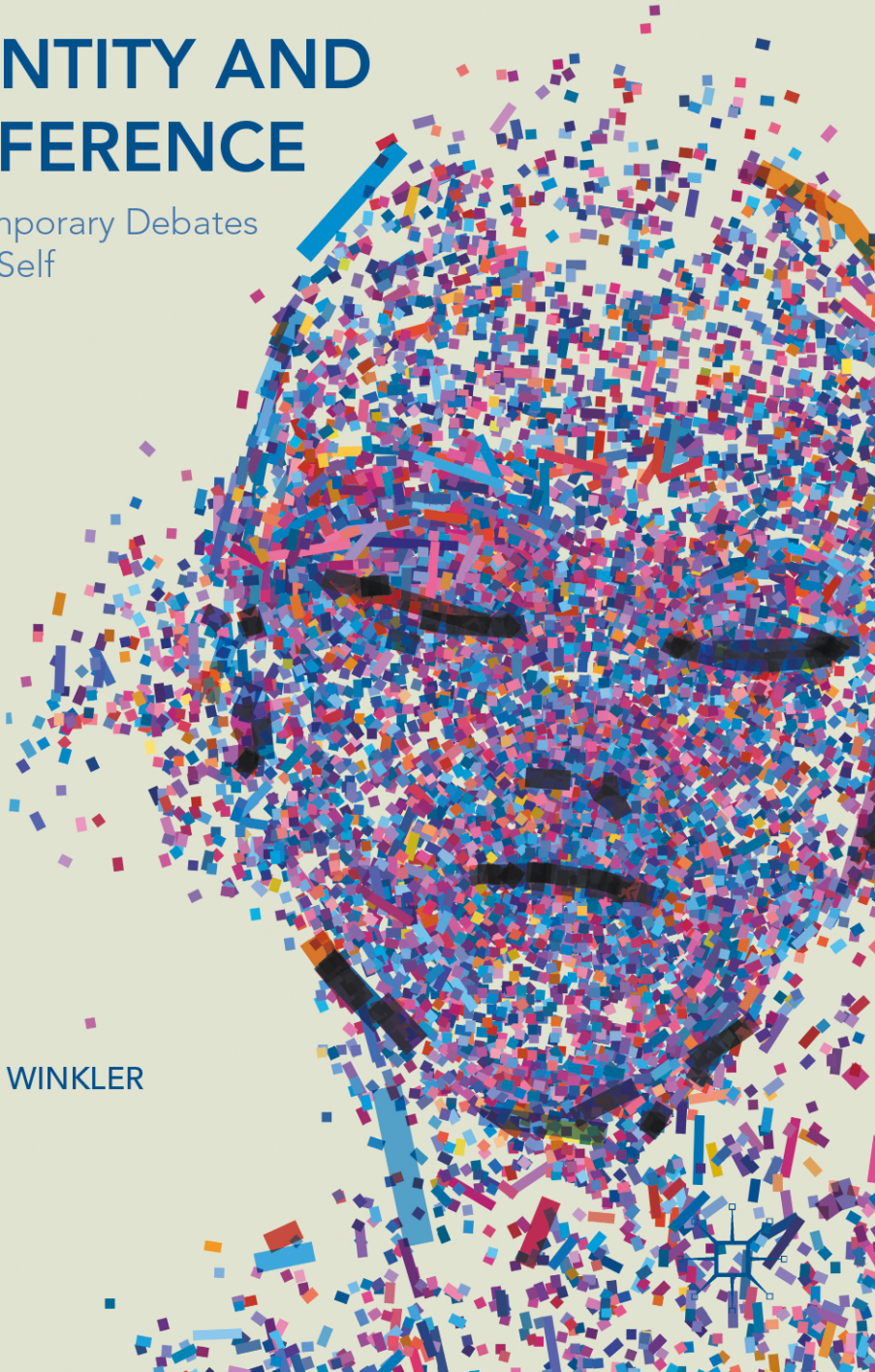
IDENTITY AND DIFFERENCE

Contemporary Debates on the Self



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Identity and Difference

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Contemporary Debates on the Self

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Reconsidering Identity and Difference in the Debate on the Self

The intellectual landscape of the humanities has since the 1960s been overshadowed by the question of identity and difference—political and national identity, ethnic and racial identity, gender identity and, in philosophy, the question of the identity of the self and of the knowing, acting and desiring subject. This is partly due to the social, cultural and political upheavals experienced in different parts of the globe at the time, for example, the movement of decolonization in sub-Saharan Africa, the Civil Rights Movement in the USA or second-wave feminism. It is also due to the emergence of a new intellectual orientation in French philosophy in the 1960s. Suspicious, on the one hand, of the claim made by the philosophies of the subject (particularly by existentialism and phenomenology) that the identity of the subject, although not given or natural, is self-constituted, and of the claim made by structuralism in linguistics, anthropology and psychoanalysis that there are invariable structures that govern human life, on the other, a certain unity of perspective or commonality of outlook emerged among various French thinkers such as Deleuze, Derrida and Foucault, to name but a few, which overturned one of the most long-standing beliefs in Western thought. This is that difference (or variation) is not to be derived from or understood on the basis of a prior identity (or structure) but, rather, that identity—whether the identity of a singular or collective subject, of the self or of a people—is a product of differential relations.

This shift of perspective has had significant implications in the discourse on the self, agency and subjectivity in narrative theory, phenomenology, personal identity theory, politics, anthropology, feminism, cultural, race and postcolonial studies. This book explores the contemporary effect of this shift of perspective in the debate on the self in four parts: Narrative Theory and Phenomenology; Politics, Authenticity and Agency; Feminism; and Race and the Postcolonial.

Part I of the book, Narrative Theory and Phenomenology, focuses on the contemporary discourse on the self in narrative theory and phenomenology. A brief glance at the discourse on the self in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries will quickly show that the 'self' is said and thought in many ways. For some, such as logical positivists, behaviourists and, more recently, eliminative materialists, the notion of the 'self' or 'person' (using these terms interchangeably for now) does not pick out a real category in the world and plays no role in the explanation of human nature. For more recent analytic philosophy, by contrast, personhood is recognized as being crucial for our social, moral and cultural life, and the person is regarded as having intrinsic worth. In addition, recent work in cognitive science has adopted the idea of the embodied, extended, embedded and enactive self, whereas phenomenology since Edmund Husserl, Max Scheler and Edith Stein has focused not only on the personal nature of the self but also on its historical and transcendental character. These multiple ways in which the concept of the self is used calls for an account of its historical origin and of the variation of its senses in the history of Western thought. This is the task that Dermot Moran undertakes in Chapter 1, 'The Personal Self in the Phenomenological Tradition'. Moran traces the development of the concept of the self and person from ancient Greek thought to Kant and beyond with a particular focus on the phenomenological tradition and narrative theory.

Narrative theories of personal identity standardly rely on the belief that there are good reasons for drawing comparisons between literary characters and persons. They draw such comparisons to illustrate their thesis that we constitute our personal identity through the narrative by which we understand ourselves. However, there has been a surge of criticisms in the past decade against making such comparisons. In his contribution to this volume, 'Persons, Characters, and the meaning of

"Narrative"', Alfonso Muñoz-Corcuera considers these criticisms and proposes a new defence of narrative theories of personal identity. David Mitchell tackles the problem of self-deception in 'What Does Self-Deception Tell Us About the Self? A Sartrean perspective'. This is a particularly vexing problem in psychology and phenomenology inasmuch as both disciplines sometimes rely on a common Cartesian heritage concerning the transparency of the mind or self-consciousness. Is it not the case that the self must know that it is deceiving itself about something? Must it not know that the lie it tells itself *is* a lie? How, then, is self-deception possible? Mitchell critically examines the Freudian and deflationary accounts of self-deception and shows them to be wanting. He turns to Sartre to account for the possibility of self-deception and argues that it reveals the self to be stranger than we tend to think.

The question concerning the nature of authenticity and agency in the context of political and ethical action and behaviour is currently a fiercely debated topic in the discourse on the self in both popular and academic literature. This is the theme of Part II. Such phrases as 'I wasn't myself' or the call 'Be yourself!' suggest that there is a difference between the 'I' and the 'self' and that in order to have an authentic relationship to oneself this internal difference must be eliminated. Indeed, is not authenticity in this sense at the heart of the political, moral and social doctrine of individualism? It is also apparent in Cartesian rationalism, particularly in the First Meditation of the *Meditations on First Philosophy* in which the reader is asked to withdraw from the authority of tradition and that of the senses in order to return to its true inner self, which is reason. In 'Being My-*Self*? Montaigne on Difference and Identity', Vincent Caudron turns to Michel de Montaigne and Pierre Charron to examine their account of authentic selfhood. Caudron argues that Montaigne's *Essays* and Charron's *On Wisdom* offer a particularly stringent critique of individualism (and of Cartesianism) in that the internal difference between the 'I' and the 'self' is not an obstacle to but a necessary condition for authenticity.

The question of authenticity is, in the conceptuality of Western thought, closely associated with the question of agency. What conditions must someone satisfy in order to count as an agent? Within the Kantian tradition, self-consciousness is typically understood as a capacity to be reflectively responsive to reasons and to have an objective self-conception, that is,

a self-narrative or practical identity in the world to which we commit ourselves. Working within this Kantian tradition, David Velleman and Christine Korsgaard both maintain that self-consciousness in this sense is a necessary and sufficient condition for agency. They distinguish this model of self-consciousness, which is specifically human, from first-personal awareness, which they believe can be ascribed to some non-human animals too. In 'Specifically Human? The Limited Conception of Self-Consciousness in Theories of Reflective Endorsement', Irene Bucelli questions this distinction between self-consciousness and first-personal awareness. Bucelli argues that first-personal awareness is already specifically human inasmuch as it involves a relation of self-reference (or a sense of ownership) that does not entail the objective notion of a person and that can also not be attributed to animals, and, moreover, that an objective self-conception is not simply added on to this specifically human first-personal awareness but, rather, that it thoroughly modifies it.

