conceptualize as id; the ego, insofar as it does not defend against them, repeats them in reorganizing them, i.e., re-creatively.<sup>167</sup>

In the act of re-creation or reorganization of earlier subjective experience this new level of organization assumes the quality of consciousness, although Loewald also notes that it will likely lose this quality over time (and may require re-creation or reorganization onto yet another level of organization).

Repetition is also connected with memory and so-called memory traces. The latter refer to those earlier levels of recorded ego-organization that are not normally accessible to consciousness, and which may yet be taken up and creatively re-organized. As we have seen, conscious remembering can be described as active repetition, just as active repetition can be described as a (passive) form of remembering. Both forms are (mutually) reconfigured in the process of recreating, and a sense of loss may accompany the process in which a new organization of experience (gradually) loses its character of consciousness as a new element of the unconscious has been added:

The sense of loss which may be felt when such creative remembering and reorganizing in analysis recedes from consciousness while the gain from such conscious experience is not lost, is evidence of this course [i.e. of generating new organization of something old].<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 94.

This notion of a sense of loss that accompanies the therapeutic process is closely tied to the concept of mourning, which, as we will see in connection to the Oedipal drama, is for Loewald an inescapable part of the process of becoming a responsible agent.

And there can be another sense of loss of the opposite kind, when some memory, some unconscious id wish becomes conscious, because the new organization achieved in this conscious moment of recreation hinders retrogression to an earlier organizational level: something of the poignant intensity and immediacy, of the youth of living up to that level is to be given up. The unconscious id wants to reproduce on its own level and resists organization. It is here that there are connections between remembering, working through and the work of mourning that deserves close study.<sup>169</sup>

### **Murder, Guilt and Mourning**

The importance of mourning and its relation to responsibility is examined in “The Waning of the Oedipus Complex.” This article charts the continuing relevance of the Oedipus complex, both as an organizing psychological complex within the life of the individual, and as an invaluable meta-theoretical tool within psychoanalytic theory itself. Loewald wrote the article in part as a response to the dwindling interest in the Oedipus complex in light of the growing body of theoretical data that emphasized the pre-Oedipal stages of development. It is within this context that he elaborates the significance of mourning for the development of autonomy.

The active words, destruction and demolition, which Freud has used in referring to the [temporary] dissolution of the Oedipus complex [until it rears its head again during adolescence], may be heard as reverberations of that dominant feature of the oedipal conflict, parricide, the destruction of the parent by the child.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>170</sup> Hans Loewald, “The Waning of the Oedipus Complex,” in Hans W. Loewald, *The Essential Loewald: Collected Papers and Monographs* (Hagerstown, Md: University Publishing Group, Inc., 2000), 387.

The term parricide is used rather than patricide, as the latter only refers to the murder of the father. The former term is more inclusive, and includes within it the murder of someone who symbolizes a parent figure (mother or father) or an entity of group representing parental authority. The sacred bond between parent and child is violated, thus murdering the parental authority itself:

If we take etymology as a guide, it is the bringing forth, nourishing, providing for, and protecting of the child by the parents that constitute their parenthood, authority (authorship), and render sacred the child's ties with the parents. Parricide is a crime against the sanctity of such a bond. The bond is most clearly exemplified for us by the relationship to biological parents.<sup>171</sup>

Obviously, it is not actual physical parricide that is germane to the discussion of the Oedipus complex. What is significant is that a form of psychological parricide inevitably occurs as the individual assumes responsibility for herself, i.e. becomes a responsible agent. This responsibility implies a measure of autonomy in the etymological sense of the person becoming "self-legislating," but it is an autonomy that is nevertheless significantly constrained/encumbered by (internal/external) forces. These constraints radically distinguish it from Descartes's *cogito* or Kant's transcendental subject and the derivative conceptions of the unencumbered self that continue to inform much of Western philosophy (in this connection, Rawls's original position comes to mind). With this psychological crime comes guilt (an example of the aforementioned constraints), which must be atoned for if the individual is to become genuinely responsible.

In the process of becoming an adult significant emotional ties with parents are severed [thus producing guilt and a need to atone]. They are not simply renounced

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 387.

by force of circumstances, castration threats, etc- although these play an important role- but they are also actively rejected, fought against, and destroyed to varying degrees.<sup>172</sup>

For Loewald, guilt does not derive purely from Oedipal fantasies in the child's mind, as postulated by Freud. Rather, in viewing the Oedipus complex in terms of generational struggle,<sup>173</sup> Mitchell (correctly, in my view) reads Loewald as arguing that a version of the parent is actually destroyed or murdered as a child develops and becomes more independent. At one time the infant was totally dependent on her parents for everything, and even though the parents may take great pleasure in watching her grow, it is with difficulty that they give up the joys and responsibilities that this level of total care entails. And yet the growing child must renounce this level of care and kill that version of the parent, no matter how much resistance she encounters:

Parents always exit conflictedly, never simply gracefully, from each developmental stage. And the child, who needs to struggle toward his own emancipatory freedom, must do his part in pushing the parent off. The murder brings guilt, and bearing that guilt is an important part of psychological growth.<sup>174</sup>

Murder and emancipation<sup>175</sup> are thus inescapably intertwined. We develop our autonomy, represented by the superego, and engage in "non-incestuous object relations" by killing our parents and appropriating their power and authority, including their responsibility for us:

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 388-9.

<sup>173</sup> Erik H. Erikson also makes the Oedipal complex into a generational issue, but he views it differently from Loewald. Loewald touches on this in his "Internalization and the Superego," in Hans W. Loewald, *The Essential Loewald: Collected Papers and Monographs* (Hagerstown, Md: University Publishing Group, Inc., 2000), 267.

<sup>174</sup> Stephen A. Mitchell, *Can Love Last? The Fate of Romance Over Time* (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002), 159-60.

<sup>175</sup> Emancipation, with its positive connotation, is favored by Loewald in his developmental account of mental life. We will come to see how Emmanuel Levinas interprets the assertion of personal freedom and autonomy by the individual (which is much the same thing) in a very different light from Loewald.

In short, we destroy them in regard to some of their qualities hitherto most vital to us. Parents resist as well as promote such destruction no less ambivalently than children carry it out. What will be left if things go well, is tenderness, mutual trust, and respect, the signs of equality.<sup>176</sup>

Loewald clearly elaborates the need for opposition in the individual's striving for autonomy. Parental figures that provide too much leeway and insufficient boundaries often hinder the emancipation of their children, even though they believe (perhaps with a measure of denial?) that they are facilitating independence. Without such a struggle that results in parricide, there would be no guilt and thus no development of a responsible self that can atone for the crime. It would therefore appear "as if opponents are required with whom the drama of gaining power, authority, autonomy, and the distribution of guilt can be played out."<sup>177</sup>

### **Superego and Conscience**

It is this (partial) mastering of the Oedipus complex that leads to the configuration of the superego, which for Freud and Loewald is the locus of conscience and the repository of morality. The superego may be thought of as an internalization of the moral norms represented in the person of the father (or, more generally for Loewald, either parental figure), and it assumes a more or less stable psychical structure in the post-Oedipal individual. For object-relations theorists, it represents an internal object. In other

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<sup>176</sup> Loewald, "The Waning of the Oedipus Complex," in Hans W. Loewald, *The Essential Loewald: Collected Papers and Monographs* (Hagerstown, Md: University Publishing Group, Inc., 2000), 390.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 389.

words, the superego as internal object is configured as the parents are destroyed as libidinal objects. The constitution of the superego occurs as the direct result of the psychical crime of parricide, and this psychic structure/internal object then has the task of monitoring (i.e. taking responsibility for) the ego.<sup>178</sup>

If the superego is constituted as a result of psychical parricide, it is also structured in part as a means of atoning for this crime. This atonement takes place because in some way the superego restores the libidinal relationships that were destroyed, but internally rather than externally:

The organization of the superego, as internalization or narcissistic transformation of oedipal object relations, documents parricide and at the same time is its atonement and metamorphosis: atonement insofar as the superego makes up for and is a restitution of oedipal relationships; metamorphosis insofar as in this restitution oedipal object relations are transmuted into internal, intra-psychic structural relations.<sup>179</sup>

Thus, for Loewald, the superego “embodies the child’s successful appropriation of parental authority which is transformed into the child’s capacities for autonomy and responsibility.”<sup>180</sup>

This oedipal drama of guilt and atonement frequently plays out in the psychoanalytic context in the interactions between analyst and patient. The inability on the part of the patient to assume responsibility for herself is often the result of an inability or unwillingness to bear the guilt associated with parricide. An unending need for

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 389. As we shall see in the following chapter, this idea recalls Emmanuel Levinas’s reading of Pascal’s “taking one’s place in the sun” in which the assertion of the ego necessarily occurs at the expense of the Other.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 389.

<sup>180</sup> Thomas H. Ogden, “Reading Loewald: Oedipus reconceived,” *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 87, vol. 3 (Jun 2006): 659.



punishment (“cruel, inflexible standards and demands”) may then be substituted for authentic atonement or reconciliation, which can only come about by means of proper mourning for that which was lost/destroyed:

Need for punishment tends to become inexhaustible if atonement or reconciliation is not eventually brought about by mourning, which leads to a mature superego and to the possibility of non-incestuous object relations (the word “atone,” literally and in many contexts, means to become or cause to become *at one*, to reconcile, to bring to concord or harmony).<sup>181</sup> [*italics in original*]

For Freud, as for Loewald, guilt represents the linchpin in the human ascent from the bestial to the civilized. If Oedipal guilt is absent the result is sociopathy, while an excess of Oedipal guilt results in neurosis (the symptoms of which express and provide punishment for infantile sexual wishes). The latter situation leads to what Freud termed the “negative therapeutic reaction” in which the neurotic seeks relief from therapy but cannot permit herself to derive any: “As the oedipal criminal he unconsciously takes himself to be, he regards himself as undeserving of help: his crimes are unpardonable.”<sup>182</sup>

We have therefore seen that becoming responsible for oneself— becoming an autonomous agent— involves forcibly severing and reformulating sacred bonds with our primary caretakers, our most intimate others.<sup>183</sup> In Loewald’s developmental account of the origins of consciousness, these bonds are prior to the self, they are antecedent to the autonomous “I” that is regarded as the primary (and often the sole) locus of meaning in

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<sup>181</sup> Loewald, “The Waning of the Oedipus Complex,” in Hans W. Loewald, *The Essential Loewald: Collected Papers and Monographs* (Hagerstown, Md: University Publishing Group, Inc., 2000), 389-390.

<sup>182</sup> Stephen A. Mitchell, *Can Love Last? The Fate of Romance Over Time* (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002), 156-7.

<sup>183</sup> This account of subjectivity is both similar to, and radically different from, Emmanuel Levinas’s account. For both thinkers, the development/assertion of the ego necessarily occurs at the expense of the other. Other similarities and differences will be explored in the following chapters.

Western Philosophy. Within the psychoanalytic paradigm, the notion that one can become a completely unencumbered moral agent (i.e. free from guilt) through an exercise of will (as in the Kantian context) is illusory, and necessarily entails considerable repression.

The (always incomplete) resolution of the Oedipus conflict in childhood leads to the temporary waning (i.e. repression) of this complex until adolescence, when it reemerges and is expressed via passive repetition (i.e. unconsciously). For Loewald, this repression is an important part of the developmental process of becoming morally responsible. It is also an indispensable part of the process of building healthy (i.e. non-incestuous), loving relationships with others:

Parricide is carried out, instead of being sidestepped, in that dual activity in which aspects of oedipal relations are transformed into ego-superego relations (internalization), and other aspects are, *qua* relations with external objects, restructured in such a way that the incestuous character of object relations gives way to novel forms of object choice. These novel object choices are under the influence of those internalizations. Insofar as human beings strive for emancipation and individuation as well as for object love, parricide on the plane of psychic action is a developmental necessity.<sup>184</sup> [*italics in the original*]

It is this ongoing linkage between internal and external relations, primary and secondary processes, that infuses a life with meaning (by giving way to “novel forms of object choice”) in Loewald’s developmental account.

As previously indicated, this psychical parricide renders us guilty and requires atonement. One of the ways in which this guilt is made manifest is in the need for

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<sup>184</sup> Loewald, “The Waning of the Oedipus Complex,” in Hans W. Loewald, *The Essential Loewald: Collected Papers and Monographs* (Hagerstown, Md: University Publishing Group, Inc., 2000), 390.

punishment, although as we have seen, punishment cannot in and of itself remove the guilt. This is due to the fact that punishment (whether self-inflicted or inflicted by others) is primarily (although not necessarily exclusively) in the service of repression of the sense of guilt. In other words, guilt frequently leads to a need for punishment. In a similar vein, anxiety frequently leads to a defense against guilt,

but anxiety is not therefore to be equated with a need for assuaging or eliminating it. Nor is anxiety, in its primary function, a signal to induce flight or repression, but a sign of internal conflict and danger that may be dealt with in a number of ways.<sup>185</sup>

The guilt resulting from the psychical murder of the parents therefore leads to inner conflict, which in turn is passively repeated by the individual. Punishment, which has a strong masochistic component, represents a short-circuit of the process of atonement. In order for genuine mourning and atonement to take place, the guilt must first be borne (rather than evaded and thus short-circuited) for a period of time:

For action that is not compulsive to take place, the affect is to be borne for a time (it is here that the “holding environment” is of help). Thought and feeling (affect) are “delayed action,” that is, activity that lingers, is “long,” instead of being a short circuit (it should be kept in mind that seeing any action or process that does not short-circuit as a delay, takes reflex action and direct “energy discharge” as the standard).<sup>186</sup>

We have seen that the superego, as an internalization of the moral norms of the parents, serves in part as an internal monitor of the ego, and in this way allows a person to be autonomous (literally, “self-legislating”) and hence morally responsible. This is one way in which we atone for the psychical parricide that inevitably results from our passage to adulthood. But can there be another way in which the superego helps us to atone? One

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 391.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 391.

possibility is that, at the same time that the parents are (psychically) murdered, a form of immortality is also bestowed upon them. By internalizing important aspects of our experience of our parents into who we are as individuals (i.e. into our very structure), we secure for them

a place, a seat of influence, not only in the way the child conducts his life, but also in the way the child's children conduct their lives [since these same moral norms will be passed on to the succeeding generations], and on and on.<sup>187</sup>

While the Oedipus complex is never fully mastered, it is possible to mitigate the guilt that stems from it. In order to achieve this, one must work through (and eventually reconcile) the complex and conflicting oedipal strivings. In other words, they must be reintegrated on a more highly differentiated level of mental organization. Loewald elaborates the conflicted nature of these oedipal strivings in his essay "Ego and Reality," and his account is significantly more nuanced and complex than that of Freud. This essay is significant from a feminist perspective as well, in that Loewald's account of the Mother and Father is more ambiguous than Freud's (and thus less restricted by gender stereotypes).

For Loewald, the father figure is not primarily a hostile figure (as he is for Freud), representing the castration threat to which the young boy responds by either passive submission and/or rebellion. He also has a positive and more essential role for the development of the ego:

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<sup>187</sup> Thomas H. Ogden, "Reading Loewald: Oedipus reconceived," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 87, vol. 3 (Jun 2006): 659.

Against the threat of the engulfing, overpowering womb, stands the paternal veto against the libidinal relationship with the mother. Against this threat of the maternal engulfment, the paternal position is not another threat or danger, but a support of powerful force.<sup>188</sup>

As this passage suggests, the oedipal relationship with the mother is also more conflicted than Freud initially postulated. She represents more than an object of libidinal desire, the union with which is thwarted by the father. There is also the overpowering, “annihilating” aspect of the maternal figure, in which the individuating child is threatened with a loss of differentiation:

To express it in broader terms: The original unity and identity [i.e. between infant and mother], undifferentiated and unstructured, of psychic apparatus and environment is as much of a danger for the ego as the demand of the “paternal castration threat” to give it up altogether.<sup>189</sup>

We may therefore discern two pairs of relationships to the parent figures that play out in the Oedipal drama:

- (1) in regard to the mother, a positive libidinal relationship, growing out of the primary narcissistic position, and a defensive, negative one of dread of the womb, dread of sinking back into the original unstructured state of identity with her;
- (2) in relation to the father, a positive, “typically masculine” identification with him, which lends powerful support against the danger of the womb; and a defensive relationship concerning the paternal castration threat.<sup>190</sup>

These positive and defensive relationships with the mother and father enter into the Oedipus complex and form components of it. What has been referred to as the paternal

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<sup>188</sup> Hans Loewald, “Ego and Reality,” in Hans W. Loewald, *The Essential Loewald: Collected Papers and Monographs* (Hagerstown, Md: University Publishing Group, Inc., 2000), 14.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

castration threat now consists of a later, hostile (castration) threat and an earlier positive identification with an idealized version of the father. Furthermore, the positive libidinal relation with the mother now consists of a need for union with her as well as a dread of this union. Loewald is thus claiming that “as the dread of the womb cannot be explained primarily by the fear of the father’s penis, so the positive identification with the father cannot be reduced to the fearful submission to his castration threat.”<sup>191</sup>

Loewald thus rejects the simplistic characterization of the relation to the Mother as solely positive and to the father as solely hostile in the Oedipal drama. Although he is nevertheless emphasizing the biological role of the woman as mother (i.e. he is, at least in this regard, essentializing women), one could argue that his account is less monolithic and Patriarchal than Freud’s.

As we have seen, in order to master the guilt that inevitably follows the crime of psychic parricide, the individual must come to terms with the conflicting Oedipal strivings toward the mother and father figures. The link to these primary process ways of experiencing the relationships to our earliest caretakers must be maintained, but these connections must be integrated into the more complex and differentiated ways of experiencing that are appropriate to the adult world. The development of the superego may be understood from this perspective.