Authenticity and agency, which are two particular ways of thinking about the identity of the self—whether as something given or achieved, as something natural or self-posited—are in turn connected with the question of the identity of the human being. Is there an 'essence' to the human being? In other words, does philosophical anthropology have a stable, identifiable, invariably fixed object of study? In 'Making the Case for Political Anthropology: Understanding and Resolving the Backlash Against Liberalism', Rockwell F. Clancy analyses the contemporary backlash against multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism and, more generally, inclusive liberal values—visible, for instance, in forms of political conservatism and religious fundamentalism. This backlash, Clancy argues, can be understood as resulting from the abandonment of a philosophico-political anthropology by liberalism, that is, of a determinate conception of human nature and, correlatively, of the human good or the good life for man. Yet is it possible, indeed, is it even desirable to operate without a conception of human nature and of the human good in political theory? Clancy demonstrates that it is neither possible nor desirable. He proposes a conception of a philosophico-political anthropology that develops an account of the relations between the individual and the community that are characterized not by the exclusive particularism of fundamentalism and conservatism but, rather, by the inclusive particularism characteristic of the

materialist doctrines of Spinoza, Deleuze and Latour among others. A materialist and non-essentialist conception of human nature, in other words, might help resolve the backlash against liberalism and serve as a critical foundation and instrument for progressive political theories.

Part III turns to feminism, the field that without doubt has been the most responsive to the shift of outlook experienced in the late 1960s in the humanities, notably, the prioritization of difference over identity in the discourse on the (gendered) subject. Post-structuralist authors such as Derrida, Deleuze, Foucault, Lyotard and others have each in their own unique way demonstrated the limited, conditioned if not fictitious nature of the modern (Kantian) notion of the subject conceived as a sovereign, self-unifying subject that legislates to itself norms of truth and action. This notion of the subject has proven to be inadequate in the face of the experience of our subjectivity that has come to mark our 'postmodernity'. This is an experience of being decentred rather than unified, of heteronomy rather than of autonomy, an experience of our subjectivity as being in flux. In 'The Decentred Autonomous Subject', Kathy Butterworth considers the effects of this critical appraisal of the modern subject by post-structuralism for feminism. Butterworth contends that it has given rise, on the one hand, to an anti-essentialist thinking in feminist theory, something that ought to be preserved, yet, on the other, this critique has also given rise to a celebration of the fragmented self, which raises serious psychological and political concerns for feminism. In the first place, some post-structuralist authors for whom the fragmented self constitutes a positive and normative model generally tend to underestimate the real psychological costs on people who suffer from psychotic disorders such as schizophrenia, people who suffer from a fragmentation of self. It is also, in the second place, not always clear how such a model can be used to challenge the oppressive structures of patriarchy and capitalism. To this end, Butterworth considers Ricoeur's model of the subject, which, she argues, retains the central insights of the post-structuralist critique of the modern subject whilst being responsive to the psychological costs on people who suffer from a fragmentation of selfhood. She argues that this model can best serve as a critical tool for feminist theory.

Another key concern in feminist theory is the differential power of the erotic, understood as the necessary condition of possibility of the body's

ambiguous nature, its being at once an object for others and a subject for itself. In 'Exploring Rape as an Attack on Erotic Goods', Louise du Toit argues that patriarchy appropriates the healing, constructive, and liberating power of the erotic through perversions and distortions, through mystifications and phantasies such as the idea that it is necessary to 'overcome' one's flesh in order to be an authentic subject. Du Toit considers this in the context of the question of what is sexual about sexual violence, how a sexual attack differs from non-sexual forms of physical attacks. She argues that the patriarchal framing of sexual attacks not only reduces the human erotic to sexuality; it also robs the victims of sexual attacks of the subjectivity of their body.

In the wake of Luce Irigaray's work on sexuate difference and intersubjectivity, a key issue in feminist theory has been whether an ethics of sexual difference in the current global context is possible. Can a universal, and not simply a local or context-dependent, ethics of sexual difference be articulated? In 'Making Mischief: Thinking Through Women's Solidarity and Sexuate Difference with Luce Irigaray and Gayatri Spivak', Laura Roberts considers these questions. She analyses how Spivak has mobilized Irigaray's work on sexuate difference to address women's solidarity and teases out what this might suggest about the possibility of cross-cultural communication between and among women.

Part IV turns to the question of identity and difference in the discourse on the self in the context of race and postcolonial studies. In 'The "Africanness" of white South Africans?', Sharli Paphitis and Lindsay-Ann Kelland explore the way South African philosophers have started to pay attention to whiteness, 'whiteliness' and the role of white South Africans in political processes and transformation in South Africa. In particular, they examine the questioning of Africanness on the part of white South Africans, and hence with the way white South Africans have been dealing with the question of belonging to and of being at home in their South African environment. In 'Alterity, Identity, and Racial Difference in Levinas', Louis Blond critically assesses the charges that have been brought against Levinas' philosophy and ethics of alterity by some of the scholarship in postcolonial theory and identity politics. Postcolonial theory claims that Levinas' deployment of alterity

suppresses the materiality and historicity of social and political others and in so doing denies the ethnic and racial makeup—the embodiment—of other identities. Louis examines Levinas' understanding of alterity and identity and considers the claim that Levinas' philosophical position licenses the subdual of racial and ethnic difference.

Johannesburg, South Africa Rafael Winkler

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This book is dedicated to the two centres of gravity in my life, Mira and Salomé, to whom I owe more than I am capable of giving.

Contents

Part I Narrative Theory and Phenomenology

1 The Personal Self in the Phenomenological Tradition 3
Dermot Moran

2 Persons, Characters and the Meaning of 'Narrative' 37
Alfonso Muñoz-Corcuera

3 What Does Self-Deception Tell Us About the Self? A Sartrean Perspective 63
David Mitchell

Part II Politics, Authenticity, and Agency

4 Being My-*Self*? Montaigne on Difference and Identity 89
Vincent Caudron

5 Specifically Human? The Limited Conception of Self-Consciousness in Theories of Reflective Endorsement 105
Irene Bucelli

6 Making the Case for Political Anthropology: Understanding and Addressing the Backlash Against Liberalism 129
Rockwell F. Clancy

Part III Feminism

7 The Decentred Autonomous Subject 155
Kathy Butterworth

8 Exploring Rape as an Attack on Erotic Goods 177
Louise du Toit

9 Making Mischief: Thinking Through Women's Solidarity and Sexuate Difference with Luce Irigaray and Gayatri Spivak 201
Laura Roberts

Part IV Race and the Postcolonial

10 The 'Africanness' of White South Africans? 235
Sharli Paphitis and Lindsay-Ann Kelland

11 Identity, Alterity and Racial Difference in Levinas 259
Louis Blond

Index 283

Part I

Narrative Theory and Phenomenology

1

The Personal Self in the Phenomenological Tradition

Dermot Moran

1.1 Introduction: Self and Person in Contemporary Philosophical Discussion

The interrelated concepts of 'self' and 'person' have long traditions within Western philosophy, and both have re-emerged, after a period of neglect, as central topics in contemporary cognitive sciences and philosophy of mind and action.[1] The concepts of 'self' and 'person' are intimately related, overlap on several levels and are often used interchangeably. While some philosophers (in the past and at present) seek

[1] Earlier versions of this chapter were given as an invited lecture in Huazhong University of Science and Technology (HUST), Wuhan, People's Republic of China (12 December 2015); as an Invited Lecture to the Institute of Philosophy, Russian Academy of the Sciences, Moscow (21 November 2014) and as the Plenary Address to the Irish Philosophical Society 'Futures of Phenomenology' Annual Conference, University College Galway (7 March 2010).

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to separate them quite sharply,[2] here I will treat being a self (with some degree of self-awareness) as at least a necessary element of being a person in the full sense. The phenomenological tradition, which is the specific focus of this chapter, tends to treat the person as the full, concrete, embodied and historically and socially embedded subject, engaged in social relations with other subjects, and does not treat the person as a primarily 'forensic' conception (as a legal or moral appellation), as in the tradition of John Locke. For this reason, I will speak primarily of the 'personal self' in the phenomenological tradition and will not attempt to distinguish between selfhood and personhood (much of the debate about the distinction, which is outside the limits of this chapter, turns on the limits of personhood—when one becomes a person or if one can, while still living, no longer be a person).