The nuanced picture of responsibility elaborated by Loewald strikes a balance between the more extreme depictions of moral agency that are current in contemporary Western culture. On the one hand, Loewald’s account rejects the abject powerlessness associated

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 15-16.

with the so-called medical-biological account of moral agency, in which our thoughts and actions are solely determined by internal or external forces beyond our control (i.e. in which our agency is illusory). On the other hand, he rejects the hyper-rational consumerist account of moral agency in which our most difficult choices are construed as radically unconstrained. For Loewald (as for Heidegger with his notion of *geworfenheit*), we are thrown unwilling into the world at birth and it is our (developmental) task to own up to our circumstances so that we can experience ourselves as agents:<sup>192</sup>

I will stress here only certain relevant aspects of self-responsibility. It involves appropriating or owning up to one's needs and impulses as one's own, impulses and desires we appear to have been born with or that seem to have taken shape in interaction with parents during infancy. Such appropriation (notice that I use the same word as when I spoke of appropriating parental authority), in the course of which we begin to develop a sense of self-identity, means to experience ourselves as agents, notwithstanding the fact that we were born without our informed consent and did not pick our parents.<sup>193</sup>

Agency for Loewald is not, as it appeared to be for Freud, illusory. Our capacity to be responsible and to choose is real, but so are the forces that serve as constraints on our freedom. The superego, which is an internal object (i.e. it is a construct and thus limited), is the essence of our internal agency. Using a constructivist analogy, Stephen A. Mitchell<sup>194</sup> has likened the balance between freedom and constraints to those limitations imposed on an architect or artist by the medium in which she is working. A great variety of houses can be made out of brick or straw, but the materials used will impose real

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<sup>192</sup> For an elaboration of the continuities between Loewald and Heidegger, see Stanley A. Leavy, "Time and World in the Thought of Hans W. Loewald," *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child* 44 (1989): 231-240.

<sup>193</sup> Hans Loewald, "The Waning of the Oedipus Complex," in Hans W. Loewald, *The Essential Loewald: Collected Papers and Monographs* (Hagerstown, Md: University Publishing Group, Inc., 2000), 392.

<sup>194</sup> Stephen A. Mitchell, *Can Love Last? The Fate of Romance Over Time* (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002). This analogy also recalls Martin Buber's notion of fettered surprise. For a more detailed treatment please see Michael Oppenheim, *Jewish Philosophy and Psychoanalysis: Narrating the Interhuman* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006).

constraints on how the houses are designed. In a similar vein, agency and choice are possible within the constraints of the forces that threaten them. The desires and impulses to which we are subjected are not to be repressed or overpowered, but are rather to be granted the active existence that they will have regardless (i.e. with or without our consent). Taking ownership over these desires and impulses by recognizing and accepting them as our own may partially mitigate their severity, but at any rate will allow us to be responsible for them.

Following the lead of the word responsibility, one may say that appropriation consists in being responsive to their urgings. A harsh, unyielding superego is unresponsive and in that sense irresponsible. Unless modified it leads to self-destruction or to having to be bribed and corrupted. Self-inflicted or “arranged” punishment is one form of such corruption; it merely assuages guilt for a while.<sup>195</sup>

### Loewald, the Self, and Responsibility

According to Loewald’s reading of what it means to be responsible, one cannot become an autonomous self without atoning for the guilt incurred by the crime of psychical parricide. This notion of guilt and atonement is absent from traditional liberal conceptions of the autonomous self, which asserts itself as an act of will. One might argue that this act of imposing the will represents an attempt to master reality, to stamp one’s authoritative interpretation upon the world into which one has been thrown.<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> Hans Loewald, “The Waning of the Oedipus Complex,” in Hans W. Loewald, *The Essential Loewald: Collected Papers and Monographs* (Hagerstown, Md: University Publishing Group, Inc., 2000), 392-3. This notion of “allowing or granting [our desires and impulses] that existence that they have in any event,” rather than trying to overpower or repress them, recalls the approach recommended in certain types of Buddhist meditation (i.e. Zen and Vipassana). A more detailed comparison is beyond the parameters of the present examination.

<sup>196</sup> We shall explore this idea in the next chapter in relation to Levinas’s account of the assertion of the ego and the subjugation of the Other.



From Loewald's psychoanalytic perspective, this latter account represents an evasion or repression of the need to atone, and hence a denial of responsibility:

Responsibility to oneself, in the sense of being responsive to one's urgings in the manner I described, involves facing and bearing the guilt for those acts we consider as criminal. Prototypical, in the oedipal complex, are parricide and incest.<sup>197</sup>

As we have seen, it makes little difference on the psychical plane if these acts are merely fantasies or are carried out symbolically, because they nevertheless possess a psychic reality (i.e. they serve to configure our internal and external relations) and require atonement. An internal restitution of the child-parent relation is needed:

Atonement for these crimes- which I defined as reconciliation, being again at one- consists in a reconstitution of child-parent relations on the internal scene of action (internalization). As mentioned before, this transposition or transmutation, at once destruction and restitution, in metapsychological language is a transformation of object cathexis [repression] into narcissistic cathexis [internalization].<sup>198</sup>

Responsibility is therefore paradoxical, in that it entails both a criminal act and its restitution. From the viewpoint of received morality, self-responsibility is a crime (i.e. parricide) of which humans are inevitably guilty as they emancipate themselves as individuals, but it is at the same time restitution and atonement for that crime:

Without the guilty deed of parricide there is no autonomous self. And further, also from the viewpoint of received morality, individuality and its maturity- I am not speaking of unbridled individualism- is a virtue, a *summum bonum*, at any rate in

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<sup>197</sup> Hans Loewald, "The Waning of the Oedipus Complex," in Hans W. Loewald, *The Essential Loewald: Collected Papers and Monographs* (Hagerstown, Md: University Publishing Group, Inc., 2000), 393.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 393. Loewald distinguishes between object cathexis and narcissistic cathexis in Hans Loewald, "On Internalization," in Hans W. Loewald, *The Essential Loewald: Collected Papers and Monographs* (Hagerstown, Md: University Publishing Group, Inc., 2000), 76-7.

modern Western civilizations. To live among these paradoxes appears to be our fate for the time being.<sup>199</sup> [*italics in the original*]

It bears repeating that for Loewald, we are all inevitably guilty simply by becoming self-responsible individuals, at least within a western context that valorizes individuality as a virtue. We will see that this may not be the case in so-called collectivistic, non-western contexts.

The self, for Loewald, is therefore in its very structure designed to require or to bring about atonement. In particular, affect (especially guilt) is instrumental in creating a self. Without this guilt which requires atonement, there can be no self. This depiction is very different from the self of Western Philosophy (i.e. Kant and Mill, as explored in the earlier chapter on Feminism) which is radically unencumbered by affect and from which ethics can be deduced via a mathematical equation (consequentialism) or by reference to abstract universal moral laws (deontology). From the point of view of such theories, guilt is either irrelevant or an actual hindrance to sound (i.e. rational) thinking about moral matters. For Loewald it is indispensable:

Guilt then is not a troublesome affect that we might hope to eliminate in some fashion, but one of the driving forces in the organization of the self. The self, in its autonomy, is an atonement structure, a structure of reconciliation, and as such a supreme achievement.<sup>200</sup>

If Loewald challenges the traditional philosophical conceptions of the self, then he also challenges the supposed dichotomy of objectivity and subjectivity that pervaded the scientific paradigm of Freud's time. Although the self acts upon the world in the sense

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<sup>199</sup> Hans Loewald, "The Waning of the Oedipus Complex," in Hans W. Loewald, *The Essential Loewald: Collected Papers and Monographs* (Hagerstown, Md: University Publishing Group, Inc., 2000), 393-4.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 394.

that our experience is shaped by the particular contours of consciousness, the self and consciousness are also shaped by the world. This dialectical back-and-forth enriches our experience and facilitates new ways of relating to the world (and of loving):

In mature object relations, ideally the self engages in a return movement with objects that are differently organized and experienced by the self thanks to its own richer organization. It is this richer self-organization that can lead to novel ways of relating to objects while being enriched by their novelty. In some sense that novel way of relating with objects- most obvious in mature relations- creatively destroys and reconstitutes, in a sea-change on the plane of object love, the old oedipal relations. It also constitutes an atonement.<sup>201</sup>

We will recall that for Loewald, the ego emerges gradually over time from an original unity between infant and mother in which there is no differentiation between self and other, inner and outer. So-called “objective” reality emerges as a distinct sense of self is formed— objectivity and subjectivity are thus co-created. The developing ego serves an integrative function, in which the original experience of unity and connectedness is preserved on increasingly complex and differentiated levels of experience. For Loewald, a “richer self-organization” means that the links between primary and secondary experience (or, in terms of one aspect, between fantasy and reality) are vibrant and alive. By permeating the present with the primary experiences of the past, the present is enriched and transformed, thereby transforming our experience of “reality.” As reality is transformed, we find new ways of relating to the objects (i.e. people) in the world, and these new relations in turn have a transformative effect on us. It is important to keep in mind that these relationships— between subject and object, reality and fantasy— are

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 394. One also recalls in this connection the implications of Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle in quantum mechanics.

continuously negotiated and renegotiated over a lifetime. Loewald equates any reification of the self with psychopathology (acting out, neurosis, etc).

This fluid account of the relationship between objectivity and subjectivity and between fantasy and reality clearly anticipates many of the insights of the postmodern critique of philosophy. However, it would not be accurate to characterize Loewald as a postmodern thinker. For example, Loewald posits a cause and effect relationship between our early experiences and later psychopathologies that is far more deterministic than a strictly postmodern account. As we have seen, Loewald brackets his account of Oedipal conflict by situating it within a particular time and place (i.e. the Western context) but his version of intrapsychic structural development is, at least from the vantage point of the explicitly postmodern-historicist or social-constructivist theories that followed him, positivist.<sup>202</sup> After all, Loewald maintained the Freudian conceptual frameworks (for example, the structures of Id, Ego and Superego) even while introducing radical transformations of their meaning. Joel Whitebook argues that Loewald's resistance to making the postmodern move was a result of theoretical choice and not, as implied by Teicholz, a result of bad timing, but this is not entirely clear.<sup>203</sup> In any event, Loewald's account is structured in such a way as to avoid the excesses (i.e. the inability to account for real human agency in a radically de-centered self) that afflicts much of postmodern theorizing about the subject.

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<sup>202</sup> Judith Guss Teicholz, *Kohut, Loewald, and the postmoderns: a comparative study of self and relationship* (Hillsdale, N.J.: Analytic, 1999), 18-9.

<sup>203</sup> Joel Whitebook, "Hans Loewald: A radical conservative," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 85, vol. 1 (Feb 2004): 101 (footnote 3).

### Loewald and Feminism

Before discussing Loewald and feminist theory, it would be useful to reconsider his views on the maternal dimension in the Oedipal drama. Although he identifies parricide as the primary psychological crime for which the individual must atone, he also stresses the significance of the closely-related crime of incest, in which the sanctity of the primary process (i.e. undifferentiated) unity between mother and infant is violated as the infant differentiates herself and yet still desires to maintain that original unity. In other words, as the infant comes to experience herself as a separate entity, her mother is (by extension) experienced as separate, too (i.e. as an external object). The incestuous desire for union with that object thus inevitably accompanies the process of differentiation. Incestuous acts and fantasies constitute a crime because they violate the sanctity of the original oneness, i.e. the infant-mother unity that precedes the Oedipal phase:

The “sacred” innocence of primary narcissistic unity and its derivatives, anterior to individuation and its inherent guilt and atonement, while resulting from sexual union of the parents, precedes and is the undifferentiated source of the child’s emerging sexuality. Our vision tends to be blurred by a nostalgic longing for such a state...Implicit in the modern objective, scientific world view, on the other hand, is an investment in the opposite direction that tends to negate the validity, however compromised and complicated by subsequent development, of the primacy of that unitary source.<sup>204</sup>

Here Loewald alludes to the idolization of science, which mistakes the world of “objectivity” for the sole reality. He “regarded such a state as a culturally valued, normative pathology.”<sup>205</sup> From a feminist perspective, Loewald is asserting the value of the stereotypically feminine sphere of fantasy, affect and subjectivity against the

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<sup>204</sup> Hans Loewald, “The Waning of the Oedipus Complex,” in Hans W. Loewald, *The Essential Loewald: Collected Papers and Monographs* (Hagerstown, Md: University Publishing Group, Inc., 2000), 396.

<sup>205</sup> Stephen A. Mitchell, “From Ghosts to Ancestors,” *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* 8, vol. 6 (1998): 849.

obsession with the allegedly masculine sphere of abstract hyper-rationality and objectivity.

How does the incestuous impulse play a role in the development of a (responsible) self?

As we have seen, incest occurs on the psychical plane when someone (i.e. the mother) with whom we had a prior unity becomes a libidinal object: "The very same person with whom there had been a pre-objectal [in other words, undifferentiated] bond prior to and continuing into the oedipal phase now becomes an object of sexual desire."<sup>206</sup>

Understood in this way, incest is the inevitable consequence of the shift, without a substitutive change of person, from a primary-process (and hence undifferentiated) way of experiencing to a secondary-process (i.e. differentiated) way of experiencing. The incestuous object was previously not experienced as a distinct object at all, but rather as part of a unified whole. As differentiation occurs, the ego strives to maintain the original unity on a more complex level of organization, and thus the "new" object emerges as an object of desire. As with the crime of parricide, which follows later, incest is the inevitable consequence of the development of secondary-process ways of experiencing the other (who was originally the same). The emerging libidinal object thus has, ontologically speaking, a liminal status:

The incestuous object thus is an intermediate, ambiguous entity, neither a full-fledged libidinal *objectum* nor an unequivocal *identificatum*. The fact that the incestuous object, insofar as it is libidinal object, is the very same person that originally had been and continues to be also an *identificatum*, renders incest evil in our eyes. The identificatory intimacy of child and parent (or close relative) is both exploited and defied in incest.<sup>207</sup> [italics in the original]

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<sup>206</sup> Hans Loewald, "The Waning of the Oedipus Complex," in Hans W. Loewald, *The Essential Loewald: Collected Papers and Monographs* (Hagerstown, Md: University Publishing Group, Inc., 2000), 397.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, 397.

When Loewald speaks here of *identificatum* (identification), he is referring to the psychological process whereby an identity of subject and object (i.e. infant and mother) or of parts or aspects of them, is established:

Insofar as, in identification, they become identical, one and the same, there is a merging or confusion of subject and object. Identification tends to erase a difference: subject becomes object and object becomes subject.<sup>208</sup>

Incest can thus be understood as “a regressive, back-sliding repetition of an intermediate stage in the process of individuation,” and “incestuous oedipal fantasies dominating sexual life in adulthood represent non-resolution of the Oedipus complex.”<sup>209</sup> Seen from another light, the desire to maintain the (prior) unity with the mother in a newly-differentiated context is a driving force in the development of the superego and hence, for Loewald, of a self. Becoming a responsible, autonomous self entails giving up the oedipal-incestuous ties in the process of superego formation. In other words, the primary identifications must be renounced so that they may give way to (or be reconfigured as) secondary or superego identifications.<sup>210</sup>

The maternal figure, at least in terms of the Oedipal period, is thus granted a far more important role in Loewald’s developmental account than in Freud’s theory. However, Loewald also emphasizes the centrality of the maternal role in the pre-Oedipal period, and especially with reference to his notion of *conscire* (which derives, along with the word “conscious,” from the Latin *conscius*, “to know together”).

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<sup>208</sup> Hans Loewald, “On Internalization,” in Hans W. Loewald, *The Essential Loewald: Collected Papers and Monographs* (Hagerstown, Md: University Publishing Group, Inc., 2000), 83.

<sup>209</sup> Hans Loewald, “The Waning of the Oedipus Complex,” in Hans W. Loewald, *The Essential Loewald: Collected Papers and Monographs* (Hagerstown, Md: University Publishing Group, Inc., 2000), 398.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 398.

Conscire is related to the preconscious, which may be distinguished from primary-process mentation by virtue of it being differentiated to some degree. However, this differentiation occurs mainly on an internal, psychic plane, and thus does not entail conscious awareness in the usual sense:

We are most familiar with this *conscire*, with this splitting into different psychic elements which thereby encounter and know each other, from consciousness. But it is not conscious awareness of such things that establishes that knowing.<sup>211</sup>  
[italics in the original]

If this knowing is not established by conscious awareness, then how does it arise? It originates with the mother, in her “mirroring interpretation and organization of the child’s urges, feelings, and actions— through such processes the links of action and feeling become links of meaning.”<sup>212</sup> Of particular importance in this passage is the interpretive dimension of the mother’s mirroring. Rather than passively reflecting back what she perceives in her child, the whole process of this reflection and recognition becomes a central constituent of the child’s individuation. This is due, in part, to the fact that the mother (and other primary caretakers) are far ahead of the infant’s stage of development/differentiation:

Parental care, knowing, understanding, embedded in their interactions with the child, take place in the context and perspective of the child’s overall requirements and future course of development, as perceived and misperceived by the parents. Thus, parental recognizing care reflects more, as it were, to the child than what he

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<sup>211</sup> Hans Loewald, “Perspectives on Memory,” in Hans W. Loewald, *The Essential Loewald: Collected Papers and Monographs* (Hagerstown, Md: University Publishing Group, Inc., 2000), 169.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.



presents; it mediates higher organization. This generating difference or gradient is essential.<sup>213</sup>

By assigning the primary (but not necessarily exclusive— other caretakers, including the father, also have salient roles) responsibility for the development of conscience in the infant to the mother, Loewald is rejecting the patriarchal characterization of the feminine as the irrational (and thus inferior) member of the male-female dyad. For him, it is the mother who initiates and shapes the development of secondary-process mentation in the infant, which is the sphere characterized by differentiation and (at sufficiently-advanced levels of organization) philosophical and scientific thinking.

We may therefore discern a number of features in Loewald's thought that are consistent with many of the insights revealed through the feminist critique of philosophy and of Freudian psychoanalysis.

First and foremost, Loewald does not privilege a stereotypically masculine way of experiencing/interpreting reality. On the contrary, he forcefully argues that a meaningful present is only possible when a dialectical relation between fantasy/affect (primary process) and reality/rationality (secondary process) is extant. In this way the two relations to reality, "the paternal and the maternal, which have their own advantages and dangers, are, in fact, perfect complements."<sup>214</sup> Another way of stating this is that Loewald does not

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<sup>213</sup> Hans Loewald, "Psychoanalysis and the History of the Individual," in Hans W. Loewald, *The Essential Loewald: Collected Papers and Monographs* (Hagerstown, Md: University Publishing Group, Inc., 2000), 540. In the same essay, Loewald reiterates the central role of the mother in initiating the development of conscience in the infant: "This mirroring, I said, reflects more than what the infant presents. It contains the mother's acts of organizing the infant's activities and experiences within an envisioned temporal-spatial totality of his being- the prototype of what is called his ego as a coherent organization... The totality or coherent organization is to begin with merely in the mother's foreseeing eye, as a kind of unperceived plan. And so the infant's uniform mental acts [i.e. primary-process mentation] thus acquire differentiation. (p. 542)

<sup>214</sup> Joel Whitebook, "Hans Loewald: A radical conservative," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 85, vol. 1 (Feb 2004): 104.

repress the pre-oedipal (feminine) in his work while privileging the oedipal (masculine) dimension.