Earlier twentieth-century movements, such as behaviourism (e.g. operant conditioning with its denial of free will; Skinner 1974), logical atomism (Russell 1956), logical positivism (Ayer 1952), linguistic behaviourism (Ryle 1949) or, more recently, eliminative materialism (Churchland 2011), or even forms of cognitive science that focus on *sub-personal* systems only (the very term 'sub-personal' is indicative of an explanatory gap), have all been reluctant to acknowledge the reality and importance of selves and persons (see Metzinger 2009, 'the myth of self'). The Churchlands, for instance, with their eliminative materialism, have proclaimed that 'person' does not identify a real category in the world and plays no role in final explanation of human behaviour. Similarly, Richard Dawkins has written:

> Each of us humans knows that the illusion of a single agent sitting somewhere in the middle of the brain is a powerful one. (Dawkins 1998: 283–284)

Recent analytic philosophy (Williams 1973; Sturma 1997; Wilkes 1988; Baker 2013) has recovered some ground and displays a growing

[2] Eric Olson, in the entry on 'Personal Identity' in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, claims he will speak only of personal identity as self 'often means something different: some sort of immaterial subject of consciousness, for instance'.

recognition that personhood is crucial for human social, moral and cultural life and that persons must be regarded as intrinsically valuable and worthy of respect and protection of their dignity. Lynne Rudder Baker (2000; 2007; 2013), with her 'constitution' view, is perhaps the leading analytic exponent of the reality of persons. She argues that persons come into existence gradually and are constituted in social interaction but these facts do not mean that one cannot draw an ontological distinction between persons and other kinds of material entity. Persons, for her, have ontological distinctness (based in part on their capacity for saying 'I'). Baker writes:

> What distinguishes person from other primary kinds (like planet or human organism) is that persons have first-person perspectives necessarily. (Baker 2007: 68)

She continues:

> The first-person perspective is a very peculiar ability that all and only persons have. It is the ability to conceive of oneself as oneself, from the inside, as it were. (Baker 2007: 69)

Discussions of personhood have also recently emerged in the cognitive sciences (Gallagher 2000; Ikäheimo & Laitinen 2007; Farah & Heberlein 2007), with the adoption of the *embodied, extended, embedded* and *enactive* ('the four Es') self in a social world (a conception that has already been in discussion, as we shall see, in phenomenology since the first decades of the twentieth century). Cognitive scientists talk of the 'extended mind' (Menary 2010; Clark & Chalmers 1998) or 'leaky mind' (Clark 1998), whereby mind must be understood with reference both to body and world ('embodied and embedded'; Haugeland 1998). Certainly, recent philosophy of mind and cognitive science recognizes the importance of *embodiment* as a necessary condition for conscious subjectivity, expressive emotion and personhood (Clark 1998; Thompson &Varela 2000; Shapiro 2004; Gallagher 2005). More generally, there is an emphasis on links between cognition and its embodied engagement with its environment (including other subjects—social cognition). These ideas of

embodied and situated cognition, now popular in cognitive science, have a longer history in the phenomenological tradition (Thompson and Varela 2000; Gallagher 2005). These analytic re-appropriations of phenomenology's discoveries, however, still neglect the intrinsic subjective and intersubjective points of view and more generally the manner in which human beings weave the narrative history of their lives. Some argue that selfhood is deeper than personhood, that there is a 'core' or 'minimal self' (Zahavi 2005 and 2007; Strawson 2009), a consciousness of oneself as an immediate subject of experience. This minimal self involves little more than a pre-reflective self-awareness and the more fully fledged 'narrative self' or 'extended self' is founded on this minimal self (Damasio 1999).

Having some kind of conscious self that persists through time is often seen as being a necessary condition of personhood. Contemporary analytic philosophy, especially in the work of David Wiggins (2001), has revived a number of Lockean arguments regarding personal identity. This Lockean tradition has been challenged by hermeneutic thinkers such as Charles Taylor (1989), who, following Hans-Georg Gadamer, describes persons as requiring 'answerability' and who can give some kind of narrative shape to their lives.

Another important contemporary approach, alongside the Neo-Lockean persistence notion, reformulates the traditional criterion of rationality by describing human persons as possessing the power for second-order representations or *metarepresentation*, that is, the capacity to *represent* their representations, for example, to consider certain states as *having been* theirs ('I was in pain yesterday'). The latter example involves adopting a complex temporal stance towards one's cognitive states, something perhaps unavailable to creatures lacking language abilities. This view, often understood more generally as the capacity for *metarepresentation* (Sperber 2000), has been the subject of much critical discussion. Most notably, the American philosopher Harry Frankfurt (1988) has proffered the influential claim that human persons are capable not just of wants and desires but also of higher-order or *second-order* desires about their desires (I can desire to curb my desire for cigarettes). Frankfurt claims the capacity to form higher-order desires is adequate to distinguish persons from non-persons (Frankfurt 1988).

In light of these many and quite diverse contemporary approaches, and in order to situate the phenomenological approach to the person and the self, it is necessary to begin with a brief review of self and person in the history of philosophy.

1.2 Self and Person in the History of Western Philosophy

Debates about the existence and nature of the self are as old as philosophy itself, with the denial of the existence of the self, a recurrent theme, for instance, in ancient Indian Buddhist thought (*anatta*, or the 'no-self' doctrine; Perrett 2016: 184–87). Similarly, in ancient Greek philosophy, there was a long tradition of discussion over the meaning of the Delphic injunction to 'know yourself' (*gnōthi seauton*), which, according to Plato, governed Socrates' life mission (Annas 1985). Among the Stoics, for instance, self-knowledge took the form of knowing that human beings are part of the material cosmos but are unique in having a rational nature (Gill 2006; Brouwer 2013). It is not always clear, however, that ancient philosophers thought of self-knowledge as knowledge of a *self* (understood as something like a stable Cartesian ego) and there have been lively debates about when the concept of self emerged (Sorabji 2006), with some pointing to St. Augustine's discussions of inner life (Taylor 1989) and especially his *Confessions*, which is sometimes regarded as the first autobiography. Certainly, the *Confessions* is a meditation that offers *both* self-examination and self-renewal (Taylor 1989; Marion 2012).

The concept of the person, like that of the self, is an ancient concept, although its provenance cannot be straightforwardly traced back to classical Greek philosophy; rather, it has its origins at the turn of the first millennium. The concept of 'person' (Latin: *persona* from the Greek πρόσωπον meaning 'face' 'visage' and referring to masks worn by theatre actors) first emerged in the context of Roman Law (distinguishing persons in their own right from slaves who were under the right of another), Alexandrine grammar (number, e.g. first, second, third person) and early Latin Christian theology (defining the three 'persons' to be found in the one God; see Kobusch 1997; de Vogel 1963; Carruthers et al. 1985).

Ancient accounts of personhood as found, for instance, in the Stoic Panaitios of Rhodes (as reported in Cicero's *De Officiis* I §§30–32) tend to emphasize the rational character of the human person, free will, the unique individuality of persons and also their historical contingency (Haardt & Plotnikov 2008: 30). The standard definition of the person is to be found in Boethius' *Contra Eutychen et Nestorium* (Boethius 1918), where it occurs in a theological (Christological) context: a person is 'an individual substance of a rational nature' (*naturæ rationalis individua substantia*; Koterski 2004). Boethius' concept of the person, with its concepts of *substantiality*, *rationality* and *individuality,* had a huge influence on Thomas Aquinas and the Middle Ages generally.

In European philosophy in the modern period, discussions of the self and its self-identity are usually traced back to Descartes's rediscovery (but see Dupré 1993) of the *cogito ergo sum* (a reworking of St. Augustine's *si fallor sum*). Descartes characterized the 'soul' or 'mind' (*mens*) as an *ego cogito* that is able to achieve self-conscious recognition not only of its own existence but also of its nature or essence. Through a direct non-sensible, rational intuition of ourselves, we are able to deduce many truths, including that the essential nature of the ego is *res cogitans*, thinking substance, that it is essentially thinking, finite, fallible, contains representations, has sensation and memory, and so on. Descartes claims, on the basis of direct, introspective self-evidence, that he can know with certainty that he is a being who cannot know everything, who is finite, and hence fallible, who is essentially independent of extended reality, and so on. This mind is not a body but is connected with a body which can influence it. Descartes concentrated largely on the self's sensory, rational and volitional nature, but he later discussed, in his *Les passions de l'âme* (*Passions of the Soul* 1649, Descartes 1985), the affective and emotional layers of the self ('the passions') as it is influenced by bodily disturbances. Descartes, however, does not discuss the concept of the 'person' as such, which is primarily introduced by Locke.

John Locke, especially in 'Of identity and diversity', Chapter 27 of Book 2 of his *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (added to the second edition of that work in 1694 on the recommendation of his friend and fellow philosopher William Molyneux, Locke 1975: 328–348), combines his discussion of the self and self-identity ('the sameness of a

rational Being') with his discussion of the value of the person, which he regards as a legal or 'Forensick Term' (Locke 1975: 346).

Reacting to Locke and Berkeley, David Hume famously denied that there was any encounter with the self in experience. In the section entitled 'Of personal identity' in his *A Treatise on Human Nature* (Hume 1978), he wrote:

> For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe anything but the perception. (Hume 1978: 252)

For Hume, there was no 'impression' of self that 'continued invariably the same, thro' the whole course of our lives' (Hume 1978: 251) that could give rise to a real idea of self as an identical and simple entity that perdured beneath our experiences. For Hume, for instance, when one is asleep, there is clearly no self. Thus he concludes, in this section, that 'the rest of mankind' (excluding metaphysicians who think they can perceive an enduring self) 'are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions'. He goes on to invoke his familiar image of the mind as a theatre where impressions make their appearance and disappear again. There are only perceptions; there is not even a theatre as a place where those perceptions take place (Hume 1978: 253). To be fair, Hume then goes on to distinguish between personal identity as experienced in thought and personal identity as regards our 'passions or the concern we take in ourselves' (Hume 1978: 253). In this section, however, he goes on to dismiss worries about personal identity 'as grammatical rather than as metaphysical difficulties' (Hume 1978: 262). Identity comes at best from the manner ideas cohere with one another and form at least the appearance of a continuous stream.

Alfred Jules Ayer endorsed this Humean conception of the self in Chapter 7, 'The self and the common world', of his *Language, Truth and Logic* (Ayer 1952: 120–133). He writes:

> For it is still fashionable to regard the self as a substance. But when one comes to enquire into the nature of this substance, one finds that it is an

> altogether unobservable entity. . . . The existence of such an entity is completely unverifiable. (Ayer 1952: 126)

Ayer himself professes able to solve Hume's worries about identity by saying that the identity of the self is simply bodily identity, here to be understood in terms of 'the resemblance and continuity of sense contents'. One remains the same (even with memory loss) if one continues to have sense contents. How these sense contents are to be identified as belonging to the *same* subject experiencing them is of course left unexamined in Ayer's account.

Despite the scepticism of Hume, the European Enlightenment (especially Kant) established a new universal vision of persons as free, *rational* agents. Persons are understood as individuals, as wholes, as free agents, as rational and as worthy of infinite respect. In his *Critique of Practical Reason,* Kant claims the origin of duty lies in the 'person' defined as 'nothing else than . . . the freedom and independence from the mechanism of nature regarded as a capacity of a being subject to special laws (pure practical laws given by its own reason), so that the person belonging to the world of sense is subject to his own personality as far as he belongs to the intelligible world' (Kant 1997: 74). For Kant, persons belong to two worlds. They must be treated as ends in themselves because we must respect them as free and rational and not constrained by their embodiment in the world of nature. Kant writes in the *Groundwork*: 'rational beings . . . are called persons because their nature already marks them out as ends in themselves, i.e., as something that may not be used merely as means, hence to that extent limits all arbitrary choice (and is an object of respect)' (Kant 2002a: 46). To be a person is to be a moral agent and to be answerable to standards or norms one has set oneself. For Kant, the person is that subject who is accountable for his or her actions. Contemporary analytic philosophers tend to continue this tradition of seeing 'person' as a moral or legal notion. One is a person insofar as one is a moral agent or deserving of dignity and respect. Galen Strawson, similarly, claims that Locke's concept of person has to be understood more or less as the moral actions we lay claim to (Strawson 2011).

In the *Critique of Pure Reason* (Kant 1998), Kant primarily treats the 'I' as a condition of experience that cannot itself be experienced. He writes in

the B-edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* that the 'I think must be able to accompany all my representations' (B131/132, Kant 1998: 246). This I think is a matter not of sensibility but of spontaneity and Kant calls it 'pure apperception' or the 'transcendental unity of self-consciousness'. It is, for Kant, an objective condition of all cognition (B138, Kant 1998: 249–250). Kant distinguishes sharply between the empirical manner in which I appear to myself and this transcendental source of unity of apperception:

> . . . in the synthetic original unity of apperception, I am conscious of myself not as I appear to myself, nor **as** I am in myself, but only **that** I am. This representation is a **thinking** not an **intuiting**. (B157, Kant 1998: 259)

There is, in agreement with Hume, no *experience* of the pure I; the 'I think' is rather as Kant says 'the form of apperception on which every experience depends' (A354, Kant 1998: 419)

For Kant, contra Hume, the subject, then, is a logical substratum; a '(merely logical) unity' (Kant 1998: A 355–356), and Kant refers to it as a 'logical ego' or 'logical I' (Kant 1998: A 355, B 428). Thinking does not, for Kant, represent this logical subject as an appearance (Kant 1998: B428). Max Scheler takes issue with Kant concerning his conception of the flow of consciousness and its relation to the person. Against Kant, who thought of an ego as merely 'interconnection of experience in time' attached to the idea of a 'merely logical subject', Scheler maintains that experiences are always belonging to someone and it is only by abstraction that we can talk of experiences as such (Scheler 1973: 377). In his 1927 lectures, *Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (Heidegger 1982), Heidegger comments on this in an interesting manner:

> 'The ego is a logical ego' does not mean for Kant, as it does for Rickert, an ego that is logically conceived. It means instead that the ego is subject of the *logos*, hence of thinking; the ego is the ego as the 'I combine' which lies at the basis of all thinking. (Heidegger 1982: 130)

Kant writes in his 1793/1804 essay *What Real Progress Has Metaphysics Made in Germany since the Time of Leibniz and Wolff?*:

> That I am conscious of myself is a thought that already contains a twofold self, the I as subject and the I as object. . . . But a double personality is not

> meant by this double I. Only the I that I think and intuit is a person; the I that belongs to the object that is intuited by me is, similarly to other objects outside me, a thing. (Kant 2002: 362)

These potent remarks in fact closely resemble the position that Husserl will adopt, as we shall see later. He too will see the person as having a natural and a transcendental dimension and recognize the crucial capacity of the self to engage in 'self-splitting' (*Ichspaltung*) so that it can come to view itself as agent of its own deeds, author of its own judgements and is formed by its own 'position-takings'. For both Kant and Husserl, the capacity of a human being to have a self-representation is central to being a person. Right at the start of his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798), Kant declares:

> The fact that man can have the representation 'I,' elevates him infinitely above all the other beings living on earth. By virtue of this he is a *person*; and by virtue of his unity of consciousness through all the changes he may undergo, he is one and the same person, i.e., a being completely different in rank and dignity from *things*. . . . (Kant 2006: 15)

An ego by its capacity to represent itself to itself is thereby a person. It is because an ego can represent itself that it is capable of holding itself up to a norm; it is capable of acting according to laws it applies to itself. Kant writes in his *The Metaphysics of Morals* (*Die Metaphysik der Sitten*):

> But man regarded as a *person*—that is, as the subject of morally practical reason—is exalted above any price, for as such (*homo noumenon*) he is not to be valued as a mere means to the ends of others or even to his own ends, but as an end in himself. (Kant 1996: 189).

Persons in the Kantian tradition are complex entities, both beings in nature causally connected with the natural world, but also beings of freedom and reason, ends in themselves, of infinite value, and deserving of respect. For Kant, the person is both a sensible and a rational being.

Let us now turn to the phenomenological tradition, which will develop many of these Kantian insights in a new register and greatly fleshes out the notions of person and self.

1.3 The Phenomenological Tradition

The phenomenological tradition has much to say about both selfhood and personhood, but, despite this rich tradition, its contribution has been relatively neglected until recently, partly because its accounts are complex and often cast in a deeply technical language. In what follows, I shall base my phenomenological account of personhood primarily on the writings of Edmund Husserl, but also include insights drawn from some of the more neglected figures of the phenomenological movement, especially Max Scheler (1973) and Edith Stein (1989; 2000). I will conclude with a brief discussion of narrative conceptions of the self as found in the tradition of Paul Ricoeur, Charles Taylor, Hans-Georg Gadamer and others (and versions of which can be found also in Daniel C. Dennett's 'multiple-drafts' conception of consciousness; Dennett 1990) in comparison with the phenomenological approach.

Broadly speaking, the phenomenological approach challenges narrowly objectivist, naturalistic, reductionist or eliminative accounts of selfhood and personhood currently predominant in contemporary philosophy and in the cognitive sciences. The phenomenological approach begins from the understanding of concrete human experiences and how subjects grasp themselves as meaningful intentional agents. In contrast, objectivist and naturalistic approaches (an exception is Lynne Rudder Baker's 'constitutionalism'; Baker 2013) tend not to appreciate the subject as a first-person meaning-intender who is living a life that has significance for him/her, interwoven with the lives of others who are co-intending collective and public meanings and establishing an intersubjective community of persons. Persons have at least some minimal sense of their life trajectory in *history*, a sense of the past and, at some level, a capacity also for a meaningful future, which matters to them.

For phenomenology, moreover, the essential embodiment of the self (in contrast to immaterialist conceptions) emphasizes human situatedness (in space and time), limitation and finitude, and restriction of perspective (occupying a particular standpoint). To be a self is to occupy a point of view that is necessarily limited and partial but which is also, necessarily, thereby aware of other possible perspectives and points of

view. According to the phenomenological perspective, the living, embodied being is, at the very least, sentient, feels, enjoys and suffers, and acts in such a way that he or she is constantly *making sense* of his or her life *from a first-person perspective* (Moran 2000). Living a conscious life as a person cannot be thought of as an impersonal process that can be studied in an entirely objective, 'third person' manner. Human conscious life involves an ineliminable first-person perspective.

One must begin from the primary datum of the first-person experience of living through a meaningful life which aims at wholeness or integrity, while being temporal, finite, suffering, emotional and so on (see Heidegger 1962). Furthermore, while persons ideally *aim* at rationality, they are not *explicitly* rational. There is a deep affective core to the person; persons are primarily feeling, emotional, acting and suffering beings, who share this felt world with other persons and whose environment supports and reflects this felt condition. The phenomenological tradition maintains that emotions can be framed and coloured by *moods* that are not just pervasive in the whole person but affect and filter the manner in which the person interacts with his or her surrounding world. It is not easy to articulate the phenomenological sense of the self as intentional, purposive and as meaning-constituting or disclosing but one useful description has been supplied by Robert Sokolowski (2008), who characterizes persons as 'agents of truth' and of disclosure. The self is a meaning-weaving agent whose comportment in an already meaningful world gives it the sense of being a discloser or manifester of that world.

1.4 The Mature Husserl's Concept of the Personal Self

One of the problems reading Husserl, Scheler and Stein on the phenomenology of personhood is that they employ a range of familiar terms (soul, the psychic, personhood, the spiritual ego), but in unfamiliar ways. Stein and Husserl, for instance, distinguish between what is 'psychic' and what is 'personal' in the strict sense. Certain personal attributes (e.g. readiness to make sacrifices), although perceivable in action by others, belong

to the spiritual core of the person and are sharply different from psychic feelings and emotions. For Scheler, all mind is personal and the idea of an impersonal mind is absurd (Scheler 1973: 389).