Nor does Loewald believe (along the lines of Kohlberg's stages of moral development) that the highest stage of differentiation is the most meaningful. On the contrary, reification at such a hyper-rational level is a form of pathology:

Perhaps the so-called fully developed, mature ego is not one that has become fixated at the presumably highest or latest stage of development, having left the others behind it, but is an ego that integrates its reality in such a way that the earlier and deeper levels of ego-reality integration remain alive as dynamic sources of higher organization.<sup>215</sup>

Mitchell reads Loewald's treatment of language along similar lines. Loewald does not privilege the denotative, syntactic dimension of language, but argues for the need of an active link between the same words in their primary (i.e. undifferentiated) and secondary-process forms.<sup>216</sup> In this way his theory compliments Luce Irigaray's feminist critique of the patriarchal (and hence inherently repressive) character of secondary-process language use. If Irigaray's studies of language revealed that women have more difficulty saying "I" (i.e. asserting themselves as autonomous subjects), then Loewald's theory affirms the pathological origin of this state of affairs. On this reading, languages that, by virtue of their structure, restrict the agency of women (this is more explicit in reflective languages) are engaged in a (neurotic) repression of the primary process experiential realm. Such societies would thus be inherently pathological.

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<sup>215</sup> Hans Loewald, "Ego and Reality," in Hans W. Loewald, *The Essential Loewald: Collected Papers and Monographs* (Hagerstown, Md: University Publishing Group, Inc., 2000), 20.

<sup>216</sup> Stephen A. Mitchell, "From Ghosts to Ancestors," *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* 8, vol. 6 (1998): 832-3.

While Freud has been criticized by feminists for his phallocentrism and biological determinism, it is much more difficult to situate Loewald's position on sexuality and gender. Teicholz identifies this difficulty noting that

the paucity of Loewald's exploration of the specific issues of sexuality and gender has led me to stretch toward an interpretation of his position on the basis of meager material in his writings. This absence alone probably speaks for itself.<sup>217</sup>

Teicholz has also indicated that in postmodern thought and contemporary perspectives on gender, the dichotomy between masculine and feminine is resolved "by invoking a dialectical relationship between them."<sup>218</sup> As we have seen, the centrality of this dialectical relationship is a core feature of Loewald's thought.

The following chapter will focus on the thought of Emmanuel Levinas. By reading Levinas for what it means to be responsible, important features in his account of subjectivity will be brought into focus. In particular, the importance of guilt, persecution, and atonement will be examined, and these features will then be compared and contrasted with Hans Loewald's developmental account of subjectivity.

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<sup>217</sup> Judith Guss Teicholz, *Kohut, Loewald, and the postmoderns: a comparative study of self and relationship* (Hillsdale, N.J.: Analytic, 1999), 211.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

## **Chapter Four: Emmanuel Levinas and the Priority of the Other**

Since Emmanuel Levinas' death in 1995, his philosophical legacy has given rise to a veritable industry of scholarly articles, books and conferences examining various facets of his thought. It would not be possible to do justice to the full breadth of his contribution to philosophy in a single chapter. This essay will commence with a brief summary of his life and a review of the current state of Levinas scholarship. The salient themes in his thought will then be examined, beginning with Levinas's critique of philosophy, his phenomenology of the inter-human encounter, the need to preserve the alterity of the other in that encounter, and the reduction of the other to the same that is the inevitable result of totalizing thinking. Levinas's arguments for ethics as first philosophy will be examined, which includes his juxtaposition of what he terms "Greek" (ontological) and "Hebrew" (ethical) perspectives. It is in this vein that Levinas's interpretation of the biblical story of Cain and Abel will be considered, in which he juxtaposes Cain's undeveloped subjectivity with the fully developed ethical relation that is represented, from the point of view of the mother, by maternity. The importance that Levinas attributes to the face will be examined, along with his thoughts on bad conscience and death. Levinas's radical re-conception of human subjectivity and what it means to be unique will be examined in detail, and the chapter will conclude with a careful consideration of his phenomenology of non-intentional consciousness. The overarching theme that unites these facets of Levinas's thought is his engagement with what it means to be a responsible (ethical) self, and the theme of responsibility will be considered throughout the chapter.

**Emmanuel Levinas: A brief biographical overview**

Levinas was born in Lithuania in 1906 and studied philosophy in Germany at the University of Strasbourg from 1928-29 with Husserl and Heidegger before settling in France in the 1930s. He has been credited with introducing phenomenology to Sartre and, hence, to French intellectual life.<sup>219</sup>

Levinas fought for France during the Second World War and was captured and imprisoned by the Germans. Although he and his immediate family escaped death, their extended families were murdered by the Nazis. Following the war, Levinas held chairs in philosophy at Poitiers, Paris-Nanterre and the Sorbonne.<sup>220</sup>

*Totality and Infinity* (1961) and *Otherwise than Being: or, Beyond Essence* (1974) are Levinas's most significant works, and he has had a profound influence on an entire generation of postmodern French philosophers, including Jacques Derrida (particularly in his essay, "Violence and Metaphysics"), Jean-Francois Lyotard, and Luce Irigaray. Indeed, it has been argued that Levinas's critique of philosophy "can be seen to underlie almost all responsible work in postmodernism."<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> "But it was Sartre who guaranteed my place in eternity by stating in his famous obituary essay on Merleau-Ponty that he, Sartre, 'was introduced to phenomenology by Levinas.'" Emmanuel Levinas, "Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas," in *Face to Face with Levinas*, edited by Richard Cohen (Albany: SUNY Press, 1986), 16.

<sup>220</sup> Robert Eaglestone, "Postmodernism and ethics against the metaphysics of comprehension," in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism*, edited by Steven Connor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 184-5.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

### The current state of Levinas scholarship

Colin Davis's recent article<sup>222</sup> reflects on the state of Levinas scholarship eleven years after his death. The backdrop for this reflection is the publication of *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas* which was edited by Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002).

While the collection does a good job of reflecting the current state of Levinas studies, there is little in the way of criticism of his work. The book offers

A useful chronology of Levinas's life and career; an Introduction which explains the main issues in his thought; discussions of his relation to Judaism and to other thinkers such as Husserl, Heidegger, Kant and Blanchot; essays on key terms such as the face, the feminine, substitution and evil; analysis of his views on language, poetry and art; and finally a decent Bibliography and a detailed Index.<sup>223</sup>

As for the criticism, Stella Sandford argues that no useful resources for feminism are to be found in Levinas's account of the feminine,<sup>224</sup> while Gerald L. Bruns recovers from Levinas a useful contribution to modernist aesthetics.<sup>225</sup>

With these two exceptions, there is little in the way of explicit criticism of Levinas's work in this volume, and there is rather "a discernible inclination to speak from within Levinas's discursive universe rather than attempting to elucidate it for the uninitiated."

Elsewhere, Davis notes that rather than offering a critique of Levinas, many of his

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<sup>222</sup> Colin Davis, "Levinas at 100," *Paragraph* 29, vol. 3 (2006): 95-104.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>224</sup> Stella Sandford, "Levinas, feminism and the feminine," in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, edited by Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). There is a sizable literature on Levinas and feminism, which include some positive approaches to his work.

<sup>225</sup> Gerald L. Bruns, "The Concept of Art and Poetry in Emmanuel Levinas's Writings," in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, edited by Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

commentators “seem content to inhabit and to mimic his discourse with gratitude.”<sup>226</sup>

This tendency is particularly evident in discussions of the Levinasian theme of the face, which (as we shall see) is central to his thought yet obscure.<sup>227</sup>

Davis has also identified a softening of Levinas’s asymmetrical and impossibly demanding ethics into something much gentler and less troubling. For instance, in the introduction of the *Companion*, Critchley summarizes Levinasian ethics in the following manner:

As Levinas was fond of putting it, the entirety of his philosophy can be summarized in the simple words, ‘Après vous, Monsieur.’ That is, by everyday and quite banal acts of civility, hospitality, kindness and politeness that have perhaps received too little attention from philosophers. It is such acts that Levinas qualifies with the adjective ‘ethical.’<sup>228</sup>

This reading of Levinas’s ethics is “Levinas-lite: domesticated, sanitized, and with all the pain taken out.”<sup>229</sup>

This softening of Levinas’s ethics is most evident when juxtaposed with his (extreme) claim in *Otherwise than Being* that, I am even responsible for the persecutor and thus for the persecution to which I am subjected:

Obsessed with responsibilities which did not arise in decisions taken by a subject ‘contemplating freely’, consequently accused in its innocence, subjectivity in itself is being thrown back on oneself. This means concretely: accused of what the

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<sup>226</sup> Colin Davis, “Levinas at 100,” *Paragraph* 29, vol. 3 (2006): 96.

<sup>227</sup> See, for instance, Bernhard Waldenfels, “Levinas and the face of the other,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, edited by Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 63-81.

<sup>228</sup> Simon Critchley, “Introduction” in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, edited by Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>229</sup> Colin Davis, “Levinas at 100,” *Paragraph* 29, vol. 3 (2006): 98.

others do or suffer, or responsible for what they do or suffer. The uniqueness of the self is the very fact of bearing the fault of another.<sup>230</sup>

For Hillary Putnam, this statement goes too far and can thus be left aside without necessarily compromising Levinas's overall project.<sup>231</sup> Elsewhere in the *Companion* Robert Bernasconi suggests that Levinas's claim has been misunderstood and that he does not mean to shift the blame for violence and murder onto the victim. Such a reading would entail a confusion between Levinas's analysis of ethical responsibility and the legal variant of responsibility that is the frequent focus of Western ethics.<sup>232</sup>

While it is true that one may not be legally to blame for persecution, this does not mean that one is not ethically responsible for it (although the nature of this responsibility is unclear). Bernasconi wonders whether or not Levinas's sense of being persecuted is a by-product of his experience as a Jew, but he chooses to defer this highly difficult and sensitive consideration to some other occasion.<sup>233</sup>

If Putnam wishes to set aside this aspect of Levinas's thought and Bernasconi wishes to soften it (or delay discussion of it to some later date), Davis argues that it is impossible to remove from the account of subjectivity developed in Levinas's text "the claim that I am responsible for the persecutor without fundamentally altering his account of the subject as persecuted, obsessed, accused, hostage and responsible."<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht Boston and London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), 112.

<sup>231</sup> Hilary Putnam, "Levinas and Judaism" in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, edited by Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>232</sup> Robert Bernasconi, "What is the question to which 'substitution' is the answer?" in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, edited by Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 240.

<sup>233</sup> Colin Davis, "Levinas at 100," *Paragraph* 29, vol. 3 (2006): 99.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.



Through a careful examination of the account of subjectivity developed by Levinas, this examination will advance an interpretation of this difficult facet in his thought. In the next chapter, we will examine Levinas's account of subjectivity, and in particular this notion of responsibility for the persecution to which we are subjected, in relation to Loewald's account of superego formation and the Oedipal Crime that precipitates/accompanies it. A critical comparison with Loewald will bring into focus salient aspects of Levinas's account of the self, in particular the significance of guilt, persecution, and the need to atone that permeates his account of subjectivity. In short, we will clarify what it means to be a responsible self for Levinas, as well as what it means to be responsible for the persecution to which we are subjected.

### **Levinas and Alterity**

*The Cambridge Companion to Levinas* omits some of the most serious philosophical challenges to Levinas's project, among them the critique of his notion of alterity.

According to Davis, the entirety of Levinas's philosophical project is predicated upon his notion of alterity. As we shall see, for Levinas the initial encounter with the Other is with someone that is *wholly* other, and not merely a bit different from me. This notion of an absolute other with whom I am nevertheless (asymmetrically) related has been criticized by John Caputo, who questions whether this relation (even if it is one of command-and-response) nevertheless implies a prior commonality. In other words,

perhaps the Other is not so different from me, after all.<sup>235</sup> A relation with an absolutely Other would be impossible as there would be no basis upon which to meet: “Either there can be an encounter with the Other, in which case the Other is not entirely Other; or the Other is entirely Other, in which case it cannot be encountered.”<sup>236</sup>

Perhaps Levinas’s understanding of “Otherness” should be read within the context of his critique of ego-centered subjectivity. The Other is absolutely Other in relation to the ego, which, prior to this encounter, believes itself to be sovereign and to encompass everything important within itself. The alterity of the Other issues forth as a command that rends the ego’s self-satisfaction and complacency asunder and takes it hostage. After summarizing the salient themes in Levinas’s thought, this chapter will conclude with an examination of Levinas’s notion of non-intentional consciousness, for perhaps it is N-I-C as an “internal Other” that allows the ego to enter into relation with an absolute Other. Levinas’s phenomenology of non-intentional consciousness is also similar in a number of striking ways to Hans Loewald’s account of primary process mentation. Levinas’s notion of alterity will be examined presently.

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<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 100. Davis cites John Caputo, *Against Ethics: Contributions to a Poetics of Obligation with Constant Reference to Deconstruction* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), 80-1.

<sup>236</sup> Colin Davis, “Levinas at 100,” *Paragraph 29*, vol. 3 (2006): 100.

### Levinas's Critique of Philosophy

The following section will examine Levinas's critique of the totalizing thinking that he identifies with traditional philosophy. His phenomenology of the inter-human encounter and the need to preserve the alterity of the other will also be considered, along with his juxtaposition of what he terms the Greek (ontological) and the Hebrew (ethical) perspectives. Levinas is arguing for ethics as First Philosophy, and he develops this argument in part through his analysis of the biblical story of Cain and Abel. We will see how Levinas juxtaposes the underdeveloped subjectivity of Cain with the maternal role, which he understands (from the point of view of the mother) as the exemplar of the fully ethical relation. In this connection, the theme of the ethical requirement to answer for one's "place in the sun" (i.e., one's self-assertion as an autonomous I) will be introduced.

In *Existence and Existents* (first published in French in 1947), Levinas elaborates the process by which totalizing thought- the radical reduction of the other to the same that characterizes Western philosophy— takes place. The two terms from the title of the work— existent and existence— are defined in the introduction:

The difference between that which exists [the existent] and its existence itself, between the individual, the genus, the collective, God, beings designated by substantives, and the event or act of their existence, imposes itself upon philosophical reflection- and with equal facility disappears from its view. It is as though thought becomes dizzy pouring over the emptiness of the verb to exist,

which we seem not to be able to say anything about,<sup>237</sup> which only becomes intelligible in its participle, the existent, that which exists.<sup>238</sup>

There is that which exists independently of the knower/observer— the objects in the world— which Levinas refers to as the existent. Then there is the same object after it has come to be known (comprehended) by the knower. What happens when this encounter takes place? The knower encounters the existent initially as something other to itself, but the act of comprehending it strips the existent of its particularity— of its otherness— and reduces it to the same as the knower. This occurs because the existent becomes “known” to the knower via its appropriation/reduction to a neutral third term. Levinas claims that it is this reduction of the other to the same that is shattered in the genuine ethical relation:

Does not that summons to responsibility destroy the forms of generality in which my store of knowledge, my knowledge of the other man, represents the latter to me as similar to me, designating me instead in the face of the other as responsible with no possible denial, and thus, as the unique and chosen one?<sup>239</sup>

In the realm of thought, this can mean that (in the non-ethical relation) the existent loses its particularity and becomes the member of an abstract general. This appropriation also occurs in the realm of sensation, where “sense is that by which what is exterior is already adjusted to and refers to what is interior.”<sup>240</sup> Or, this appropriation can occur through the third term of Being, and it is Heidegger’s ontology that becomes the target of an

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<sup>237</sup> This recalls Martin Heidegger’s opening remarks on the phenomenology of Being in the first section of *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1962), 24-8.

<sup>238</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. A. Lingis (London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1988), 17.

<sup>239</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 26-7.

<sup>240</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. A. Lingis (London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1988), 47.

especially fierce critique by Levinas.<sup>241</sup> Heidegger describes *dasein* (“being-in-the-world”) with an appeal to an ontological finality to which all objects in the world are subordinated, and Levinas questions this emphasis on instrumentality:

Seeing objects as “material”- in the sense that we speak of “war material”- he has included them in the care for existing, which for him is the very putting of the ontological problem... [But] not everything that is given in the world is a tool.<sup>242</sup>

Eaglestone summarizes Levinas’s critique in the following manner:

If I understand myself as a being who has Being (already reflectively but unreflective, already an implicit philosophy absorbed with my mother’s milk; ideas are at their most powerful when we do not recognize that they are there), I am led to believe that any other existent must have Being as I do, and is, in this key way at least, the same as me.<sup>243</sup>

This reduction of the other to the same thus occurs, as it were, “behind the scenes,” without our prior realization. This is what Levinas means when he says that this process “imposes itself upon philosophical reflection- and with equal facility disappears from its view.”<sup>244</sup>

This totalizing metaphysics is, for Levinas, the essential characteristic of philosophy, or what he terms (since the origins of modern philosophy can be traced back to ancient

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<sup>241</sup> “...Heideggerian ontology, which subordinates the relationship with the Other to the relation with Being in general, remains under the obedience to the anonymous, and leads inevitably to another power, to imperialist domination, to tyranny.” Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* (The Hague/Boston/London: Martinus Nijhoff publishers, 1979), 46-7.

<sup>242</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. A. Lingis (London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1988), 42-3.

<sup>243</sup> Robert Eaglestone, “Postmodernism and ethics against the metaphysics of comprehension,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism*, edited by Steven Connor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 186.

<sup>244</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. A. Lingis (London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1988), 17.

Greece) the language of Greek. Truth is equated with that which is present to me and can thus be gathered up or brought into accord with a totality (i.e. the cosmos). Because this totality is singular, everything within it is reduced to the same:

To equate truth thus with presence is to presume that however different the two terms of a relation might appear (e.g., the Divine and human) or however separated over time (e.g., into past and future), they can ultimately be rendered commensurate and simultaneous, the same, contained in a history that totalizes time into a beginning or an end, or both, which is presence. The Greek notion of being is essentially this presence.<sup>245</sup>

In other words, once a philosophical system is in place, the “real” or the “true” is only that which can be appropriated into Being. The history of the West reveals the violence and, ultimately, the annihilation to which the human Other (i.e., the Jew, the Roma) has been subjected, and this consequence of ontological thinking is what fuels Levinas’s (post-*Shoah*) critique and gives it its sense of urgency.