There is another complication in talking about a phenomenological account of the self, even in Husserl, leaving aside the extra complexity introduced by Heidegger's new terminology of Dasein with its Self-being (*Selbstsein*). Husserl initially rejected the Kantian transcendental conception of the self. In his *Logical Investigations* (Husserl 2001), he more or less took over from the Brentano of *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* (1874) a somewhat Humean conception of the self as merely a bundle or 'collection' of lived experiences and even reports that he cannot find anything like the kind of 'pure ego' or 'the ego of pure apperception' found in the Neo-Kantians. All he can find is 'the empirical ego and its empirical relations to its own experiences, or to such external objects as are receiving special attention at the moment, while much remains, whether "without" or "within", which has no such relation to an ego' (Husserl 2001 vol. 1: 92). Husserl rejected Paul Natorp's Neo-Kantian account of the ego as always subject and never object. For Natorp, the ego as such cannot be further described since all forms of description are objectifications of the ego. Husserl ends up claiming that we perceive the ego in our daily experience 'just as we perceive the external thing' (Husserl 2001, vol. 1: 93) but denies something like a pure ego. However, by 1913, Husserl famously reported that he had now found this elusive pure ego. In the 1913 revised second edition of the *Logical Investigations,* he is more appreciative of 'the pure ego' (*das reine Ich*) of the Neo-Kantians (adverting particularly to Natorp), which he had originally dismissed as an unnecessary postulate for the unification of consciousness (see 'The Pure Ego and Awareness' [*Das reine Ich und die Bewussheit*], Husserl 2001, vol. 1: 91n.). From 1913 onwards, Husserl comes to embrace the Neo-Kantian conception of the transcendental ego which he will characterize as the source of all 'meaning and being' (*Sinn und Sein*) in his *Cartesian Meditations* (Husserl 1967). Husserl is interested in the manner in which human subjects are not just isolated transcendental egos but also intersect with one another to create the cultural and historical lifeworld. Husserl is particularly interested in the manner in which being a self means *having a history*, which is a much richer concept than merely having continued extension over a period of time.

A very rich phenomenological concept of personhood is developed in Husserl's *Ideas* II (Husserl 1989), unpublished during his life, but edited by his then assistant Edith Stein. It is also taken up in Edith Stein's doctoral thesis *On the Problem of Empathy* (Stein 1989) and in her subsequent important and neglected study, *Contributions to the Philosophical Foundation of Psychology and the Human Sciences*, published in Husserl's own *Jahrbuch* in 1922, and recently translated as *Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities* (Stein 2000). Husserl, in particular, in his *Ideas* II (which was heavily edited by his then assistant Edith Stein), recognizes that humans are first and foremost engaged in a 'personalistic attitude' (*die personalistische Einstellung*) towards themselves and others. Husserl writes:

> [The personalistic attitude is] the attitude we are always in when we live with one another, talk to one another, shake hands with another in greeting, or are related to another in love and aversion, in disposition and action, in discourse and discussion. (Husserl 1989: 192)

The personalistic attitude is, for Husserl, actually prior to the more familiar 'natural attitude' (*die natürliche Einstellung*).

Phenomenology recognizes that one starts from a certain assumption of normality or optimality, conditions set by the 'lifeworld' (Husserl 1970). It is only by beginning with the optimal or 'normal' situations that we can move to understand situations that depart from the norm (see Merleau-Ponty 1962). Self-aware rational agency, the traditional paradigm, sets a very high standard achievable by some but not all persons, for instance, very young children, persons with dementia and so on. Personhood must also be accorded to selves that reach some *minimal* level of capacity for selfhood and functioning as investing their lives with significance for themselves.

Phenomenology recognizes that persons are in part *constituted through their emotions* and feelings and the manner in which they express themselves by acting meaningfully. The person is primarily a loving heart, as Scheler characterizes it. One's whole experiential world is presented and filtered through emotions and moods (Heidegger 1962). Indeed, human emotions (anxiety, shame, love) have been long explored

in depth by classical phenomenology, often drawing on art and literature, whereas traditional philosophy of mind, partly because of its natural scientific paradigms for explanation, have tended (with a few important exceptions, e.g. Goldie) to overlook the manner moods and emotions are interwoven with our sensory and cognitive lives and are very much part of human rationality. Emotions are not just felt by and expressed in the body (e.g. facial expressions, smiling) but the whole body is *inhabited* emotionally: for example, the whole body can be tense; a way of walking can be nervous and so on. One's emotions also colour one's thoughts and judgements. While the cognitive sciences are again interested in emotions (Prinz 2003; Goldie 2000), suppressed for many years by mechanistic and behaviourist approaches, they often acknowledge their lack of precise descriptive characterizations of emotions, moods and feelings and furthermore are not able to handle the relations between moods and the overall lifeworld. Here the phenomenological tradition provides a rich repository of analyses. Key phenomenological insights that can be utilized effectively in philosophy of mind include emotions are intentional (i.e. object-directed), not private but world-disclosing, often intrinsically intersubjective (gratitude, shame, envy are other-related or other-involving). These insights challenge overly narrow approaches to emotion and help understand certain conditions, for example, autism, which are often externally described as involving deficiencies in emotion ('emotional flatness').

Phenomenology, as we have seen, begins from embodiment. Husserl insists that conscious, subjective life is necessarily embodied. This, for him, was an a priori, eidetic truth. Furthermore, although he regularly uses Kantian and Cartesian language of the 'I think', for him, the pure I—the I of transcendental apperception—is not, as he puts it, a 'dead pole of identity', it is a living self, a stream that is constantly 'appearing for itself' (*als Für-sich-selbst-erscheinens*, Husserl 1965: 189). It is simply, in the Hegelian language Husserl also employs, a 'for itself' (*für sich*).

Husserl's approach to the self is very complicated and multilayered. The mature Husserl was undoubtedly influenced by the Kantian (and Neo-Kantian) conceptions of the self as person understood as an autonomous (giving the law to itself), rational agent, but Husserl never suggests that the person is *purely* a rational subject. At the centre of the person, for Husserl,

is a *drive* for reason, but it is a drive sitting upon many other affective and embodied elements, including drives, 'strivings', passively being drawn to things and so on. Beginning from the life in the womb, there is a first-person subjective consciousness that is not yet an ego. It is driven by drives and interested and can properly be described as 'pre-personal' or as a 'pre-ego' (*Vor-Ich*). With regard to the adult, mature human being, he recognizes that the self is free to take positions, to occupy stances, to make decisions that become part of the subject's abiding character. For Husserl, the capacity for 'position-taking' (*Stellungnehmen*) is central to the self. This involves the capacity for uniquely personal acts, what Husserl often calls 'I-Thou acts' (*Ich-Du-Akte*, XXVII 22), following the tradition of Hermann Cohen. Husserl speaks of 'self-willing' and 'self-formation' (*Selbstgestaltung*). It is through the accumulation of position-takings that the self is formed as a personal agent:

> As a point of departure we take the essential capacity of human beings for self-consciousness in the precise sense of personal self-reflection (*inspectio sui*) and the capacity grounded therein of reflectively taking positions vis-à-vis oneself and one's life, that is, the capacity for personal acts: of self-knowledge, self-evaluation, and of practical self-determination (self-willing and self-formation). (Husserl 1989a: 23)

Persons evaluate their actions, motives, goals and values. We can alter, take up or modify or negate position-takings, affirm or reject values. We can affirm or reject previous decisions made freely. Husserl emphasizes that not only can we curb or alter a position but we can reflectively renounce a position. We can acknowledge a drive and also take a disapproving stance towards it (even if we do not have the psychic strength to curb the drive). We can, in Husserl's example, have an uncontrollable desire to smoke, but we can experience the desire and disapprove of it, and hence have a negative evaluation of a drive that we thus wish not to be part of our self. Equally, we can encourage habits and acts that can become literally second nature.

From *Ideas* I (1913) onwards, Husserl characterizes the subject as being an 'I-pole' (*Ichpol*) or 'I-centre' (*Ich-Zentrum*), which acts as 'the centre of all affections and actions' (Husserl 1989: 105). The I is a 'centre' from which 'radiations' (*Ausstrahlungen*) or 'rays of regard' stream out or

towards which rays of attention are directed. It is the centre of a 'field of interests' (*Interessenfeld*). It is the 'substrate of habitualities' (Husserl 1967: 67). Husserl speaks of a human person's ability to act freely from the 'I-centre' outwards: thinking, evaluating, acting. They also accumulate convictions as beliefs become sedimented into ways of acting and thinking. Moreover, at the highest level, Husserl always emphasizes how human subjects have a sense of control over their cognitive states. Persons can curb their inclinations and what passively affects them. The subject is an 'acting subject'.

But the person is also passively constituted. Perhaps too much attention is placed in the Lockean and Kantian tradition on the person as the *performer* of (primarily moral) acts, on the person as *agent*; there is a whole other way in which the person is constituted through its passively being formed by accumulated habits, experiences that 'sediment' into convictions and eventually become character traits. In its full concretion, the *self* is made up of its convictions, values, outlook and so on. It has a history, a 'style', a unique way of conducting itself. As Husserl writes in *Cartesian Meditations*: 'The ego constitutes itself *for itself* in, so to speak, the unity of a history' (Husserl 1967: 75). Experiences, like scars on the physical body, generally speaking cannot be struck out, although they can be inhibited, suppressed, forgotten or disvalued in some way. As the Husserl scholar Henning Peucker has written:

> The ego as a person is characterized by the variety of its lived experiences and the dynamic processes among them. According to Husserl, personal life includes many affective tendencies and instincts on its lowest level, but also, on a higher level, strivings, wishes, volitions, and body-consciousness. All of this stands in a dynamic process of arising and changing; lived-experiences with their meaningful correlates rise from the background of consciousness into the center of attention and sink back, yet they do not totally disappear, since they are kept as habitual acquisitions (*habituelle Erwerbe*). Thus, the person has an individual history in which previous accomplishments always influence the upcoming lived-experiences. (Peucker, 2008: 319)

Husserl gives an a priori account of personhood. The essential capacity for self-consciousness and what Husserl calls *inspectio sui* (self-awareness)

is important. The person is not just a rational agent but also built up on capacities, dispositions, skills and what Husserl often refers to as *praxis*. Husserl also speaks of a *habitus*.

There is much more to be said about the complexity and variety of Husserl's thinking on the ego, the ego-body, the self and the person. But to clarify the manner in which Husserlian thinking developed I want now to turn briefly to two further phenomenologists—Max Scheler and Edith Stein.

1.5 Max Scheler on the Personal Self as 'Performer of Acts'

Max Scheler's phenomenology of the human person has received considerable treatment from scholars including Karol Wojtyla, later to become Pope John Paul II, who wrote a study on Scheler entitled *The Acting Person* (Wojtyla 1979). From the outset, Scheler characterized his position as 'personalism' and his personalism begins with a critique of Kant's overly formalist approach to personhood, which emphasizes universality and has no way of capturing the unique individuality of persons. In his major work, *Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Wertethik* (*Formalism in Ethics and the Material Ethics of Value*; Scheler 1973), Part One of which was published as the second part of the first volume of Husserl's *Yearbook of Phenomenology* in 1913 (Part Two was published in 1916), Scheler discusses the person in great detail. He notes that Kantian formal ethics claims to be able to confer priceless dignity on the person (Scheler 1973: 370). The moral person, on the formalist view, is seen as a source of rational acts and subject to ideal laws. That is, for Kant, only a formal ethics properly addresses the dignity of persons by recognizing their autonomy as rational beings, while all 'material' ethics (the kind Scheler will espouse) in Kant's view enslaves the will to extrinsic determining grounds and does not recognize the pure moral will. For Scheler, on the other hand, only a material ethics can recognize persons as concrete entities and as the 'immediately coexperienced unity of experiencing' (Scheler 1973: 371). Scheler recognized that universal rational motivations are not individualized.

Rational acts are by their nature 'extra individual' (Scheler 1973: 372). Formal ethics then cannot really recognize autonomy. A person is more than a purely rational being with a will. According to Scheler's approach, a being that thinks itself, for example, the Aristotelian god as 'thought-thinking-itself', is not a 'person'. Scheler, then, wants to retain the Kantian idea of the uniqueness and dignity of persons but he believes his framework is much more capable of recognizing persons as such.

Scheler develops Husserl's conception of the person as an intentional agent, as the performer of acts, but his views tended to evolve separately from Husserl's work. The person exists in the performance of intentional acts. For Scheler, moreover, the whole person is contained in each act. Acts have a personal starting point; they originate in a person. A person is an essential and concrete unity of different acts. These acts (not just perceiving, judging, willing, feeling but valuing) go on seamlessly and continuously through an individual life. Furthermore, it is the being of the person that is the foundation for all essentially different acts: 'The person is the concrete and essential unity of the being of acts of different essences which in itself . . . precedes all act differences' (Scheler 1973: 383).

An act, for Scheler, can never be considered an object and hence a person as such can never be an object. Persons are individuated in and through their acts; this is what accounts for the uniqueness and irreplaceability of persons. At the highest level, persons are oriented to values but it also has a 'self-value' that marks out the person from all other beings. Scheler analyses the feeling of shame, for instance, as an experience of one's own self-worth before the other. All experiences are invested with value and human beings in particular apprehend value. Value apprehension is an intentional act that, however, is carried out through the emotions rather than intellectually. One feels oneself drawn to a particular value.

For Scheler, the person is not the same as the ego. He regards the ego as an object (or can become an object) and hence quite distinct from the person which can never be objectified. A person, for Scheler, is a 'self-sufficient totality' (Scheler 1973: 390). For Scheler, furthermore, the person is not a part of the world (hence he rejects any naturalism of the person) but rather is a *correlate* of the world. There is an individual world corresponding to each person (Scheler: 393). As Heidegger would

recognize in his brief but penetrating remarks in *Being and Time* § 10, Scheler is something of a 'personalist' without offering an account of the ontology of personhood. For Heidegger, to say that a person is a 'performer of acts' is not well grounded ontologically. But Scheler is masterly in his treatment of the manner in which the person is related to temporality. A person can review his or her life and make decisions about it. Scheler writes:

> What we call the person or personal self, that central concretion of our responsible acts ranging over the course of time, can of its nature—de jure—contemplate every part of our past life, can lay hold of its sense and worth. (Scheler 1987: 99)

The person is the spiritual core and it has its own basic intentionality of loving or hating. Scheler writes:

> In every soul, taken as a whole and at any of its moments, there governs a personal, basic direction of loving and hating: This is its basic moral tenor [*Gesinnung*]. Whatever a personal soul can will or know, the spheres of its cognitions and effects or, in one word, its possible world, is ontically determined by this direction. (Scheler 1987: 136)

It is the whole self that loves or hates, according to Scheler (1987: 147). Scheler spends a lot of time examining the different ways in which persons can look up to other person-types they regard as exemplary, for example, what he calls the hero, the genius and the saint.

1.6 Edith Stein on Personhood and the Constitution of Spiritual Life

We cannot discuss the notion of personhood in phenomenology without adverting to the fascinating and groundbreaking work of Edith Stein. Stein wrote her doctoral thesis, *On the Problem of Empathy*, 1917 (Stein 1989), under the direction of Husserl but was also deeply influenced by Scheler's account of empathy, as well as by the Munich philosopher and psychologist

Theodor Lipps, among others. In her posthumously published *Life in a Jewish Family,* she explains why she took up the problem of empathy:

> In his course on nature and spirit Husserl had said that the objective outer world could only be experienced intersubjectively, i.e. through a plurality of perceiving individuals who relate in a mutual exchange of information. Accordingly an experience of other individuals is a prerequisite. To the experience, an application of the work of Theodor Lipps, Husserl gave the name *Einfühlung*. What it consisted of, however, he nowhere detailed. Here was a lacuna to be filled. (Stein 1986: 269)

According to her autobiography, *Life in a Jewish Family*, she found the task challenging, became depressed and worked herself into a spirit of despair, even wishing she was dead. However, she finally finished the thesis. The second chapter is the main treatment of empathy, but Chapter Three lays down a phenomenological account of the constitution of the psycho-physical individual. Stein records that the first part of her dissertation followed Husserl's advice but her own interest was more evident in the 'constitution of the human person' (Stein 1986: 397), or what she calls in Chapter Four 'the constitution of personality [*Personlichkeit*]' (Stein 1989: 108). Stein speaks of 'the spiritual subject' by which she means the human subject insofar as he or she is an agent attuned to values, as she puts it ' an "I" in whose acts an object world is constituted and which itself creates objects by reason of its will' (Stein 1989: 96). Spiritual acts are not simply separate rays streaming out from an ego but overlap, interpenetrate and build on one another to create the objectively real social and cultural world. The world of spirit, as opposed to nature (which is governed by causal laws), is governed by the lawfulness of motivation, following what Husserl also says in *Ideas* II. As she puts it, directly echoing *Ideas* II, 'motivation is the lawfulness of spiritual life' (Stein 1989: 96). Moreover, spiritual subjects operate within a general context of 'intelligibility and meaningfulness' (Stein 1989: 96). A feeling, for example, may motivate a particular expression and define the range of expressions that can properly issue from it. Stein distinguishes the ego (understood, following Husserl, as a centre for streaming in and radiations outwards) from the person. The person is constituted by personal properties (Stein 2000: 135).

In her 1922 essay on psychology, published in Husserl's *Jahrbuch*, translated as *Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities* (Stein 2000), Stein is primarily interested in the constitution of personhood. For her the person is the highest layer of the human being and the human self is made up of four layers—the physical, the sensory, the psychic and the personal. Here she emphasizes especially the role of *feeling* in the constitution of personality. There are different layers and dimensions to the self and different ways in which the ego is involved or at a distance from these feelings. In theoretical acts such as perception, imagination, thinking and so on, I am usually directly turned towards the object and there is no experience of an 'I' at all—hence, Husserl was right in his analysis offered in the Fifth Logical Investigation. As Stein had already written in *The Problem of Empathy*:

> It is possible to conceive of an object only living in theoretical acts having an object world facing it without ever becoming aware of itself and its consciousness, without 'being there' for itself. (Stein 1989: 98)

Following Scheler, she sees feelings of sensation as not closely involving the ego. Sensation, she writes, results in nothing for the experienced I (Stein 1989: 100):

> The pressure, warmth, or attraction to light that I sense are nothing in which I experience myself, in no way issue from my 'I'. (Stein 1989: 100)

Pains and pleasures, for instance, take place at a distance from the ego. According to Stein, they are, as she puts it, 'on the surface of my "I"' (Stein 1989: 100). Other feelings and moods are much more deeply involving the self; they are not so much on the surface of the 'I' as actually constitutive of the I. They are 'self-experiencing' in a specific way. They 'inundate', 'penetrate' and 'fill' the I. The self is entirely permeated by emotions but even these can be at different *depth*. As Stein writes:

> Anger over the loss of a piece of jewelry comes from a more superficial level or does not penetrate as deeply as losing the same object as the souvenir of a loved one. Furthermore, pain over the loss of this person would be even deeper. (Stein 1989: 101)

Stein acknowledges central and more peripheral levels of the self. Willing, for instance—and this is also true of Husserl—involves the ego in a much more central way than, for instance, 'theoretical acts' such as perceiving. Theoretical acts, for Stein generally, such as perceiving, are entirely irrelevant to what she calls 'personality structure' (Stein 1989: 107). Theoretical acts form the basis or foundation for acts of feeling (hence for Stein there could not be a purely feeling subject); nevertheless, perception is not integral to the I.