While philosophy gives rise to a totalizing ontology (an egology, as it were) that reduces the other to the same, there is an alternative approach to meaning and truth, a different way of encountering the other that preserves its integrity and particularity. Levinas terms this alternative tradition of encounter the Hebrew (i.e. the biblical), and it is the realm of ethics:

The interhuman realm can thus be construed as a part of the disclosure of the world as presence. But it can also be considered from another perspective- the ethical or biblical perspective that transcends the Greek language of intelligibility-

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<sup>245</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, “Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas,” in *Face to Face with Levinas*, edited by Richard Cohen (Albany: SUNY Press; 1986), 19.

as a theme of justice and concern for the other as other, as a theme of love and desire, which carries us beyond the infinite being of the world as presence.<sup>246</sup>

In juxtaposing ethics and ontology, Levinas is arguing that the former is prior to the latter, that “man’s ethical relation to the other is ultimately prior to his ontological relation to himself (egology) or to the totality of things that we call the world (cosmology).”<sup>247</sup> For Levinas, ethics is therefore First Philosophy.

This ethical relation is expressed in a responsibility to the Other that is without limit in the sense that it can never be satisfied—the debt, as it were, can never be fully repaid. Furthermore, it is a debt that is timeless in the sense that it did not originate in a temporal decision or act of will on the part of an autonomous “I” (bound, in Kant’s terminology, by space and time, the *a priori* forms of existence). Rather, it is a debt that precedes the very existence of the self, and the authentic (ethical) self only emerges via its subordination to the Other, i.e. in the effort to satisfy the debt. Because it precedes my existence as a self, the freedom of the other cannot issue from me as an act of my will. It is not derivative (and thus reduce-able to the same):

The unlimited responsibility in which I find myself comes from the hither side of my freedom, from a “prior to every memory,” an “ulterior to every accomplishment,” from the non-present par excellence, the non-original, the anarchical, prior to or beyond essence. The responsibility for the other is the locus in which is situated the null-site of subjectivity, where the privilege of the question “Where?” no longer holds.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>247</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, “Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas,” in *Face to Face with Levinas*, edited by Richard Cohen (Albany: SUNY Press, 1986), 21.

<sup>248</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being Or Beyond Essence* (The Hague/Boston/New York: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1981), 10.

In order to elaborate this difficult notion of an unlimited responsibility that precedes the assertion of agency by an autonomous self, Levinas turns to the Biblical story in the Book of Genesis of Cain's murder of his brother, Abel. Levinas does not seek religious sanction for his argument, nor does the story itself serve as a form of philosophical proof or justification: rather, he uses the story as a springboard for philosophical inquiry.<sup>249</sup> The Biblical story serves to frame a discussion about responsibility that would otherwise be difficult to initiate "given the essentially Greek nature of philosophical language" and the fact that the "Greek" and the "Hebrew" discourses remain distinct: "the translation of biblical wisdom into the Greek language remains unfinished."<sup>250</sup>

Claire Elise Katz addresses this theme of a responsibility that is prior to freedom and choice in her essay, "Raising Cain: The Problem of Evil and the Question of Responsibility."<sup>251</sup> Her examination of Levinas's use of the story of Cain and Abel is instructive, and will help to clarify these difficult facets of his thought.

Katz's article explores the problem of evil with reference to Levinas's claim that "[It is] through evil that suffering is understood."<sup>252</sup> Whereas theodicy has traditionally attempted to rationalize evil (in the sense, for example, of the 'for our sins, we are punished' line of reasoning), Levinas regards the source of evil as

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<sup>249</sup> "A philosophical truth cannot be based on the authority of a verse. The verse must be phenomenologically justified. But the verse can allow for the search for a reason. This is the sense in which the words 'you are a Jewish philosopher' are acceptable for me. It irritates me when one insinuates that I prove by means of the verse, when sometimes I search by way of the old ancient wisdom. I illustrate with the verse, yes, but I do not prove by means of the verse." Emmanuel Levinas, "Interview with Francois Poirie," in *Is It Righteous To Be?*, edited by Jill Robbins (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 62.

<sup>250</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, "Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas," in *Face to Face with Levinas*, edited by Richard Cohen (Albany: SUNY Press, 1986), 19.

<sup>251</sup> Claire Elise Katz, "Raising Cain: The Problem of Evil and the Question of Responsibility," *Crosscurrents* 55 (Summer 2005): 215-233.

<sup>252</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, "Useless Suffering," in *Entre Nous*, translated by Michael Smith and Barbara Harshav (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).



The inability to be attuned to the other. This kind of evil, the capacity to be so detached from humanity that one cannot see one's own responsibility in the order of things is, one might say, the precondition of all other evil.<sup>253</sup>

The essay begins by examining Levinas's treatment of the story of Cain and Abel, with an emphasis on his depiction of Cain's detachment from the rest of humanity. Although concerned with Cain's murder of his brother, Levinas is even more concerned with Cain's famous reply to God's question concerning Abel's whereabouts: "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Genesis 4:9) This reply is indicative of Cain's inability to assume responsibility for his actions, and it also speaks to his general detachment from humanity:

This is why in the dialogue between God and Cain- 'Am I my brother's keeper?'— rabbinical commentary does not regard the question as a case of simple insolence. Instead it comes from someone who has not yet experienced human solidarity and who thinks (like many modern philosophers) that each exists for oneself and that everything is permitted.<sup>254</sup>

Cain's lack of attunement to the other— what Levinas terms his "sober coldness"<sup>255</sup>— indicates that his subjectivity is underdeveloped. He cannot yet respond to another, although his defensive response to God "indicates a space for doing so."<sup>256</sup>

Katz follows this discussion of Cain and Abel with Levinas's treatment of the theme of maternity, which he juxtaposes with the undeveloped subjectivity of Cain. The maternal is thus presented as "the epitome of an unmediated relationship characterized by a pre-

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<sup>253</sup> Claire Elise Katz, "Raising Cain: The Problem of Evil and the Question of Responsibility," *Crosscurrents* 55 (Summer 2005): 215-6.

<sup>254</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, trans. Sean Hand (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 36-7.

<sup>255</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being Or Beyond Essence* (The Hague/Boston/New York: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1981), 10.

<sup>256</sup> Claire Elise Katz, "Raising Cain: The Problem of Evil and the Question of Responsibility," *Crosscurrents* 55 (Summer 2005): 216.

reflective response [which] is for Levinas the example *par excellence* of responsibility and response to the other.”<sup>257</sup> [italics in the original]

The story of Cain and Abel is instructive for Levinas on a number of counts. First of all, the murder of Abel occurs prior to the handing down on Sinai of the Torah, which contains the codified command “Thou shalt not murder.” One could therefore argue that Cain’s actions did not violate any pre-existing moral norm. Furthermore, it is unclear that anyone had ever experienced death until that point. There is certainly no mention of Adam or Eve or Cain or Abel experiencing death, and so it is at least possible that Cain did not realize that Abel would die as a result of his actions. In any case, as we nevertheless wish to hold Cain accountable for his actions (and this is certainly the position of the rabbinic expositors of this story), then his responsibility must be understood as deriving from an obligation that is prior to any decision, action, or knowledge, and which does not arise out of Cain’s freedom:

For Levinas, there is a notion of response that he names the ethical; and this response precedes what we have normally come to understand as the ethical: codified rules for behaviour that imply knowledge of what is expected and the freedom to do otherwise... We are claimed by the other and we have no choice in this obligation.<sup>258</sup>

Our responsibility for the other is not concerned with our knowledge of a moral law, nor is it a by-product of our freedom to make a choice with respect to such laws; rather, for Levinas the issue is one of “response or attunement to the other, to be in a relationship

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<sup>257</sup> Ibid., 216.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid., 219-20.

with the other as called to respond. The ethical as response is the pre-condition of any possibility of an ethical relation.”<sup>259</sup>

Cain’s subjectivity is therefore not fully developed because he is unable to respond to God’s question in a way that reveals responsibility to another. This biblical story was clearly a source of inspiration for Levinas’s account of the face to face relation, which he regards as signifying the ethical:

Levinas’s conception of the ethical is not intended to give us a new set of rules or guidelines that would tell us what to do. He understands the ethical as a response [i.e. to the face of the other] that occurs at the pre-cognitive, pre-epistemic, pre-ontological level, rather than at the level of rational discourse, moral education, or abstract moral rules.<sup>260</sup>

If Levinas’s account insists on the asymmetry of the ethical relation (i.e. the primacy of other), this relation is nevertheless complicated by the presence of the third person (thus introducing the political dimension and necessitating a consideration of justice).<sup>261</sup>

As we have seen, Levinas makes it clear that the true ethical relation cannot be systematized (i.e. reduced to yet another theory of the ethical, such as deontology or utilitarianism). The relation between the two terms (self and other) cannot be stated in a formal system (such as Martin Buber’s “I-Thou” relation) as this would necessitate a critical vantage point outside the relation from which I could observe and define it. The very foundation for such an exercise in abstraction is shattered in the exposure to the

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<sup>259</sup> Ibid., 222.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid., 221.

<sup>261</sup> “...I am always dealing with a multitude of persons, and consequently, these relations between persons and the context of the situation have to be taken into account. That is what limits, not my responsibility, but my action, modifying the modalities of my obligations.” Emmanuel Levinas, “Interview with Francois Poirie,” in *Is It Righteous To Be?*, edited by Jill Robbins (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 55.

other. The ethical relation is prior to every freedom (i.e. to the assertion of will by an autonomous, calculating self) and is the source of authentic subjectivity in the form of the one-for-the-other.

It signifies outside of all finality and every system, where finality is but one of the principles of systematization possible. This responsibility appears as a plot without a beginning, anarchic...In responsibility the same, the ego, is me, summoned, provoked, as irreplaceable, and thus accused as unique in the supreme passivity of one that cannot slip away without fault.<sup>262</sup>

If Cain lacked a fully developed subjectivity because of his inability to be attuned to the other, then the maternal relation to the developing fetus— at least from the viewpoint of the mother— cannot be anything but ethical for Levinas. Levinas uses maternity as a metaphor for the ethical because the maternal relation occurs, as it were, prior to cognition and prior to choice. The mother does not choose to feed the fetus that is gestating within her body (although she may choose to make efficacious adjustments to her diet). Rather, she eats and the fetus automatically derives the necessary nutrients from her meal. Of course, the mother could refuse to eat at all thereby killing the fetus (and perhaps herself as well), but this would be widely regarded as pathology.

In *Otherwise Than Being* Levinas notes that one can only be for the other because we are beings that eat; in other words, we can only offer food because we require food for ourselves in order to survive: “Thus, it is only when one can give the bread from one’s mouth that one can be for the other. The bread from one’s mouth signifies the giving over of one’s very existence.”<sup>263</sup>

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<sup>262</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being Or Beyond Essence* (The Hague/Boston/New York: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1981), 35-6.

<sup>263</sup> Claire Elise Katz, “Raising Cain: The Problem of Evil and the Question of Responsibility,” *Crosscurrents* 55 (Summer 2005): 223. Katz cites Levinas’s *Otherwise Than Being*, 74.

This giving of the bread from one's mouth is not chosen, in the sense that one makes a calculated decision after thoughtful deliberation. Rather, it is a form of responsibility "which arrives in the form of sensibility, [and] is vulnerability and contact; it is an unchosen exposedness to the other."<sup>264</sup> This responsibility is characterized as maternity for Levinas, which is a "gestation of the other in the same" and "bears even responsibility for the persecuting by the persecutor." It is pre-reflective, for "rather than a nature, earlier than nature, immediacy is this vulnerability, this maternity, this pre-birth or pre-nature in which the sensibility belongs."<sup>265</sup>

Katz points to the swelling belly and stretched skin during pregnancy, as representing Levinas's conception of the ethical relationship. While the fetus is gestating, the pregnant mother cannot help feeding the child inside her, to give the bread from one's mouth. Maternity from the point of view of the mother is thus, for Levinas, the premiere example of being claimed by another and responding to a call that is prior to choice. It is "alterity in the same...psyche in the form of the hand that gives even the bread from its own mouth...here the psyche is the maternal body."<sup>266</sup>

This relationship between mother and child is presented by Levinas as the most powerful possible bond between humans, second only to a relationship with God.<sup>267</sup> However, despite Katz's position, Levinas's image of the maternal is problematic on at least two

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<sup>264</sup> Claire Elise Katz, "Raising Cain: The Problem of Evil and the Question of Responsibility," *Crosscurrents* 55 (Summer 2005): 223.

<sup>265</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being Or Beyond Essence* (The Hague/Boston/New York: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1981), 75-6. Cited by Claire Elise Katz, 223.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*, 67. Cited by Claire Elise Katz, 224.

<sup>267</sup> In *Totality and Infinity*, published in 1961, Levinas initially described the ethical relation in terms of paternity. *Otherwise than Being: or, Beyond Essence*, was published twelve years later in 1981.

counts: First, it idealizes the mother-child bond and motherhood in general, and, second, it essentializes women.<sup>268</sup>

Levinas seems to regard sacrifice as a descriptive, rather than a prescriptive, element of motherhood. If we regard Levinas's treatment of maternity as descriptive rather than normative, then we may conclude that maternity entails a conception of sacrifice, one that is extreme on both the giving and receiving ends. The maternal figure (and it bears repeating that Levinas is using maternity as a metaphor) is thus portrayed as the most developed case of subjectivity, in stark contrast to the disconnectedness of Cain: "The maternal figure cannot but say 'here I am' to her child; she is, in fact, always already responding to her."<sup>269</sup>

We might compare the ego that is content in its own being, that has not yet questioned its right to be, with Cain and his cool detachment from humanity. Levinas refers frequently in his writings to this (unethical) state, and the harm that it necessarily inflicts on others. To be more precise, in carving out and claiming my own freedom and autonomy, I necessarily limit and restrict the other: "I repel and send away the neighbor through my very identity, my occupying the arena of being; I then have always to reestablish peace."<sup>270</sup> Levinas identifies this theme of repelling the neighbor via the assertion of self-

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<sup>268</sup> A feminist reading of Levinas's work reveals a number of serious difficulties, including his use of male normative language; his (largely uncritical) use of androcentric Jewish texts; and his association of the feminine with the Other in his analyses of the erotic relationship. There are many feminist readings of Levinas, as well as many disagreements about his relevance for feminist thought in general.

<sup>269</sup> Claire Elise Katz, "Raising Cain: The Problem of Evil and the Question of Responsibility," *Crosscurrents* 55 (Summer 2005): 225.

<sup>270</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being Or Beyond Essence* (The Hague/Boston/New York: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1981), 137.

identity in the philosophies of Pascal (positively) and Heidegger (negatively), both of whom he frequently cites in this connection:

My being-in-the-world or my 'place in the sun', my being at home, have not these also been the usurpation of spaces belonging to the other man whom I have already oppressed or starved, or driven into a third world; are they not acts of repulsing, excluding, exiling, stripping, killing? Pascal's 'my place in the sun' marks the beginning of the image of the usurpation of the whole earth.<sup>271</sup>

If Pascal was opposed to taking one's "place in the sun," then for Heidegger it was a necessary step in the movement towards authenticity (i.e. being-towards-death). Levinas critiques and inverts this theme in Heidegger by arguing that authentic subjectivity can only occur when I question my own being and ask myself whether my being is justified. It is not the confrontation with the inevitability of my own death that imparts authenticity.<sup>272</sup> Instead, for Levinas, it is the refusal to be complicit in the death of the other, along with my willingness to substitute myself for them, that is the mark of authentic subjectivity:

The *I* is the very crisis of the being of a being [*l'être de l'étant*] in the human. A crisis of being, not because the meaning of this verb (in its semantic secret) remains to be understood and is an appeal to ontology, but because, being myself, I already ask myself whether my being is justified, whether the *Da* of my *Dasein* is not already the usurpation of someone's place.<sup>273</sup> [italics in original]

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<sup>271</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, "Ethics as first philosophy," in *The Levinas Reader*, edited by Sean Hand (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 82.

<sup>272</sup> "My death, always premature, may check the being that *qua* being perseveres in its being, but in anguish, this scandal does not shake the good conscience of being, nor the morals based on the inalienable right of the *conatus*, which is also the right and the good conscience of freedom." [italics in the original] Emmanuel Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 22.

<sup>273</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, "Philosophy and Transcendence," in *Alterity and Transcendence*, translated by Michael B. Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 28.

### Levinas's account of subjectivity

This section will examine Levinas's conception of subjectivity, which radically departs from the traditional Liberal-humanist conception of an autonomous I as the locus of meaning and of the authentically human. He also presents a very different conception of what it means to be a unique self. The theme of responsibility will be examined in this connection, along with Levinas's understanding of what he terms "bad conscience" and the significance that he attributes to death (which must mean for him, the death of the other). Levinas's conception of the face as signifying the ethical relation will also be developed in this section.

In his elaboration of the ethical relationship, Levinas is arguing for a radical reformulation (in fact, nothing short of a complete reversal) of the Western philosophical conception of subjectivity, of Descartes's thinking "I" as the sole or even primary locus of meaning:

The way I appear is a summons... The uniqueness of this ego, this I, is not due to a unique trait of its nature or its character; nothing is unique, that is, refractory to concepts, except the I involved in responsibility.<sup>274</sup>

The other is prior to me, and I am summoned to authentic subjectivity via my exposure to and responsibility for the other. My uniqueness and individuality derive solely from my non-replaceability with regard to the command that issues forth from the face of the other, and this completely inverts the Liberal humanist conception of the (pre-existing) autonomous I as the locus of meaning. The command from the other is addressed to me,

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<sup>274</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being Or Beyond Essence* (The Hague/Boston/New York: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1981): 138-9.



and nobody else can take my place (hence my uniqueness). My subjectivity emerges in response to this command. This is a radical reversal of the manner in which one, within modernity, normally conceives of uniqueness as deriving from one or multiple unique characteristics (or a unique configuration of characteristics) attributed to an individual ego. The positing of uniqueness to an autonomous I in the manner described above, is a necessary step in Pascal's "usurpation of the whole earth" (i.e. reduction of the other to the same). In other words: I identify myself with a unique ego, and as I am confronted by the alterity of the neighbor that threatens to destroy the false foundation upon which this uniqueness is erected, I must reduce her otherness to the same in order to preserve and safeguard my identity. Taken to its extreme, this process leads to the development of totalizing systems of thought that are solipsistic.

Levinas further elaborates this notion of the threat to my self-identity and uniqueness that results from my exposure to the other in *Alterity and Transcendence*:

The natural *conatus essendi* of a sovereign *I* is put in question before the face of the other, in the ethical vigilance in which the sovereign *I* recognizes itself as 'hateful,' and its place in the sun 'the prototype and beginning of the usurpation of the whole earth.'<sup>275</sup> [italics in original]

My (false) sense of being a unique "I," a self-contained and self-sufficient ego possessed of unique characteristics, is thus called into question (elsewhere, Levinas uses more forceful language to describe the experience) in the face of the other. I must answer for the death of the other (i.e. the displacement/reduction that occurs when I assert my own freedom) and accept responsibility by refusing to be complicit in this death:

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<sup>275</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, "Philosophy and Transcendence," in *Alterity and Transcendence*, translated by Michael B. Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 32-3.