Stein, following Scheler, believes there is a hierarchy of felt values. For Stein:

> The feeling of value is the source of all cognitive striving and 'what is at the bottom' of all cognitive willing. (Stein 1989: 108)

The apprehension of value (*Wertnehmen*), following Scheler, is itself something valuable as is the experience of the creation of value. I can be happy, and then further happy because of my own happiness. I can enjoy a work of art and then enjoy my enjoyment of it (Stein 1989: 102). Similarly, feelings can lead to other feelings, as complex psychoanalytic literature teaches us. The self is precisely a being that is attuned to value (here Stein is following Scheler). Feelings are correlated to values and values are given to the subject in intentional acts. This attunement to values is of course a clear acknowledgement that the self and person moves in the space of reasons, meanings and values. The self and the person belong within the domain of normativity—but there is more in what Stein, following Husserl and Scheler, calls 'spirit' (*Geist*).

According to Stein, every feeling has a certain mood component 'that causes the feeling to spread throughout the I from the feeling's place of origin and fill it up' (Stein 1989: 104). A slight resentment can grow and consume me completely. Emotions can have mood components that colour the emotions. Stein makes comparisons with aspects of light and colour—intensity, illumination and so on, to show the same kinds of descriptive character apply to emotions. There is not only 'depth' and expanse ('width'), and 'reach' in relation to emotions and feelings, but there is also

duration. Emotions and feelings develop, evolve and change over time. Stein believes that the length of time a feeling remains in me is subject, she says, to 'rational laws' (Stein 1989: 104) not natural laws. In other words, they are explicable under the overall laws of *motivation*.

Interestingly, Stein acknowledges that every individual person has a 'core' and a quota of 'psychic strength' (*Lebenskraft*). She suggests this tentatively:

> Perhaps one could show that every individual has a total measure of psychic strength determining intensity . . . so the rational duration of a feeling may exceed an individual's 'psychic strength'. (Stein 1989: 105)

Stein has a strong sense of the identity of the individual person, even in different contexts. She writes that one can very well understand the same person in different historical circumstances:

> I can think of Caesar in a village instead of in Rome and can think of him transferred into the twentieth century. Certainly his historically settled personality would go through changes but just as surely he would remain Caesar. (Stein 1989: 110)

What is involved here is an exercise in free imaginative variation that brings what is invariant into light. The structure of the person governs what variations are possible. Furthermore, Stein makes the interesting claim that personhood can be 'incomplete'. Thus, for example, someone who has never experienced love or who cannot appreciate art (Stein 1989: 111) is missing something. It is also possible that the personality does not unfold and one becomes a 'stulted' person.

In general, Husserl, Scheler and Stein have a very multilayered and dynamic conception of the self that acknowledges the deep source of the self in nature ('the self sinks its taproot in nature', according to Stein) but also, at the highest level, is oriented to values and belongs to a

community that can be guided by rational motives. The person is seen as an entity that can grow and change over time, take on new characteristics and develop aptitudes, stances towards its drives and recognize new values or revalue old values. The person has a kind of inner core that is different in each individual.

1.7 Phenomenology and the Narrative Conception of the Self

In conclusion, it is worth noticing how the phenomenological account of the personal self intersects with the narrative approach to the self. Of course, numerous versions of the narrative conception of the self have been proposed by contemporary philosophers, including Paul Ricoeur, Alasdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor and Marya Schechtmann. In *After Virtue*, for instance, MacIntyre claims that human life is a narrative unity intersecting with other narratives. The human being, for MacIntyre, is a storytelling anima. He writes: 'We are never more and sometimes less than co-authors of our own narrative' (MacIntyre 1981: 213). MacIntyre puts the narrative view succinctly:

> I am born with a past, and to try to cut myself from that past in the individualist mode, is to deform my present relationships. The possession of an historical identity and the possession of a social identity coincide. (MacIntyre 1981: 221)

A strongly critical account of the narrative self is found in Galen Strawson (2004), who denies that narration can yield trustworthy insights into the constitution of the person. He asserts that 'there are deeply non-Narrative people and there are good ways to live that are deeply non-Narrative' (Strawson 2004: 429). For Strawson, some people simply live lives that are 'episodic' and do not connect them into narratives. Strawson begins from his own condition and proclaims:

> . . . yet I have absolutely no sense of my life as a narrative with form, or indeed as a narrative without form. Absolutely none. Nor do I have any great or special interest in my past. Nor do I have a great deal of concern for my future. (Strawson 2004: 433)

Some might object that to present oneself in this manner is already to situate oneself within a narrative, to characterize oneself relative to the non-interest in the past, future and what Strawson calls the 'diachronic'.

It is helpful to think a little more about how phenomenologists understand the narrative dimension of selfhood. For Husserl and Heidegger, to be human is to be temporal and also historical. As Heidegger puts it, one experiences a factical thrownness, one simply finds oneself in this century, speaking this language, having this cultural context and so on. This is not specifically chosen, it is simply 'there'. But within this sense of being in a historical context, there is what Husserl calls 'position-taking'. One can decide to be part of one's tradition or reject it. Even one's rejection of it means one is still in a certain sense bound to it. One finds oneself, as Sartre describes so well, living a kind of life as if one were a character in a plot. Things are unfolding in a particular way. One has a sense of how this might continue and how it might end. The problem with Strawson's rejection of narrativity is that he tends to think of it as something wilful. The danger here is to think of the self simply as the controlling author of narratives more or less in the manner of the omniscient author. The narrative of one's life is not something over which one has complete control (contra Sartre) but rather something that unfolds with the exigencies of each situation. Life is what happens when you are busy making other plans, as John Lennon once said. It is not possible to control all narratives. Spin-doctors try to impose a narrative on the trajectory of an election candidate or a rising film star, but there are always the possibilities of other counter-narratives (I am not the person you want me to be). There is something, furthermore, that has to anchor narratives, a 'dative' of narrative (to adopt Sokolowski's expression), in other words the person to whom the events are happening

(the one that suffers the actions as it were as much as the agent). Phenomenology sees narrativity as part of the experience of historicity and the manner in which the self in its thrownness is projected into the future from its specific orientation to its past.

In conclusion, it is not possible to summarize adequately the richness of the phenomenological approach to self and personhood. Phenomenology has been in the forefront of recognizing the personal self as a concrete, dynamic, intentional meaning-maker who is emotionally, wilfully and rationally engaged with others and with the world. The sense of self runs deep, as Edith Stein put it, it sinks its taproot into nature. But the self is also operating on the level of motivations, values, narratives and self-conceptions which make it an extremely complex entity with its own mode of existing (that Heidegger tried to capture with the term 'Dasein'). In some respects, phenomenology has not been able to completely overcome the two-world approach to the person found in Kant. Phenomenology recognizes a concrete existing acting self, a being-in-the-world but there is also a necessary transcendental dimension. The human self is always a 'for-itself' and a 'for-others' such that it cannot be naturalized in the manner in which contemporary analytic philosophers have naturalized the self.

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2

Persons, Characters and the Meaning of 'Narrative'

Alfonso Muñoz-Corcuera

2.1 Introduction

In the neo-Lockean tradition, philosophers have departed from Locke's idea that the term 'person' stands for 'a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and places' (Locke 1975: 335). This definition has led neo-Lockean philosophers to conceive 'personal identity' in terms of the continuity of our mental life. Obviously, there are many ways in which this project can be developed. Some philosophers think that the continuity of our mental life is to be defined in terms of the continuity of our consciousness, our memories or our psychological traits. In this chapter, I focus on one particular development of the Lockean project that conceives the continuity

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of our mental life in terms of the continuity of the narrative through which we understand ourselves: narrative theories of personal identity.

Narrative theories of personal identity develop the neo-Lockean project by holding two descriptive theses: the psychological narrativity thesis, which states that we understand ourselves in narrative form; and the narrative self-constitution thesis, according to which we constitute our personal identity through the narrative by which we understand ourselves (Strawson 2012: 74). The acceptance of these two theses has caused narrativists to make extensive use of the comparisons between literary characters and persons to illustrate their points because a literary character is the best-known example of an entity constituted through the narrative of its life.

However, over the last decade there has been a significant amount of criticisms against these comparisons. For example, some say that we cannot compare ourselves with literary characters because we do not understand ourselves in narrative form (Strawson 2008; Vice 2003); others say that we should not do it because, even if we understand ourselves in narrative form, our identity is not constituted in that way (Currie 2010; Lamarque 2004, 2007; Strawson 2012; Velleman 2006); and others object that, regardless of whether we constitute our identity in that way, comparing ourselves with literary characters is misleading and may have a negative influence on our self-understanding (Christman 2004; Lamarque 2007; Strawson 2008; Vice 2003). Moreover, Lamarque also notes that comparing ourselves with literary characters is misleading not only with regard to who we are but also with regard to literary characters, since

> To see literary characters as our friends, as ordinary people like ourselves, their lives as essentially like our lives, is to set aside nearly everything that makes great literature what it is. In effect it is to ignore all essentially literary qualities and reduce literature to character and plot at the same level of banality as found in the stories we tell of ourselves. (Lamarque 2007: 118)

These criticisms have had a deep influence on narrative theories and, although there have been certain good attempts to offer a response (see Jongepier 2016; Rudd 2007, 2012; Schechtman 2011), they seem to have discouraged narrativists. For example, Goldie, despite being

narrative-friendly, begins his most recent book by stating that his central task is 'to find the *right* place for narrative in our lives, without any of the narrativist excesses that one sometimes finds these days' (Goldie 2012: 1–2). Even more surprising, Schechtman, one of the most important defenders of narrative theories of personal identity over the past two decades, has written recently that it is better 'to give up the locution of "narrative" in this context and to describe the type of unity that defines a person's identity not as a *narrative* unity but simply as the structural unity of a person's life' (Schechtman 2014: 108) because she has come to think that the term 'narrative' is liable to generate misunderstanding (*cf*. Christman 2004: 709).