The death of the other man puts me on the spot, calls me into question, as if I, by my possible indifference, became the accomplice of that death, invisible to the other who is exposed to it; and as if, even before being condemned to it myself, I had to answer for that death of the other, and not leave the other alone to his deathly solitude.<sup>276</sup>

Subjectivity is therefore, in Levinas's account, inextricably linked to responsibility for the other. We are (or rather, become) authentically human to the extent that we set aside our self-interestedness (which is the 'natural' state of affairs) and become for-the-other.

Levinas explicitly relates this notion of subjectivity to a critique of the traditional Western philosophical conceptions of subjectivity, such as those posited by Descartes and Kant:

Proximity, difference which is non-indifference, is responsibility. It is a response without a question, the immediacy of peace that is incumbent on me. It is the signification of signs. It is the humanity of man not understood on the basis of transcendental subjectivity.<sup>277</sup>

### **Bad Conscience and Death**

Levinas discusses bad conscience, which is the self that is self-satisfied, and introduces the notion of the significance of death as it relates to the spontaneous formation of subjectivity as a response to the calling-forth (the command) that is implicit in the face the Other. As we have noted with reference to Heidegger's notion of *dasein*, for Levinas

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<sup>276</sup> Ibid., 24-5.

<sup>277</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being Or Beyond Essence* (The Hague/Boston/New York: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1981), 139.

it is not the confrontation with my own death that imparts authenticity, but rather the confrontation with the death of the other. Exposure to the other necessitates a response, a questioning and subordination of the self, the acceptance of a limitless responsibility:

Bad conscience that comes to me from the face of the other, who, in his mortality, tears me from the solid ground on which I, a simple individual, place myself and persevere naively, naturally, in my position. Bad conscience that puts me in question. A question that does not await a theoretical response in the form of information. A question that appeals to responsibility, which is not a practical last resort, offering consolation for the failure of knowledge, incapable of equaling being.<sup>278</sup>

Levinas therefore reformulates Heidegger's notion of the significance of the relationship between the death of the self and authenticity. The face of the other awakens a concern for the death of the other person, and I am an ethical (and for Levinas, an authentic) subject to the extent that I respond to that concern. For Levinas, Heidegger's being-toward-death cannot give rise to an ethical relation with the other. Rather, the most we can claim is that it initiates the end of the preoccupation with the self that precludes a true ethical relation with the other (a relation that, as we have seen, is for Levinas commanded by exposure to the face of the other). Levinas develops this line of thinking with reference to Heidegger's phenomenological analysis of affectivity (*Befindlichkeit*) in *Being and Time*, in which emotion is always both the emotion of something and for oneself (i.e. fear of the wolf and fear about my own death). There is thus a return to oneself and anguish for one's own mortality. However, my preoccupation with the death of the other, my concern that they not die alone, disturbs this preoccupation with myself. It does not simply return to a fear for my own mortality, but rather

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<sup>278</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, "Philosophy and Transcendence," in *Alterity and Transcendence*, translated by Michael B. Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 28-9.

It overflows the ontology of Heidegger's *Dasein* and his good conscience of being with respect to that being itself. There is an ethical awakening and vigilance in this affective disturbance. Heidegger's being-towards-death marks, indeed, for *a being*, the end of his being-with-respect-to-that-being-itself, and the scandal of that end, but in that end no scruple about being awakens.<sup>279</sup> [italics in original]

Once again, for Levinas it is through the exposure to the face of the other that my self-interest is overturned and my (ethical) concern for the death of the other is awakened. We shall see how the face is the core term that signifies the ethical in Levinas's thought.

### The Face

Levinas's elaboration of the phenomenology of the face is of central importance in his discussion of responsibility. He is not concerned primarily with the face in its plastic form (i.e. with the aesthetic features of a particular visage), but rather with what the face signifies. For Levinas the face speaks, and what is conveyed is both the vulnerability and mortality of the other, and the command to not let her die alone. The exposure to the face of the other shatters my preoccupation with myself, which is for Levinas the precondition for the totalizing thinking that violently reduces the other to the same:

without substituting eschatology for philosophy...we can proceed from the experience of totality back to a situation where totality breaks up, a situation that conditions [i.e. stands beyond and commands] the totality itself. Such a situation is the gleam of exteriority or of transcendence [which Levinas also terms "infinity"] in the face of the Other.<sup>280</sup>

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<sup>279</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 25-6.

<sup>280</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (The Hague/Boston/London: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1979), 24-25.

In what way can the face of the other be said to “speak” for Levinas? The exteriority or transcendence conveyed by the face does not announce itself in the form of a propositional structure which can be taken up (intuited) and appropriated by the mind that perceives it, for it would then become part of a totalizing philosophy and reduced to the same. In other words, it would lose its transcendent character and become immanent. Instead, for Levinas the face “signifies,” which is to say that it conveys a meaning “that is taught by presence” and is “irreducible to evidence” (i.e. to a sensible or intellectual intuition), and this presence (which is commanding) “dominates him who welcomes it.”<sup>281</sup> In short, the infinite announces itself to me via the face of the other person, and this exposure to an irreducible otherness shatters my preoccupation with my own being (which until then had seemed self-sufficient and to encompass everything).

My preoccupation with the perseverance of my own being (which, in its naked self-interestedness, corresponds to the Darwinian notion of the survival of the fittest within the theory of evolution) is thereby overturned through my exposure to the face of the other, which awakens a concern for their death. For Levinas, to the extent that I respond to the call/command inherent in the face of the other, I become a responsible (ethical) subject and thus fully human:

But that face facing me, in its expression- in its mortality- summons me, demands me, requires me: as if the invisible death faced by the face of the other- pure alterity, separate, somehow, from any whole- were ‘my business.’ As if, unknown by the other whom already, in the nakedness of his face, it concerns, it ‘regarded me’ before its confrontation with me, before being the death that stares me, myself, in the face.<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>281</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>282</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 24-5.

The face is therefore the core term that signifies the ethical for Levinas, to which he will later include the notion of proximity.<sup>283</sup>

The face-to-face relation serves a foundational role in Levinas's philosophy. As we have seen, Levinas situates the ultimate source for the authentically human (i.e. ethical) self outside of the self (in the exposure to the face of the other), for to situate it inside the self would be to inculcate yet another philosophy of the same (an egology). If the ultimate source of my own being and all that I perceive is located within me, then every philosophical investigation that I undertake will ultimately lead to a reductive form of subjectivism, i.e. back to myself.

### **The Face and Religion**

Just as the face-to-face relation is the foundation of what it means to be authentically human for Levinas, so is it the original and authentic locus of infinity and of God:

The work of justice—the uprightness of the face to face—is necessary in order that the breach that leads to God be produced...hence metaphysics is enacted where the social relation is enacted—in our relations with men... The Other is not the incarnation of God, but precisely by his face, in which he is disincarnate, is the manifestation of the height in which God is revealed... It is our relations with men...that give to theological concepts the sole signification they admit of.<sup>284</sup>

God cannot be comprehended or thematized philosophically or theologically, because this would be to reduce him to the same, i.e. make him part of a totalizing metaphysics that destroys his transcendence. Levinas dismisses such efforts as a “forever primitive

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<sup>283</sup> Claire Elise Katz, “Raising Cain: The Problem of Evil and the Question of Responsibility,” *Crosscurrents* 55 (Summer 2005): 224. See also Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being Or Beyond Essence* (The Hague/Boston/New York: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1981), 75-98.

<sup>284</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (The Hague/Boston/London: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1979), 78-79.

form of religion.”<sup>285</sup> Levinas takes up this critique of the efforts to thematize the divine in his essay “God and Philosophy,” in which he invokes Descartes’s analysis of the idea of the infinite. I have within me an idea of infinity, but the infinite, by its very definition, exceeds or overflows the thought that seeks to contain it. In short, in trying to think the infinite (i.e. God) I reach towards something that I can never fully grasp or limit, and this breaks up the totality of the “I think” (which, as we have seen, believes itself to encompass everything within it):

The idea of God, the *cogitatum* of a *cogitatio* which to begin with contains that *cogitatio*, signifies the non-contained par excellence... It overflows every capacity; the ‘objective reality’ of the *cogitatum* breaks up the formal reality of the *cogitatio*. This perhaps overturns, in advance, the universal validity and primordial character of intentionality.<sup>286</sup> [italics in the original]

The thinking self is thus passive with respect to the idea of the infinite, the original locus of which is the face-to-face relation. Levinas speaks of this passivity as a “putting of the Infinite into thought” in which the thinking self is interrupted by that which it cannot contain, and this points to another (non-intentional) form of consciousness:

The idea of the Infinite, *Infinity in me*, can only be a passivity of consciousness. Is it still consciousness? ... An ‘idea put into us’— does this stylistic turn suit the subjectivity of the cogito? ... The putting into us of an uncludable idea overturns that presence to self which consciousness is, forcing its way through the barrier and checkpoint, eluding the obligation to accept or adopt all that enters from the outside.<sup>287</sup> [italics in the original]

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<sup>285</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>286</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, “God and Philosophy,” in *The Levinas Reader*, edited by Sean Hand (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 173.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid., 174-175.

In other words, our understanding of what it means to be conscious is shattered (Levinas speaks of it as a “trauma of awakening” of a consciousness which is “not awakened enough”) by the idea of the infinite, the locus of which is the face-to-face relation.<sup>288</sup>

Non-intentional consciousness, the meaning of the face and Levinas’s account of subjectivity; are all examined in David Parry’s recent article<sup>289</sup> in the psychoanalytic periodical, *Existential Analysis*. Of particular relevance to the present examination is Parry’s analysis of the role that non-intentional consciousness serves in Levinas’s project.

### **The Phenomenology of Non-intentional Consciousness**

This final section will examine Levinas’s phenomenology of non-intentional consciousness as an important component in his conception of alterity and what it means to be a responsible self. In order to better understand the significance of this theme and its role in Levinas’s thought, it will be situated within the broader framework of his critique of philosophy and totalizing thinking. Levinas develops his phenomenology of non-intentional consciousness with reference to Husserl’s notion of intentionality, and so a critique of the latter concept will be presented as well. Lastly, we will examine non-intentional consciousness and its connection to the Levinasian notion (borrowed from Pascal) that we necessarily displace the other when we take our place in the sun, i.e. assert ourselves as autonomous beings.

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<sup>288</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>289</sup> David Parry, “Ethics as First Philosophy and its Implications for Psychotherapists and Counsellors,” *Existential Analysis* 19, vol. 1 (January 2008): 156-175.



David Parry examines Levinas's conception of non-intentional consciousness and its relationship with intentional consciousness and elaborates the ways in which this relationship has striking similarities with our relationship with the Other. Both of these relationships make us first and foremost ethical beings.

Parry explores Levinas's claim in "Ethics as First Philosophy" that "In the face of the other man I am inescapably responsible and consequently the unique and chosen one."<sup>290</sup>

As we have seen, for Levinas our first and central concern is with ethics, and it is thus prior to any other form of philosophy. This ethical concern is awakened via our exposure to the other. Parry misreads Levinas as stating that the mortality of the other awakens in me a fear of my own mortality, and this shared fear of death bridges the distance between us:

The Other calls us to him/her and to ourselves because we can see their fate (and they can see ours); and in this mood we can see our own fate, death. It is through the dawning of our shared fate that despite our separateness we are neighbours and our affinity emerges.<sup>291</sup>

Parry's analysis reduces the other to the same. In fact, Levinas rejects this reading (which is closer to Heidegger's analysis) and argues instead that there is no return to myself, but rather an overturning of self-concern and a summons to responsibility that issues forth from the (mortality of the) other. This overturning of self-interest is connected to Levinas's understanding of non-intentional consciousness.

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<sup>290</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, "Ethics as first philosophy," in *The Levinas Reader*, edited by Sean Hand (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 84.

<sup>291</sup> David Parry, "Ethics as First Philosophy and its Implications for Psychotherapists and Counsellors," *Existential Analysis* 19, vol. 1 (January 2008): 156.

The importance that Levinas attributes to his phenomenology of non-intentional consciousness is clarified with reference to his critique of traditional philosophical thinking. In “Ethics as First Philosophy,” Levinas provides an account of thinking as a solitary activity undertaken by a self that is satisfied in its (apparent) self-sufficiency and freedom:

This [thinking] is a regal and, as it were, unconditioned activity, a sovereignty which is possible only as solitude, an unconditioned activity, even if limited for man by biological needs and by death.<sup>292</sup>

This account of knowledge recalls Franz Rosenzweig’s description of the “old thinking” which he juxtaposes with a relational, language-based “New Thinking” in his essay “The New Thinking.”<sup>293</sup> This (old thinking) knowledge appropriates the otherness of things and reduces them to the same whereby they become knowable (as objects of knowledge). However, Levinas adds that “thought as knowledge is already a labour of thought.”<sup>294</sup> In other words, we create it, although we are forgetful of this act. Once again recalling Rosenzweig, thought as knowledge is also an activity associated with solitude. Plato’s dialogues merely took the form of actual conversations. In fact, they represented the reflections of a solitary philosopher. Levinas adds that, “the wisdom of first philosophy is [therefore] reduced to self consciousness.”<sup>295</sup>

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<sup>292</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, “Ethics as first philosophy,” in *The Levinas Reader*, edited by Sean Hand (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 77.

<sup>293</sup> Franz Rosenzweig, “The New Thinking,” translated by Barbara E. Galli and Alan Udoff (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1998).

<sup>294</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, “Ethics as first philosophy,” in *The Levinas Reader*, edited by Sean Hand (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 77.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

Levinas calls into question this equation of knowledge and wisdom that is emblematic of the history of Western philosophy. However, he sees in the phenomenological method of Husserl the seeds of a philosophy that can overturn itself, and in this connection he invokes and critiques Husserl's notion of intentionality in order to go beyond knowledge and to comprehend being.<sup>296</sup> It is via his analysis and critique of Husserl that Levinas develops his phenomenology of non-intentional consciousness, and it is to this critique that we now turn our attention.

Levinas begins by looking at Husserl's notion of an "originary, non-theoretical intentionality" which the latter isolated "from the active emotional life of consciousness."<sup>297</sup> For Husserl, thoughts are intentional because they are aimed at something concrete, i.e. objects. However, these thoughts are themselves implanted, unsuspectingly, within horizons that provide them with meaning.<sup>298</sup> Husserl's phenomenological method<sup>299</sup> aims at describing these horizons, and he interprets them in turn as thoughts aiming at objects, i.e. as intentional. Levinas rejects Husserl's characterization of these horizons as intentional, since the radical exteriority with which Levinas is concerned overflows objectifying thought and thus cannot be reduced to

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<sup>296</sup> In 1928-9 Levinas went to Freiburg to take classes with Husserl for two semesters and had the opportunity to meet with him socially. Levinas also gave French lessons to Mme. Husserl at their home.

<sup>297</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, "Ethics as first philosophy," in *The Levinas Reader*, edited by Sean Hand (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 78.

<sup>298</sup> "An existent is comprehended in the measure that thought transcends it, measuring it against the horizon whereupon it is profiled. Since Husserl the whole of phenomenology is the promotion of the idea of *horizon*, which for it plays a role equivalent to that of the *concept* in classical idealism; an existent arises upon the ground that extends beyond it, as an individual arises from a concept." [italics in the original] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* (The Hague/Boston/London: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1979), 44-5.

<sup>299</sup> "This [Husserl's] Transcendental Reduction suspends all independence in the world other than consciousness itself, and causes the world to be rediscovered as *noema*. As a result it leads- or ought to lead- to full self-consciousness affirming itself as absolute being, and confirming itself as an *I* that, through all possible 'differences,' is identified as master of its own nature as well as the universe and able to illuminate the darkest recesses of resistance to its powers." [italics in the original] Emmanuel Levinas, "Ethics as first philosophy," in *The Levinas Reader*, edited by Sean Hand (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 79.

intentionality. Nevertheless, Levinas retains the phenomenological method, since “what counts is the idea of the overflowing of objectifying thought by a forgotten experience from which it lives.”<sup>300</sup> This “forgotten experience” is the radical alterity of the other, the good beyond being that I can approach (but never become identical with) in moving toward the other person.

Levinas’s objections to Husserl’s theory of transcendental reduction mirror those of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who noted that Husserl’s method of *epoché* (whereby I suspend my presumptions about the ultimate nature of things so that I may describe ‘pure’ phenomena, i.e. the aforementioned horizons in which our thoughts are embedded) ignores the fact that we are embodied beings. In other words, I am inescapably present in and a part of the world by virtue of having a body, and I cannot abstract myself away from it (as with Husserl’s transcendental move).<sup>301</sup> An additional difficulty with this supposedly pure form of consciousness is that, when it becomes an object of reflection itself (and thus intentional) and “affirms itself as self-consciousness and absolute being” there remains a form of consciousness that is non-intentional (i.e. does not have an object) “as though it were a surplus somehow devoid of any wilful aim.”<sup>302</sup>

The explanatory power of intentionality has therefore been overestimated by Husserl. If a non-intentional consciousness is present in every intentional act, then there is an aspect of our experiences that transcend representation and intentionality.

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<sup>300</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* (The Hague/Boston/London: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1979), 28.

<sup>301</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, “Ethics as first philosophy,” in *The Levinas Reader*, edited by Sean Hand (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 79.

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

Levinas seeks to explore this notion of non-intentional consciousness and notes that it is usually (prematurely) dismissed as a form of pre-reflective consciousness whose intentionality will be discerned once it is properly reflected upon: “The obscure context of whatever is thematized is converted by reflection...into clear and distinct data, like those which present the perceived world...”<sup>303</sup> Through his examination of non-intentional consciousness, Levinas is expanding our horizons of what it means to be conscious. He begins by asking what the implications might be for the confusion between non-intentional and reflective consciousness, and whether or not we are justified in positing a distinction between the two:

Might there not be grounds for distinguishing between the envelopment of the particular in the conceptual, the implicit understanding of the presupposition in a notion, the potentiality of what is considered possible within the horizon, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the intimacy of the non-intentional within what is known as pre-reflective consciousness and which is duration itself?<sup>304</sup>

This passage by Levinas recalls René Descartes’s response to an objection that was raised about his *Discourse on the method of rightly conducting reason and seeking the truth in the sciences*. Descartes had noted that, when directed towards itself, the human mind did not perceive itself to be anything other than a thinking thing (i.e. an object in the world). The objection was that “it does not follow that its [the human mind’s] nature or essence consists only in its being a thinking thing, where the word ‘only’ excludes everything else that could be said to belong to the nature of the soul.”<sup>305</sup> Descartes replied that he was making an observation about perception, and not about the underlying truth of the matter.

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<sup>303</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>305</sup> René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, translated and edited by John Cottingham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 7.

In a similar vein, Levinas starts, in the passage cited above, by directing our attention to the manner in which, upon reflection, our intentional consciousness is drawn to our thinking self, “as if the thinking ego (*moi*) appeared in the world and belonged to it.”<sup>306</sup> [italics in the original] However, as in Descartes’s response, Levinas questions whether the notion of intentionality is adequate to the task of explaining the complexities and richness of consciousness.

Levinas then reasons that intentional consciousness is accompanied by a non-intentional variety of consciousness. He asks whether “the ‘knowledge’ of pre-reflective self-consciousness really know[s]?” In other words, is it in any sense active? Levinas responds in the negative, and notes that non-intentional consciousness is pure passivity. It is not passive in the sense of one who is thrown unwillingly into a set of circumstances outside of their control (i.e. Heidegger’s *geworfenheit*) and yet remains aware of their predicament, but rather it is passive as (temporal) duration itself, the unfolding of which occurs totally outside of any form of intentionality:

This duration remains free from the sway of the will, absolutely outside all activity of the ego, and exactly like the ageing process which is probably the perfect model of passive synthesis, a lapse of time no act of remembrance, reconstructing the past, could possibly reverse.<sup>307</sup>

I am aware that I am getting older, and I may intentionally reflect on the process for a variety of purposes (i.e. in order to seek to re-capture an experience of youth, to plan for the future, and so forth). However, as Levinas is pointing out, this reflection in no way

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<sup>306</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, “Ethics as first philosophy,” in *The Levinas Reader*, edited by Sean Hand (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 80.

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.*, 80. Cited by David Parry, 161.

touches or influences the passage of physical time. Temporality thus signifies something that cannot be reduced or fully taken in by thought as intentionality, as there always remains a surplus that is otherwise-than-being:

The implication of the non-intentional is a form of *mauvaise conscience*: it has no intentions, or aims, and cannot avail itself of the protective mask of a character contemplating in the mirror of the world a reassured and self-positing portrait.<sup>308</sup>  
[italics in the original]

In other words, this non-intentional consciousness is non-seeking (as in, not directed solely towards something in the world) and has no justification (in the sense of utility) for its existence. From the perspective of intentional consciousness, this makes it a threat, or, from the perspective of the ego, what Levinas calls bad conscience. It is as though this passivity stands as a corrective to the (supposed) supremacy and self-sufficiency of the ego and an affirmation of its limits:

In its non-intentionality, not yet at the stage of willing, and prior to any fault, in its non-intentional identification, identity recoils before its affirmation. It dreads the insistence in the return to self that is a necessary part of identification. This is either *mauvaise conscience* or timidity; it is not guilty, but accused; and responsible for its very presence.<sup>309</sup> [italics in the original]

For Levinas, this is our originary way of being and its presence serves to remind the ego of the latter's "ambiguous or enigmatic" quality and thus to question itself. He seems to be arguing that, with the emergence of the ego, this originary way of being was displaced and/or appropriated in the sense of Pascal's usurpation of the whole earth. There is thus a

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<sup>308</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, "Ethics as first philosophy," in *The Levinas Reader*, edited by Sean Hand (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 81.

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

highly ambivalent, if not antagonistic, relationship between intentional and non-intentional consciousness. But it remains to be seen how, if at all, this relationship is connected to the relationship with the external other.

As the ego asserts its identity and non-intentional consciousness is displaced, the latter becomes, as it were, an internal other. We are thus, in a very immediate and profound manner, already exiled from ourselves. Levinas explicitly links the presence of non-intentional consciousness with the biblical notion of the outsider: "This [non-intentional consciousness] creates the reserve of the stranger or 'sojourner on earth', as it says in the Psalms, the countryless or 'homeless' person who dare not enter in."<sup>310</sup> In Deuteronomy 10:18 we are told that God executes justice for the orphan, the widow, and the stranger (or foreigner) in our midst. We are thus commanded to care for them as well. In making a link to the Psalms, Levinas seems to be drawing a connection between the plight of our non-intentional consciousness, which is not at home within the realm of the ego-centered psyche, and that of the external other for whom we are (infinitely) responsible. David Parry is therefore justified in asking whether our intuitive grasp of the predicament of the other as an outsider is linked to our relationship with our own non-intentional consciousness.<sup>311</sup>

As we have seen, the presence of non-intentional consciousness represents a threat to the ego's position of centrality and (supposed) self-sufficiency. Levinas characterizes the ego as hateful because, in affirming itself, it disowns and/or attempts to appropriate this (non-intentional) facet of consciousness that eludes appropriation. In

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<sup>310</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>311</sup> David Parry, "Ethics as First Philosophy and its Implications for Psychotherapists and Counsellors," *Existential Analysis* 19, vol. 1 (January 2008): 161.



other words, I try to kill it, to usurp its place in order to safeguard myself. In a similar vein, in saying “I,” I have usurped the place of the external other.

For Levinas, in becoming a self I already stand accused, as this freedom has necessarily come at the expense of the other. I am complicit in her death, even though this crime did not result from a decision that was consciously willed. Levinas’s phenomenology of non-intentional consciousness helps to explain how it is that this crime occurs, as it were, behind the scenes, without being chosen.

How should I respond to this accusation and to the profound sense of persecution<sup>312</sup> that accompanies it? For Levinas, the only authentic response is to accept responsibility for the plight of the other, to subordinate my needs to the other to the point of substituting myself for them. This responsibility begins by a questioning of my right to be in the first place: “One has to speak, to say *I*, to be in the first person, precisely to be me (*moi*). But, from that point, in affirming this *me* being, one has to respond to one’s right to be.”<sup>313</sup>

[italics in the original]

This encounter with the other therefore constitutes a “summons to responsibility [that] destroys the formulas of generality by which my knowledge (*savoir*) or acquaintance (*connaissance*) of the other man re-presents him to me as my fellow man.”<sup>314</sup> [italics in the original] The “formulas of generality” recall Levinas’s description of totalizing

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<sup>312</sup> “This accusation can be reduced to the passivity of the self only as a persecution, but a persecution that turns into an expiation. Without persecution the ego raises its head and covers over the self. Everything is from the start in the accusative.” Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht, Boston and London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), 112.

<sup>313</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, “Ethics as first philosophy,” in *The Levinas Reader*, edited by Sean Hand (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 82.

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.* 84.

thinking in *Existence and Existents*, in which everything that we encounter is reduced to the same (and thereby appropriated) via a neutral third term. However, the encounter with the other violently shatters<sup>315</sup> this preoccupation with the self; I become her hostage, and, as we have already seen, she is the origin of my authentic (i.e. responsible) subjectivity and uniqueness.

How does Levinas relate these themes to his phenomenology of non-intentional consciousness? The moment the ego becomes aware of its need to justify its own being via exposure to the face of the other, then a crisis occurs within its own house, i.e. in relation to its own originary way of being (that was unconsciously displaced).

It is likely that Parry sees a stronger correlation between our relationship with our non-intentional consciousness and with the other person than does Levinas, and he seems to emphasize the role of internal conflict within the psyche over the inter-human encounter. The danger with Parry's reading is that, given the proximity of our own non-intentional consciousness in relation to the (human) other (i.e. it is always with us, while the human other may be distant), his formulation runs the risk of becoming yet another Philosophy of the Same (i.e. self-oriented). Levinas takes great care to emphasize that the disruption of the ego occurs via exposure/proximity to the other; it cannot happen simply through self-reflection or exposure to (some aspect of) ourselves.<sup>316</sup> This is the danger inherent in any reading of Levinas's philosophy, where the desire to explicate and clarify (and simplify?) leads to a systematization of his thought and a return to a Philosophy of the

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<sup>315</sup> "[The ethical relation]... is imposed upon the I beyond all violence by a violence that calls it entirely into question." Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* (The Hague/Boston/London: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1979), 47.

<sup>316</sup> "The idea of infinity hence does not proceed from the I, nor from a need in the I gauging exactly its own voids; here the movement proceeds from what is thought and not from the thinker... The idea of Infinity is *revealed* [in the face-to-face relation], in the strong sense of the term." [italics in the original] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* (The Hague/Boston/London: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1979), 61-2.

Same. In all fairness to Parry, he is reading Levinas in order to determine the lessons that his thought might hold for psychotherapists, who are engaged in their daily practice in face-to-face encounters with their patients. In other words, his is an engaged, and not merely theoretical, reading of Levinas.

Levinas's alternative formulation of subjectivity; his notion of anteriority; and the emergence of responsibility and ethics from the inter-human encounter; will be explored in the next chapter with reference to Hans Loewald's developmental account of consciousness from its original (primary) form to the differentiated secondary form. Both thinkers will also be read against the feminist and postmodern insights that have been elaborated in the previous chapters.

## **Chapter Five: Comparing and Contrasting Loewald and Levinas**

I have a very great suspicion with regard to the practice of psychoanalysis and to its abuses. The non-knowledge that characterizes the ethical relation of which I was speaking has a proper, positive meaning of humiliation and abnegation. It is respect, not repression; nor is it simple ignorance. But if the concept of the unconscious were to signify a lived mental experience which is not reducible to re-presentation and to the present, thus giving it all the significations of temporality, then it suits me fine.<sup>317</sup>

I am definitely not a Freudian; consequently, I don't think that Agape comes from Eros. But I don't deny that sexuality is also an important philosophical problem; the meaning of the division of the human into man and woman is not reducible to a biological problem...Thirty years ago I wrote a book called *Time and the Other* in which I thought that the feminine was alterity itself; I do not retract that, but I have never been a Freudian. In *Totality and Infinity*, there is a chapter on Eros, which is described as love that becomes enjoyment, whereas my view of Agape, which starts from responsibility for the other, is grave.<sup>318</sup>

### **An Apology, or a Reflection on some methodological concerns**

This project has been deliberately framed as an interdisciplinary conversation between theoretical perspectives, in which each discipline is read critically against the others.<sup>319</sup>

However, given Levinas's apparent antipathy towards Freudian psychoanalysis that is expressed in the preceding quotations, is there a reasonable basis for comparing his thought with that of Hans Loewald, a post-Freudian who nevertheless retained and transformed the Freudian conceptual vocabulary until his death in 1993? There are good reasons (not the least of which is the fact that both were pupils of Heidegger) for bringing

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<sup>317</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, "Being-for-the-Other," in *Is It Righteous To Be?*, edited by Jill Robbins (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 118.

<sup>318</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, "Philosophy, Justice, and Love," in *Is It Righteous To Be?*, edited by Jill Robbins (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 174.

<sup>319</sup> Jane Flax employed this method of framing a project in her *Thinking Fragments*. I am indebted to her, as well as to Michael Oppenheim, who utilizes a similar approach in his *Jewish Philosophy and Psychoanalysis: Narrating the Interhuman* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006).

these two important thinkers into a dialogue with each other, but certain precautions are necessary in order to avoid the trap of reductionism. My reading of these distinct discourses has been strategically focused on the theme of moral responsibility, and this will facilitate the identification of common ground as well as questions and concerns that are not shared. The project is thus critically comparative in its method, but it is also reconstructive in the sense that it will not merely take stock of the shortcomings identified with each discipline, but will advance interpretations that address the lacunae that have been identified. However, this presentation is necessarily partial and inconclusive. In reading for the theme of moral responsibility, certain features of these highly complex discourses are brought to the forefront, while other, significant trends fade to the background. For instance, the theme of the divine is rarely addressed in this study, although it is prominent in Levinas's writings (especially in his so-called Jewish work). Furthermore, my own interests and concerns necessarily influence my reading of the materials, although every effort has been made to provide a balanced presentation. My reading is thus contestable, which is as it should be. By inviting others to work through the material on their own and to arrive at their own conclusions, any closure is provisional and the dialogue remains (at least potentially) open-ended. By deliberately circumscribing the goals of this project (i.e. I do not claim that my reading is exhaustive or arrives at *the* singular truth, although I do believe it to be fruitful) I avoid the trap of reductionism.<sup>320</sup>

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<sup>320</sup> For an excellent discussion of these and other issues that arise in inter-disciplinary analyses, please see Michael Oppenheim, "Introduction: An Apology" in *Jewish Philosophy and Psychoanalysis: Narrating the Interhuman* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006), 1-23.

### **Chapter Outline**

This chapter will undertake such a comparison with the aim of bringing into focus and clarifying important facets of Levinas's thought that have either received inadequate attention or have been misunderstood. In particular, I will focus on the respective accounts of subjectivity in Loewald and Levinas with an emphasis on the significance of guilt, persecution, and atonement in their conceptions of the human. In a similar vein, I will examine what each thinker means by responsibility. I will then read the two thinkers against the feminist and postmodern critiques/insights that were elaborated in earlier chapters. In effect, this chapter will present a critical dialogue among these different discourses.

### **The Ego is Hateful**

Levinas has termed the ego "hateful" because it asserts itself at the expense of the other. In carving out the space for my autonomy and freedom— for my subjective sense of self— I necessarily restrict and limit the freedom of the other. Furthermore, I seek to displace/disown my own non-intentional consciousness, which Levinas characterizes as our originary (i.e. pre-reflective) state of being. In order to safeguard this sense of autonomy and freedom, I deny the otherness of those that I encounter and reduce them to the same, thereby subjugating them to myself. It does not really matter if this subjugation occurs "behind the scenes" (i.e. without my being consciously aware of it) because the

harm that it causes is real and apparent. Levinas traces the outrages of the twentieth century to this type of totalizing thinking.

### **From Primary to Secondary Process Mentation**

Loewald's developmental account of subjectivity provides some possible illumination of Levinas's claim that we assert ourselves at the expense of the other. For Loewald, we start life as part of an undifferentiated mother-infant matrix or dyad. We initially have no sense of self and other; inside and outside; past, present or future; and so forth. Loewald is asserting the ontogenetic priority of the other over the self, and he terms this way of experiencing the world (which he regards as a form of thinking or mentation), primary process. Gradually, via the mediating efforts of the parental figures, we begin to experience ourselves as separate (though still connected) entities. Loewald terms this increasingly differentiated way of experiencing the world, secondary process mentation. As we move from primary to secondary ways of experiencing the world, the ego struggles to maintain the sense of connectedness or unity associated with earlier configurations, and these (newer) configurations must take novel forms as our experiences become more complex and differentiated. We experience our lives as meaningful when primary and secondary processes are integrated, when these connections to less differentiated configurations are active and alive, and the absence of a vibrant connection can lead to neurosis and psychosis.

### **Murdering the other to become a self**

For both Levinas and Loewald, the assertion of the self as autonomous and free entails a crime. Levinas's phenomenology of the face reveals the command inherent in the visage of the other to not abandon them to their fate and allow them to die alone. To do so is to be complicit in their murder. We can only atone for this crime by subjugating ourselves to the other, by making ourselves their hostage, by taking on a limitless responsibility for which no one else can be substituted; in other words, by asserting their absolute ethical priority. Given the content that is conveyed by the face of the other, it should come as no surprise that Levinas characterizes the self (ego) as persecuted and guilty, as having to atone.

For Loewald, the movement from primary to secondary processes also entails the crime of murder. Although the parental figures help to mediate this movement, they never let go without a struggle. On the psychic plane, we kill something in our parents as we assert our independence, and this murder results in a sense of guilt and a requirement to atone. This atonement takes the form of superego development, whereby we internalize part of our parents as our moral conscience and thereby assign them a place of prominence and a form of immortality. In the terminology of Loewald, this entails an internalization or narcissistic transformation of oedipal object relations, where the superego makes up for and is a restitution of these relationships. In other words, this atonement entails a substitution (of the previous parent-infant relationship for the post-Oedipal mature intrapsychic structural relations).



As adults, the Oedipal drama continues to play out in our relationships with others, and this can often entail feelings of persecution and guilt (it is in this connection that Freud spoke of the superego as persecuting the ego). In such situations, atonement entails reconfiguring the primary-secondary process relations in creative, novel ways in order to keep the connections active and to respond to the external stimuli (i.e. to the demands of our relations with others). This reconfiguration requires one to unseat the ego, as it were, from its feelings of prominence and of being complete. To the extent that primary process experiences transcend the self they reflect, from the perspective of the ego, the other (or rather, the self-other unity) that is at the core; in other words, they assert the priority of both the internal object/other (i.e. the superego and non-intentional consciousness) and of the external other (i.e. other people).

Murder is therefore at the heart of both Levinas's and Loewald's account of subjectivity. An important difference between the two accounts is that Loewald consistently characterizes our emancipation from our parents and the sense of freedom and autonomy that accompanies secondary-process mentation, in positive terms. Emancipation is something desirable (provided it is also accompanied by guilt and accepting responsibility/owning up), and the failure to fully emancipate is characterized in terms of pathology (i.e. psychosis, which is an excess of primary process). At the same time, the failure to maintain a vibrant link between primary and secondary ways of experiencing can lead to sickness, as when Loewald asserts that "we know madness that is the madness of unbridled rationality."<sup>321</sup> As we have seen, Levinas views the assertion of the freedom of the ego in negative terms, because it leads to a sense of self that is inauthentic and

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<sup>321</sup> Hans Loewald, "Man as Moral Agent," in *Psychoanalysis and the History of the Individual* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 56. Cited in Carolyn Saari, "Editorial," *Clinical Social Work Journal* 24, no. 4 (Winter 1998): 348.

morally repugnant. For Levinas, we only become authentic subjects— in other words, fully human— to the extent that we enter into an asymmetrical ethical relation with the other. Although Levinas and Loewald’s positions are not as diametrically opposed as one might think, the differences in emphasis are nevertheless real and significant.

### **The Maternal Relation**

Levinas and Loewald both emphasize the importance of the maternal relationship. At times for Levinas, the relation between mother and fetus (and later mother and baby) represents, from the point of view of the mother, the ethical relation par excellence. The mother gives herself completely to the developing fetus, offering even “the food from her mouth” (i.e. the developing fetus is nourished by her body) and this giving-over is pre-reflective. In other words, it does not result from a choice made after thoughtful deliberation and acted upon via an assertion of the will. As we have seen, for Levinas the ethical relation can never be reduced to such a calculation; it is prior to choice and timeless, i.e. it precedes the appearance of a temporal self that is capable of such reflection.

For Loewald, the mother-infant matrix is the original dyad from which the self gradually develops. This matrix is undifferentiated, and this primary-process way of experiencing remains with us throughout our lives. As we have seen, the challenge that we face in order to live a meaningful life is to maintain this connection between primary and secondary processes, in order to invest the present with the vitality and sense of being connected that characterized our earliest ways of experiencing. While Loewald does not

explicitly utilize the language of ethics when speaking of the maternal relation, the mother's priority to the infant (she brings her into the world) and her role in promoting secondary-process development (via the reflection to her child of more complex forms of psychic organization) are forcefully asserted. For Loewald, it is the development of secondary process mentation that makes it possible for us to own up (in other words, to take responsibility) for our lives. An important feature of this responsibility is the recognition and acceptance of the fact that we are the original locus of much of what we experience in terms of powerlessness and persecution at the hands of others. In other words, we are often complicit in creating relationship dynamics that will passively (i.e. unconsciously) repeat less-differentiated ways of experiencing our earliest (Oedipal) conflicts, and it is only when we own up to our role in creating such conflicts that they can be remembered (i.e. consciously experienced via reformulation in new, more differentiated forms) instead of merely acted-out. In this sense our responsibility is still connected with (unconscious) agency, which is different from how Levinas conceives of responsibility. However, because these less-differentiated ways of experiencing are pre-conscious (in the sense that they occur before we are autonomous and self-reflecting), owning up still entails taking responsibility for things not freely and consciously chosen. On the one hand, this way of owning-up resonates with Levinas's claim that we are already guilty and responsible as soon as we can say "I." On the other hand, this account seems at odds with Levinas's notion of the ethical as being irreducible to a system of thought or post-reflective calculation (i.e. utilitarianism or Kantianism), since it is elaborated in the fully differentiated language of secondary-process mentation and Loewald connects responsibility with (an unconscious form of) agency. However, the

fact that such deliberation entails and incorporates (especially within the analytic encounter) a powerful affective (i.e. pre-reflective or unconscious) dimension, gives it a greater affinity to Levinas's model of the ethical than those moral philosophical systems that have no place for the (so-called) irrational.

### **This consciousness that is not mine**

Both Levinas and Loewald assign great importance to the notion of an originary way of being that is very different from what we usually think of as self-consciousness. As we have seen, Levinas introduces the idea of non-intentional consciousness through his critique of Husserl's notion of intentionality. Non-intentional consciousness is not directed toward objects in the world; it has no apparent purpose or utility; nor is it merely reducible to some earlier form of reflective self-consciousness (since it is not consciousness *of anything*). It is pure passivity, and as such it is not complicit in the reduction of the other to the same that characterizes self-consciousness. Levinas's phenomenology of this non-intentional consciousness is undertaken in part to show us that what we normally think of as (self-) consciousness, does not exhaust the possibilities of what it means to be conscious. He is using the phenomenological approach in the service of a philosophical project in which philosophy "un-thinks" itself. Non-intentional consciousness is thus an internal other, and it is displaced and obfuscated via the assertion of the prominence of the ego in a manner that is analogous to the reduction of the external other to the same. On this reading, our ego is hateful not only because it does violence to the external other (as emphasized by Levinas), but also because it comes at

the expense of our own originary way of being. However, for Levinas, it is only through exposure to the external other (as opposed to self-reflection) that we can discern the traces of our own non-intentional consciousness.

Loewald also discusses the importance of an originary way of being in his thought, and he terms it primary process mentation. As we have seen, primary process experiences are undifferentiated: they have no sense of inside/outside, self/other, past, present or future. Loewald based his notion of primary process upon his interpretation of Freud's late statement in *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930) that some people (but not Freud himself) had reported experiencing an "oceanic feeling" in which the aforementioned differentiations were absent. Primary process takes the place of Freud's concept of the unconscious and the Id (although Loewald also utilizes these terms). An important difference is that, for Freud, the goal of psychoanalytic practice was to shine the light of consciousness on the darkness of the unconscious, to expand the circumference of the ego and re-enforce the functions appropriate to it. This goal was encapsulated in Freud's famous dictum, "where id was, there ego shall be." For Loewald, primary process experiences were not to be displaced in the service of the ego; rather, the dialectical relation between primary and secondary processes was to be maintained and strengthened, in order that our present could be made meaningful. The maintenance of this connection required that novel, creative configurations could be fashioned at increasingly differentiated levels of psychic organization, in response to changing external demands (i.e. our relations with others). All the while, our original (pre-reflective) feelings of connectedness were to be maintained. Loewald's model of primary and secondary processes is more relational than the Freudian model of the psyche. For

Loewald, primary process mentation is our originary way of being and it is relational in origin (although the original self-other dyad is undifferentiated), and our secondary process experiences (to which he assigns rational reflection, the scientific perspective, etc) follow later.

To the extent that non-intentional consciousness and primary process experiences are other than and (frequently) at odds with the (self-reflective, rational) functioning of the ego, they play similar roles for Levinas and Loewald. Both are also linked to our experience of relation with others. For Levinas, this feature is less developed, in that he does not explicitly posit a one-to-one connection between the ego's displacement of non-intentional consciousness and its displacement of the external other. An important difference between the two concepts is that Loewald's primary process has far more content assigned to it; Loewald has a great deal to say about its origins and functioning, and this content forms the core of his theoretical edifice. Levinas avoids assigning positive content to non-intentional consciousness; because it is without intention, it is also without any functions of its own. The assignation of content would result in the systematization that leads to the totalizing thinking that he is critiquing. The true ethical relation for Levinas is prior to any system or content, and he avoids compromising this stance by deliberately circumscribing his phenomenology of non-intentional consciousness.

We saw at the start of this chapter that Levinas objected to psychoanalysis precisely because the Freudian notion of the unconscious reduced the ethical relation to just such a systematic content. Does Loewald's re-configuration of the Freudian terminology suffer the same fate, or is his primary process "a lived mental experience

which is not reducible to re-presentation and to the present, thus giving it all the significations of temporality?" Clearly, Loewald is elaborating a highly systematized theoretical framework that allows him to discuss and map elusive notions such as the development of subjectivity, meaning, responsibility, and our relations with others. From a Levinasian perspective, it could be argued that he is thus guilty of reducing the face-to-face ethical relation to a system or content, thus depriving it of its ethical force. However, Loewald's primary process is very much a "lived experience" and the ongoing need for the development of new configurations in order to maintain the relation between primary and secondary ways of experiencing suspends closure indefinitely. In other words, for Loewald we are forever engaged in a movement and counter-movement (this process may be likened to the unfolding of a theme in a symphony through increasingly complex movements) towards meaning that gives our lives "all the significations of temporality" (i.e. avoids the reification of the ego and rationality in the name of a hierarchical system that assigns value according to some fixed, and thus a-temporal, criteria).<sup>322</sup> This movement toward the meaningful is undertaken in order that we may own up, i.e. become responsible selves in our relations with others.

### **Feminist Insights**

When we problematize Levinas and Loewald in terms of gender, what do we find?

Levinas's account of subjectivity and responsibility is troubling on a number of fronts, as many feminist thinkers have held. By failing to analyze for gender differences in his

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<sup>322</sup> Loewald likens taking responsibility to making music from a score. See Jonathan Lear, "Introduction," in Hans W. Loewald, *The Essential Loewald* (Hergerstown, Maryland: University Publishing Group, Inc., 2000), xxxviii (note 41).

phenomenology of the self-other relation and subjectivity, Levinas shows evidence of the androcentric bias of the totalizing philosophy that he is critiquing. When he does refer to the feminine, it is often as a symbol of otherness in relation to a masculine norm (i.e. the female is both similar to, and yet different in profound ways and thus irreducible, to the male). His discussion of maternity as symbolizing (from the mother's perspective) the ethical relation; possibly essentializes women in their biological role. Levinas also uses male-normative language, and cites traditional religious texts without accounting for their androcentric bias.<sup>323</sup>

In this project, we have focused on Levinas's account of the ego as hateful, as persecuted and needing to atone for the displacement of the other that inevitably occurs as soon as we can say "I," i.e., even before we assert our freedom and autonomy via willed action. We have also seen that authentic human subjectivity is measured for Levinas in relation to the extent to which we respond to the call inherent in the face of the other (i.e. that we assert the absolute ethical priority of the other over the self). How does Levinas's account of subjectivity compare with the feminist insights into the construction of gender and subjectivity in patriarchal societies that we have examined in previous chapters?

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<sup>323</sup> See for instance Luce Irigaray, "The Fecundity of the Caress," in *Face to Face with Levinas*, edited by Richard A. Cohen (Albany: SUNY Press, 1986) and "Questions to Levinas on the Divinity of Love," in *Re-Reading Levinas*, translated by Margaret Whitford, edited by Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).



### Levinas and Feminist accounts of the subject

Luce Irigaray's studies of language use revealed the difficulty that many women had (compared to the males who took part in the study) of saying "I," in other words, of seeing and asserting themselves as subjects within a patriarchal social-linguistic context. She concluded from this that adult women maintain closer ties to the pre-oedipal experiential realm and are thus more capable (than men) of discovering or accommodating the other, provided that they can also say "I" and assert themselves as subjects. What does this mean for Levinas's account of subjectivity? On the one hand, it could be taken to mean that women who have internalized patriarchal norms (in Hilde Lindemann Nelson's terminology, who suffer from damaged identities<sup>324</sup>) are inherently more ethical than males, by virtue of their difficulty in asserting themselves as autonomous individuals. This is a troubling notion, since it appears to endorse oppressive patriarchal norms, at least insofar as they produce women who are (more) ethical according to Levinas's definition. On the other hand, Irigaray has identified the ability to say "I" and assert oneself as an autonomous subject as a requirement in entering into relationships that accommodate (i.e. do not do violence to) the other. This insight contradicts Levinas's account of the "I" as hateful and (necessarily) destructive of the other. Should we conclude that Levinas's characterization of the ego as hateful only applies to the patriarchal ego (i.e. to the ego of men living in patriarchal societies)? Or would Levinas have reached different conclusions had his phenomenology of the face and the ethical relation taken account of gender? We have seen that Levinas also

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<sup>324</sup> Hilde Lindemann Nelson, *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair* (Ithaca & New York: Cornell University Press, 2001), 20.

characterizes the ego as persecuted and as needing to atone. The feminist thinkers that we have examined might argue that these feelings were the result of the internalization of oppressive norms. For example, Hilde Lindemann Nelson would read these feelings of persecution and guilt as evidence of morally degrading self-identities that deny us the status of fully accountable moral agents. In order to be responsible, i.e. to be capable of taking responsibility for our actions, we would have to (at least partially) dislodge these defective self-narratives and replace them with identity-constituting counterstories that portray us as fully developed moral agents. On this account, contrary to the Levinasian model, the ego is persecuted and guilty through no fault of its own, but rather due to oppressive social norms.

Levinas's critique of totalizing thinking provides a useful corrective and supplement (as he speaks of justice entering into later reflections) to views that are based exclusively on an equality/justice perspective. The latter excludes, for instance, the care perspective elaborated by Gilligan and Noddings. However, a closer look at Levinas's position reveals that he provides few resources upon which to ground a feminist critique. It should therefore come as no surprise that many feminist theorists have responded to Levinas's project with ambivalence.<sup>325</sup>

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<sup>325</sup> See, for instance, Simone De Beauvoir's brief critique of Levinas's masculine perspective in *The Second Sex* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), xxii. See also Stella Sandford, "Levinas, feminism and the feminine," in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, edited by Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 139-160. This is a common theme in many feminist critiques of Levinas's thought.

### Loewald and feminism

On a whole, Loewald's developmental account of subjectivity fares better than Levinas's, even though elaborating such an account was not Levinas's intention. Although Loewald focuses on the maternal dimension of the feminine and is thus vulnerable to claims that he essentializes women, his account avoids most of the phallogentric excesses of the Freudian model. Loewald does not privilege the Oedipal to the exclusion of the pre-oedipal, and he assigns to the mother<sup>326</sup> a preeminent role in the development of secondary process mentation in the child (which is the realm of rationality). Furthermore, his account of our infantile relations to the mother and father are highly nuanced and avoid the strict binary oppositions of the Freudian account. Finally, Loewald does not privilege as healthy or meaningful a reified account of the ego as hyper-rational and devoid of affect, but rather argues for a self in which the connections between primary and secondary process experiences are vibrant and alive. Loewald's account of superego development as a response to the psychic crime of parricide, is a powerful analytical tool with which to critique feminist models of subjectivity such as the one proposed by Lindemann Nelson. In other words, it challenges feminist thinkers to include, in a manner proposed by Jane Flax, the role of the unconscious (or primary process mentation) in the development of gender and female identity in Western culture. While Lindemann Nelson attributes feelings such as guilt and persecution solely to oppressive social norms that have been internalized, Loewald's model indicates that, at least in the Western context, such feelings are the inevitable by-product of becoming a human self. They are even

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<sup>326</sup> But not just to the mother: Loewald does not exclude the possibility that the primary caretaker can be male.

desirable, at least to the extent that they accompany the development of a conscience that presses us to own up and take responsibility for our actions. We might even argue that the absence of such feelings altogether could be read as a sign of serious psychological problems such as sociopathy.

Because Loewald's understanding of a meaningful life entails a dialectical relation between primary and secondary process experiences, his developmental account can be used to criticize hierarchical developmental models (such as Kohlberg's) that privilege a stereotypically masculine set of attributes as the highest and most desirable stage. Given the ongoing importance in adult psychic life that Loewald attributes to primary process experiences (which is the realm of affect), his account may compliment ethical models that assign a preeminent role to feelings.

Nel Noddings's ethics of care comes to mind in this regard. Loewald's careful analysis of our ambivalent feelings toward our earliest caretakers, provides a useful corrective to Noddings's account of caring, which tends to minimize the potentially destructive aspects of these relationships. Jane Flax has also articulated the need for such a corrective to this lacuna in the ethics of care. An important difference between Loewald's developmental account and the ethical models articulated by Noddings and Lindemann Nelson, is that the latter are concerned to a far greater extent with the impact of the overarching societal norms on the development of subjectivity. This is an important corrective to Loewald's account, which does not expand its analysis to include, in a systematic manner, the societal contexts that shape and frame our earliest relationships. Although he has been careful to explicitly situate his account within Western cultural contexts, it is reasonable to inquire as to how subjectivity might develop

differently within other (non-Western) cultural contexts, and what impact this might have on our understanding of what it means to be responsible.

Arti Dhand has drawn on the sources of the Indian epic tradition to expound a conception of the family that transcends the narrow, nuclear framework in the West. In her account of the ideal Indian family, all people that we encounter are to be regarded and respected as family members, to whom we have binding social obligations that supercede our individualistic goals. This ethic of self-negation is similar to Levinas's account in that both regard self-interest as incommensurate with a genuine concern for others.

Furthermore, both posit responsibility as preceding our individual freedom and capacity for self-reflection. However, a major difference is that Dhand grounds her ethics in a systematic account of the Indian dharma sources (including the Ramayana and the Mahabharata), whereas Levinas refuses to situate his ethical relation within any system. An interesting feature of the epic sources upon which Dhand's account is based, is the absence of descriptions of feelings of guilt and persecution as major motivating factors among the primary characters. For example, Rama, the hero of the Ramayana who is revered as the perfect man and the avatar (incarnation) of Vishnu, is not conflicted due to feelings of guilt or persecution.<sup>327</sup> On the contrary, he is motivated solely by duty (dharma) and never hesitates to act with certainty, even when faced with conflicting dharmic responsibilities. He consistently sets aside his self-interest for the sake of his extended family members and the people that he governs, even when doing so involves

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<sup>327</sup> Rama voluntarily exiles himself to the forest for fourteen years in order to uphold his father's rajadharma, even though this causes his father to die from grief. After his father's death, Rama's widowed mother pleads with him in vain to return to the kingdom to claim his rightful place on the throne. Rama also banishes his faultless and pregnant wife, Sita, to exile in the forest in order to quell the gossip among his subjects concerning her faithfulness to Rama. Although Rama's actions can be justified within the ancient worldview of the Ramayana, my young Western students are consistently baffled and disturbed by his choices. For them, these actions would produce an insufferable burden of guilt.

making tremendous sacrifices. Within the extended familial framework of the Indian societal context, it is a fear of shaming one's family and thus compromising their status, that motivates behavior. Shame is thus a very powerful constituent of identity within so-called collectivistic cultures.<sup>328</sup> Because one is automatically expected to sacrifice their self-interest for the greater good, there is little direct evidence that guilt (originating either from an original psychic crime or a displacement of the other) plays a significant role in the development of a self. The accounts of guilt and persecution in the Loewaldian and Levinasian accounts of subjectivity are thus to be situated within a Western cultural context.<sup>329</sup>

### Postmodern insights

This notion of a non-Western ethics and developmental account of the subject that calls into question Western assumptions on these issues, recalls the postmodern critique, which has sought to map and recover that which has been traditionally excluded in the history of Western thought and civilization. What does a postmodern critique of the models of subjectivity and responsibility advanced by Levinas and Loewald reveal?

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<sup>328</sup> The line dividing guilt from shame has not been fully standardized. Nevertheless, shame usually refers to the feelings associated with a public loss of face where social or cultural values have been transgressed, whereas guilt feelings arise from a violation of internal values. Freud characterized shame as a stereotypically feminine characteristic and associated it with so-called penis envy (which, from a phallogocentric perspective, is a sense of embarrassment about alleged genital deficiency). "Shame, which is considered to be a feminine characteristic *par excellence* but is far more a matter of convention than might be supposed, has as its purpose, we believe, concealment of genital deficiency." [italics in the original] Sigmund Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, edited and translated by James Strachey (New York/London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1965), 117.

<sup>329</sup> Even within the *Mahabharata*, in which the heroes are far from perfect, guilt does not appear to play a significant role. When Arjuna hesitates on the battlefield as he looks across at his relations and realizes that he must fight and kill people with whom he grew up, it is not guilt but fear of violating dharma that causes him to throw down his bow. According to the laws of dharma, killing one's relatives is a sin that results in a rebirth in hell.

Levinas's critique of totalizing thinking has much in common with postmodernism, and Jacques Derrida has forcefully argued that this critique underlies most responsible work in postmodernism.<sup>330</sup> In his valorization of the other, his radical critique of the autonomous self, and his resistance toward every attempt to systematize the ethical relation, Levinas has anticipated many of the central themes that have been a prominent feature in postmodern theorizing. Nevertheless, it would be inaccurate to characterize Levinas solely as a postmodern thinker, and bringing him into a dialogue with postmodern discourses will reveal important differences.

### The self-other relation

We have seen that Levinas is deeply concerned with the violence that is done to the other when the ego asserts its freedom and autonomy. By positing the ethical relation as asymmetrical and insisting that authentic subjectivity derives from the subjection of the self to the other, Levinas's critique undermines the foundation upon which the Western philosophical edifice has traditionally been grounded.<sup>331</sup> Foucault is also concerned with the violence that has been done to the other via the prominence of subject-centered reason, and while he does have an ethics, he does not (like Levinas) assert the primacy of

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<sup>330</sup> See, for example, Jacques Derrida, "Adieu," in *The Work of Mourning*, edited by Pascale-Anne Brault & Michael Naas (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 197-209.

<sup>331</sup> Levinas's notion of an asymmetrical self-other relation has been the object of Derrida's early critique, which posits an even more fundamental (prior) symmetry inherent in the understanding of the Other as "alter ego." See Jacques Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas," in *Writing and Difference*, translated by Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 79-153. In the same essay, Derrida argues that Levinas has reintroduced metaphysics (or rather, failed to escape the language of Being) via an embrace of empiricism: "But the true name of this inclination of thought to the Other, of this resigned acceptance of incoherent incoherence inspired by a truth more profound than the "logic" of philosophical discourse, the true name of this renunciation of the concept, of the a prioris and transcendental horizons of language, is *empiricism*...By taking this project to its end, he totally renews empiricism, and inverts it by revealing it to itself as metaphysics." (151).

ethics as first philosophy. Rather, Foucault is interested in mapping the genesis and transformations of power, and argues that power is inextricably linked with knowledge. In other words, our received understanding of what it means to be a self (i.e. as free, autonomous, and rational) masks the violence that has been done to those who have been marginalized because they do not conform to this understanding (for instance those who have been diagnosed as mentally ill). At the same time, these normative definitions have served to entrench institutional arrangements that promote certain groups of specialists (i.e. psychiatrists and doctors, pharmaceutical executives) to positions of authority. In writing his genealogies of these power relations, Foucault seeks to show that they are contingent (as opposed to necessary) and thus creates critical space within which one may resist the abuses of power.

If ethics is central for Levinas, it only became an explicit concern for Foucault in his later work.<sup>332</sup> Like Levinas, Foucault does not believe that an authentic ethics can be based on the humanistic, autonomous subject, since he views it as a construct that masks relations of domination. However, unlike Levinas, Foucault does not posit a normative alternative to this humanistic self. If knowledge and power are inextricably linked and relations of domination are to be resisted, then it is difficult to see how Foucault can account for the agency of his own writings. In other words, where is the locus of the agency that initiates genealogical researches in order to uncover so-called marginalized or subjugated knowledges<sup>333</sup> and use them in the service of an emancipatory criticism? There is no

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<sup>332</sup> We find, for instance, an explicit concern with Ethics in Foucault's elaboration of what he terms "bio-power." Prominent Liberal thinkers such as Jurgen Habermas, Charles Taylor, Michael Walzer, and Richard Rorty, all deny the possibility of a concept of freedom and, thus, moral agency, in their reading of Foucault's philosophical approach. See Sergei Prozorov, *Foucault, Freedom and Sovereignty* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2007), 25-6.

<sup>333</sup> See Michel Foucault, "Two Lectures," in *Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate*, edited by Michael Kelly (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1994), 17-46.



command inherent in the face of the other for Foucault, and no trace of an Absolute Other (i.e. the Infinite or God) that can be discerned in the asymmetrical ethical relation between self and other.

### The Face and *Le Regard*

Levinas's phenomenology of the face and of the ethical relation is foundational, although he repeatedly stressed that the ethical relation itself cannot be systematized. The face speaks for Levinas, but this saying cannot be reduced to a said (i.e. systematized) without depriving it of its ethical force. The command in the face is, first and foremost, to be obeyed. Foucault has no such foundation for his critique upon which to erect an alternative. For him, the gaze (*le regard*) from without is malevolent, because it assigns to us a fixed and, ultimately, reductive designation. As we are always capable of being/experiencing more, such designations are oppressive and must be resisted. For Foucault, the psychiatric gaze (as it is directed at the patient) is a model for such oppressive constructions of identity.

There are interesting parallels and differences between Levinas's account of the Face and Foucault's account of *le regard*. For both thinkers, exposure to the other is experienced as a form of violence and oppression. For Levinas, the face of the other rends my ego asunder and shatters my sense of self-satisfaction; I am turned into a hostage. For Foucault, *le regard* fixes me with an oppressive identity and draws me into an abusive power system, thereby limiting my otherwise limitless potential for self-

expression and experience. However, for Levinas the ego that is shattered in the encounter with the other is a false, inauthentic, hateful self. It is a self that is already complicit in the reduction and domination of the other. It must be violently torn apart in order for it to be substituted with authentic subjectivity (in the form of submission to the other). For Foucault, the self that is subjected to *le regard* is already an authentic self in the sense that it is (potentially) unlimited. It is hard to imagine how such a limitless self could be complicit in the violence that is done to the other, since the oppression of the other at my expense presupposes a “me” that is clearly defined and, thus, capable of being evaluated as superior. In classical psychoanalytic terms, we might re-describe Levinas’s account of subjectivity as a radical valorization of the superego at the expense of the ego, whereas Foucault valorizes the id at the expense of the superego. In both cases, the notion of ego that emerges differs dramatically from the autonomous, rational self envisioned by humanism.

### **The account of the self in Levinas and Foucault**

Another difference between Levinas and Foucault relates to their understanding of the autonomous self or ego. For Foucault, this reason-centered humanistic self is a contingent construct. As such, it is little more than a fiction, albeit a dangerous fiction that is capable of great violence. Levinas, however, refers to the way of being appropriate to this self-interested ego as the natural state of affairs. When we operate according to the imperatives of the ego, we are participating in the fight for survival that characterizes all life, and which is readily discernible in the animal kingdom. The ego is therefore not

contingent for Levinas. However, we only become authentically human (as opposed to merely reasoning animals) when we disregard the imperatives of the ego (i.e. go against nature) and subordinate ourselves to the other in the ethical relation.

### **Loewald's proto-postmodern subject**

If one conceives of a theoretical continuum with modernism and postmodernism at either extreme, then Hans Loewald would likely be situated closer to the postmodern pole. The self that he posits in his developmental account of subjectivity is inherently relational, and it continues to be shaped in adulthood by relations with others. Loewald does not valorize the reason-centered ego as the pinnacle of psychological health, but argues rather that a meaningful life is to be found via the ongoing dialectical relation between primary and secondary process ways of experiencing. Loewald's subject is a work-in-progress, in the sense that closure is always provisional and new, creative self-configurations must constantly be formulated in response to changing external stimuli (although these new formulations may occur, as it were, behind the scenes). As we have seen, Loewald also explicitly situates his account within the Western cultural context, and thus avoids making the kind of universal claims that are the target of postmodern and post-colonial critiques. Nevertheless, important differences can be identified between Loewald and postmodern accounts of subjectivity.

In drawing upon and situating his account of subjectivity within the Freudian conceptual vocabulary, Loewald is arguably complicit in a psychoanalytic "grand narrative" and is thus vulnerable to the postmodern critiques that have been leveled at

such narratives.<sup>334</sup> In Loewald's defense, he is aware of these issues and openly identifies when he is addressing meta-theoretical issues. In other words, he deliberately situates his thought within over-arching theoretical frameworks, which implies a recognition that such frameworks are not exhaustive (i.e. they provide but one potential account of the way things are). This deliberate placing-in-perspective avoids many of the distortions that inevitably arise when such theorizing occurs behind-the-scenes. Nevertheless, Loewald is theorizing within (and breaking with) the classical psychoanalytic framework and as such he can be read in terms of the power relations (i.e. between analyst and analysand) that his discipline reinforces. And while Loewald has occasionally questioned Freud's views of the therapist, analysts who have been influenced by Loewald have made theoretical moves that have brought them even closer to important facets of the postmodern critique. Roy Schaffer<sup>335</sup> has written extensively on reinterpreting psychoanalytic theories within a narrative (hermeneutic) framework, while Stephen Mitchell<sup>336</sup> has (re-) conceptualized the analyst-patient dynamic within fully relational terms.

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<sup>334</sup> Roy Schaffer abandoned the Freudian vocabulary of Loewald—his teacher and PhD supervisor—in favor of a new and, ostensibly, less reductive and deterministic “action language” for psychoanalysis.

<sup>335</sup> Roy Schaffer, *Retelling a Life: Narration and Dialogue in Psychoanalysis* (USA: Harper-Collins, 1992).

<sup>336</sup> Stephen Mitchell, *Relationality: From Attachment to Intersubjectivity* (Hillsdale NJ: The Analytic Press, 2000) and *Can Love Last? The Fate of Romance Over Time* (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002). Mitchell explicitly credits Loewald with opening the door, via his reinterpretation of classical Freudian theory, to this fully relational move.

## Conclusion

What does it mean to be morally responsible? As we have traced this theme through a variety of discourses, some salient features of moral responsibility have come into focus. Our examination of feminist ethics, and especially the so-called caring perspective, situates the (gendered) self within an interpersonal relational web of competing caring commitments. Postmodern analysis deconstructs the self as well and, like the feminist critique, inquires into the transpersonal, historical and institutional (third-person) discourses that give rise to our experiences of interiority and individualism. This placing-in-perspective of the humanistic self undermines all moral systems that are founded upon a conception of the reason-centered "I" that conceal (repress) the influence of the realm of affect and the (so-called) irrational. The primacy of this affective realm (literally, as primary process) is taken up in the developmental psychoanalytic account of Hans Loewald, who elaborates the central and ongoing role of guilt and atonement in the formation of a responsible self.

Guilt and atonement are also central to the conception of subjectivity advanced by Emmanuel Levinas. Levinas's critique of the reason-centered "I" is every bit as radical as the de-centered postmodern self, and yet (unlike Foucault) he posits an alternative conception that cannot but be ethical. This self is summoned to a (limitless) responsibility through proximity to the other, and this obligation is only mitigated by the presence of the third (i.e. a plurality of others). As in Loewald's account, the ego (as self-contained and inauthentic humanistic "I") is torn asunder via an experience of trauma. However, whereas Loewald (following Freud) seeks to identify the ultimate causes of this trauma

(i.e. to unconscious forces that have been inadequately integrated into conscious life), Levinas traces (literally, as they only exist as traces) their unfolding and assigns their origins to the beyond-being, i.e. to that which always is directed away from the self and can never be formalized in a system.

### **The Centrality of the Other**

As we have seen, the discourses that we have examined stress the primacy of the other over against the self. The Caring perspective as elaborated by Nel Noddings posits a relational self in which our moral obligations are derived from the web of social relationships that characterize our lives. Although our obligations originate in the claims made upon us by others, Noddings nevertheless posits a reciprocal relation between self and other when she identifies the potential for mutuality as the criteria for arranging our caring commitments hierarchically. In other words, we should privilege those claims that originate from sources (i.e. proximate) where the potential for relationship is greatest. We have seen that this aspect of the theory has come under criticism, precisely because it reintroduces a calculation of self-interest (and thus excessive partiality?) that undermines the ethical primacy of the other.

Hans Loewald's developmental psychoanalytic account of subjectivity also stresses the primacy of the other over the self. We begin life as part of an undifferentiated infant-mother matrix, in which we have no experience of inside-outside, self-other, past-present-future, and so forth. As we develop we gradually begin to experience increased degrees of differentiation until such a time as we achieve a sense of self as distinct from others.

However, the original sense of unity never disappears entirely; rather, we strive to integrate that sense of (primary process) connectedness on increasingly complex (secondary process, differentiated) levels of complexity. The continuing existence of the primary process way of experiencing the world is attested to via the repetition-compulsion phenomenon, which manifests itself (often pathologically) within our everyday relationships and (therapeutically) within the transference relationship in the analytic context. Primary process ways of experiencing that have not been integrated into consciousness (i.e. into more complex psychological arrangements) are passively repeated, which is to say, acted out. As these experiences become integrated, they are actively repeated, which is to say, remembered. In stressing the terms active and passive repetition, Loewald frames the phenomenon within the volitional realm. As experiences that can be (potentially) brought under some measure of conscious control, we are responsible for them. On this reading, we are thus responsible even for choices that we did not make, i.e. for infantile ways of experiencing that we did not choose and yet which continue to shape our experiences.

These primary process experiences derive from our original connectedness with the other, and represent (and least with reference to our experience of being a distinct self) traces of an internal Other. They are traces in the sense that our experience of them is always oblique; they are revealed to us (if ever) only via their manifestation in our relations with others.

The ethical primacy of the other is central to Levinas's conception of subjectivity and to his identification of ethics as first philosophy. Like Loewald, Levinas identifies the irreducible other (i.e. the good-beyond-being) via the experiential traces that are left

behind via the (traumatic) encounter between self and human other. If our everyday consciousness is always consciousness *of something* (i.e. of some discreet content), then it is intentional. However, Levinas identifies examples of non-intentional consciousness (such as insomnia) that disrupt the self in its self-satisfaction and point toward the other. The experience of the command inherent in the face before me, to not let her die alone (which Levinas equates with the Biblical commandment, "Thou shalt not kill!") is a powerful signifier of this ethical relationship. The other is always before me, and the debt can never be fully paid.

### **A de-centered Self**

As we have seen, the various discourses that we have examined all posit a self that is, to varying degrees, no longer the primary locus of meaning. The (gendered) self of the feminist critique is inherently relational, and the attributes that were previously valorized via their association with the reason-centered "I" of humanism, have been identified as Patriarchal norms and re-situated within a plurality of (non-hierarchical) values. The caring perspective thus identifies a feeling (i.e. caring), rather than impartial reason, as the foundation for ethics. The postmodern critique posits a self that is so radically de-centered, that it is unclear how it can serve as the basis of its own critique, much less for a reason-centered ethics. Foucault's ethics of resistance refuses all attempts directed from without (or self-directed, however this is conceived, from within) to impose constraints on identity, preferring instead a vague notion of freedom and potentiality. On this



reading, we are always capable of being more than we believe ourselves to be. While Foucault directs his critique primarily toward the so-called psychiatric gaze and its corollaries (i.e. towards the other as the source of limitations on the self), his critique also mitigates our capacity to refuse the other. How can we privilege a self that is indefinable? How can we rely upon a rationality that is a contingent construct and the product of abusive power relationships, in order to mitigate the demands made upon us by others? While it is difficult to construct a coherent positive ethics that derives solely from the postmodern critique (those who argue that we should privilege marginalized discourses merely for their own sake have a lot of work to do), the critique is nevertheless crucial because it asks us to question that which has traditionally gone unquestioned (i.e. because it was regarded as natural or a Divine Verity and so forth). In deconstructing the tools (i.e. instrumental reason) with which philosophy has traditionally constrained the claims made upon the self by others, the postmodern critique clears the way for a potentially limitless responsibility towards the other.

We have seen that Loewald posits a dialectical relation between primary and secondary ways of experiencing, and in this way he removes the conception of a fully independent, reason-centered self from its place of prominence. In fact, he equates this form of reified, disconnected rationality with pathology, as when he says, “we know madness that is the madness of unbridled rationality.” What implications does Loewald’s de-centered conception of the self have for our notion of moral responsibility? For Loewald, our feelings of guilt and persecution derive from the psychic crimes of parricide and incest that inevitably accompany our development as a distinct self. As such, we, and we alone, are ultimately responsible for our own persecution, and the onus is on us to

“own up” (i.e. atone). This atonement entails a questioning of the self as a means of initiating the task of reconfiguring the relationship between primary and secondary ways of experiencing in novel (and generally more complex) ways. Perhaps it is in this sense that Levinas claims that we are even responsible for the persecution to which we are subjected at the hands of the other. As with Loewald, Levinas argues that we commit a crime simply by asserting ourselves as a distinct I, i.e. by claiming our place in the sun. This claiming of a separate space inevitably occurs at the expense of the other and thus constitutes a crime for which I must answer and atone. Levinas does not identify the superego as the locus of our feelings of guilt and persecution, for to do so would be to employ the language of the same (i.e. of systems) to speak of the irreducible other (i.e. the good-beyond-being). Nevertheless, what Levinas prescribes by way of owning up—an initial questioning of my right to be—recalls the displacement of the ego that is part-and-parcel of the analytic process.

There are, of course, important differences between the Loewaldian and Levinasian account of moral responsibility. If in the psychoanalytic context closure is always provisional—reification of the self/ego is not the therapeutic goal—therapy does, in most cases, come to a conclusion. This is not to say that the demands of the superego can ever be fully satisfied, but at a certain point separation from and renunciation of the analyst becomes possible and helpful. Hopefully, the (now former) analysand will no longer be inundated by feelings of persecution and guilt, but rather will have the tools to deal with such feelings in an authentic (and healthy) manner should they arise again.

No such goal is envisaged in the Levinasian account of moral responsibility. The ethical duties are endless and yet they cannot be deferred. The debt to the other can never be paid, and the only mitigating factor in the extent to which I subordinate myself, is the presence of the third (i.e. of more than one other person/neighbor). It is as though, using Loewald's psychoanalytic language, the demands of the superego can never be assuaged, and so we are engaged in a never-ending, yet futile, effort to minimize the damage. As the boat takes on water, the best that one can hope for is to continuously bail out water. The holes can never be filled, and so the ship will forever be on the verge of sinking. However, this is not a form of (endless) self-punishment that evades our having to own up and take responsibility, but rather the very essence of responsibility itself. How might we account for these differences in Loewald and Levinas's accounts? For Levinas, the ego is always and inevitably hateful. It does violence to the other by reducing it to the same, and is motivated solely by self-interest in the Darwinian sense. There is no dialectical relation for Levinas between self and other; there can only be a (inauthentic, hateful) relation of dominance or an ethical relation of absolute subordination. As we have seen, Loewald conceives of the self-other relation in dialectical terms. The successful integration of primary (as internal other) and secondary modes of mentation produces meaning in a life, thus potentially opening up a range of loving relationships with (external) others. For Levinas, love can only flourish when the self obeys the commandment inherent in the face before me ("thou shalt not kill!") to not allow the other to die alone.

Perhaps these differences might be attributed to the differences in emphasis in the Jewish philosophical and psychoanalytic discourses. A full examination of these differences lies outside the parameters of this project.

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