In this context, I find it necessary to make a new defence of narrative theories of personal identity and to stand up for the term 'narrative'. To do so, this chapter takes the following question as its point of departure: why should we avoid comparing ourselves with literary characters? First, I gather the different answers given by the anti-narrativists to this question, offering an appropriate response to each of them. Then, I conclude my argument by positively defending these comparisons from a perspective radically different from that of Lamarque: comparing ourselves with literary characters is not only fruitful for the problem of personal identity, but also for understanding the value of literature.

2.2 We Do Not Understand Ourselves in Narrative Form, They Said

The first reason that anti-narrativists provide to argue that we should not compare ourselves with literary characters is that we do not understand ourselves in narrative form and so that the psychological narrativity thesis is false. This claim may be supported in one of two ways, a strong one and a weak one. The strong form simply says that we do not understand ourselves in narrative form. The weak form acknowledges that, because 'narrative' is an ambiguous term, there is a minimal definition of it for which it is true that we understand ourselves in narrative form. However, according to anti-narrativists, that minimal definition is uninteresting and does not allow narrativists to make any

distinctive claim. In any case, we must consider that although theoretically we may draw a distinction between these two forms, in practice almost nobody supports only the strong one, because even Strawson, perhaps the fiercest anti-narrativist, acknowledges that the theses held by narrativists may be true if we interpret the term 'narrative' in a trivial sense (Strawson 2008: 198).

Thus, leaving aside the strong form, we can see that the problem here concerns the concept of 'narrative'. According to Lamarque, it is true that narratives are prominent in human lives. However, this is not significant because narratives are not interesting per se. Only some narratives—that is, literary narratives—deserve attention, but not because of their narrative nature, but instead because of their literary features (Lamarque 2004: 393). One can only agree with Lamarque if one accepts what he presents as the minimal conditions for what counts as a narrative: (1) it must be the product of human action (it cannot be something 'found'); (2) it must contain at least two events that somehow must be related to each other; (3) especially, there must be a temporal relation between the events depicted in the narrative; (4) and it must be possible to identify a narrative as a narrative from the very formal features of its sentences. In this sense, according to Lamarque, the sentence 'the sun shone and the grass grew' is a narrative, because it fulfils all the criteria, but 'Bill kicked the ball and the ball was kicked by Bill' is not, because it does not depict two different and related events but just a single event represented in logically equivalent sentences (Lamarque 2004: 394).

Lamarque interprets narrative theories of personal identity by departing from this minimal and purely formal notion of narrative. Therefore, he seems to think that what narrativists, such as Bruner, mean when they say things such as that something is a narrative when it 'deals with the vicissitudes of human intentions' (Bruner 1986: 16) is that 'representing actions in a causal and temporal sequence [. . .] is in this minimal sense indeed to represent them in a narrative' (Lamarque 2004: 402).[1]

[1] It should be noted that, at this point, Lamarque is analysing MacIntyre's theory, not Bruner's. However, I do not think I am saying anything Lamarque would not have said, because the quote

Because this minimal definition of narrative does not imply that understanding ourselves in narrative form can give unity to our lives in the same way literary narratives give unity to the lives of characters (e.g. through a structure that contains a beginning, a middle and an end), he concludes that, when narrativists compare ourselves with literary characters and draw these kinds of conclusions, they are ignoring the differences between minimal narratives and literature. Thus, according to Lamarque and other anti-narrativists, such as Strawson and Vice, even if it may be true that we understand ourselves in narrative form, that does not allow narrativists to claim support for any of their other theses, which are derived from inappropriate comparisons between literary characters and ourselves. The sense in which we understand ourselves in narrative form is trivial and does not allow narrativists to make any distinctive claim (Lamarque 2004: 405; Strawson 2008: 204; Vice 2003: 93).

I agree with the position held by Lamarque, Strawson and Vice that narrativists sometimes seem to think that all narratives are literary and, thus, that narrativists compare life narratives with literary narratives in an inappropriate way. This is what I call the *ambiguity problem*, given the ambiguous use that narrativists make of the notion of 'narrative' (see Christman 2004). However, it seems clear to me that anti-narrativists have failed to interpret this problem because the minimal and purely formal notion of narrative from which Lamarque departs is completely alien to narrative theories of personal identity (see Rudd 2012: 177).

Indeed, the problem with narrativists is that they demonstrate that we understand ourselves in narrative form according to a minimal notion of 'narrative' and then draw conclusions that imply a literary notion. However, what anti-narrativists do not realise is that both notions are derived from different frameworks. While the literary notion they employ is formal (i.e. it is based on the formal features that a text must have in order to be a literary narrative), the minimal one is what

by MacIntyre that Lamarque reproduces is very similar to the quote by Bruner I have cited: 'narrative history [. . .] [is] the basic and essential genre for the characterisation of human actions' (MacIntyre, 2007: 208). Moreover, when Lamarque discusses Bruner's work he seems to be interpreting him in this same way (see Lamarque, 2004: 404).

we shall call a cognitive notion (i.e. it is based on the cognitive mechanisms involved in narrative understanding). This being the case, the two notions of 'narrative' that are present in the works of narrativists—and produce the ambiguity problem—are a minimal-cognitive notion and a literary-formal one. For their part, Lamarque and the anti-narrativists focus on this literary-formal notion of 'narrative' and presuppose that this formal framework is the relevant one for narrative theories of personal identity. Thus, they interpret that narrativists claim that we understand ourselves in narrative form according to a minimal-*formal* sense of 'narrative', and therefore, they base all of their criticisms on this assumption. The problem is that, in doing so, they presuppose that the minimal-formal notion that they have in mind is equivalent to the minimal-cognitive notion that is present in the works of narrativists. However, the notion of 'narrative' derived from the cognitive framework cannot be reduced to a formal one. Thus, although the ambiguity problem weakens the position of narrativists, the criticisms raised by Lamarque and the anti-narrativists are off the mark.

We may better understand both confusions—the one that produces the ambiguity problem and the one that is present in the criticisms of anti-narrativists—by more closely examining the concepts of 'narrative' used by Bruner, Schechtman and Lamarque.

As noted earlier, for Bruner, something is a narrative when it addresses human intentionality. However, when he says this, he does not mean that a sentence is a narrative when it contains a sequence of human actions, as Lamarque may think. What he is trying to convey is that there is a primitive mode of thought that we use specifically to understand our behaviour as intentional systems, which is different from the primitive mode of thought that we use to understand non-intentional objects. According to Bruner, this mode of thought that we use to understand ourselves may be labelled as 'narrative' because it is also the mode of thought that we use to understand literary works. In this sense, he even comes to ask if it would be possible that what we recognise as a self or a person (in ourselves or in others) is what is convertible into some version of a narrative (Bruner 1997: 152). From his perspective, persons—or selves—are a kind of entity that we can only understand when we use this narrative mode of thought. Thus, for Bruner,

something is narrative not when it contains sentences of one type or another, but instead when it is interpreted using the narrative mode of thought, that is, the mode of thought we use to understand intentional systems.

Although she assures us that she bases her thought on Bruner's concept of 'narrative', Schechtman also says that we constitute our identities through the story we tell about our lives. By 'story' she means 'a conventional, linear narrative' (Schechtman 1996: 96), such as those we can find in traditional novels, that is, a linguistic construction with certain formal features that must be explicitly codified in a text. Thus, we can see how the confusion that causes the ambiguity problem arises, because Schechtman uses the minimal-cognitive notion of 'narrative' defined by Bruner to unjustifiably claim that we also understand ourselves in a literary-formal narrative way.[2]

Finally, as I have just stated, Lamarque departs from the assumption that the relevant framework for narrativists is formal. Thus, he looks for the minimal conditions for something to be a narrative in a formal sense and then attempts to understand the claims made by narrativists from that perspective, thus forcing us to evidently distort Bruner's definition: something is a narrative when it is made up of sentences that refer to human actions.

It may be claimed that even if it is true that narrativists depart from a minimal-cognitive notion of 'narrative', this notion could be reduced to a minimal-formal notion, as Lamarque does. Not in vain Bruner himself seems to be ambiguous in this regard, and although he sometimes uses the term 'narrative' to refer to a mode of organising experience, as I have just said, in other places he uses it to refer to a form of discourse and writes statements such as 'a narrative is composed of a unique sequence of events, mental states, happenings involving human beings as characters or actors' (Bruner 1990: 43). However, we must take into consideration that, for Bruner, something is a narrative as a form of discourse not because of its formal constituents but instead by virtue

[2] In any case, we must note that Schechtman most likely goes wrong at this point because of a certain ambiguity that is already present in Bruner's work. I discuss this ambiguity below.

of the way its interpreters make sense of them and give meaning to the narrative (Bruner 1990: 43–4).

Following Ricoeur, we may say that, for something to be a narrative from a cognitive framework, it must be the object of a psychological process called *emplotment*, which gives narratives the features that make them valuable: coherence, meaningfulness and emotional import (Goldie 2009: 98). In any case, it is important to note that the emplotment process may be more or less successful for different people, which means that narrativity is a matter of degree as well as subject dependent. In this sense, a text may be considered a narrative from a cognitive framework even if it lacks the necessary features to be considered as such from a formal perspective. The only requisite here is that someone is able to emplot the text in order to give coherence, meaning and emotional import to it. As an example, consider the short story 'The index', written by J. G. Ballard and included in his book *War Fever*. This short story consists of the index of the allegedly lost biography of Henry Rhodes Hamilton (HRH). Thus, the reader only has access to a list of names and events listed alphabetically:

> Acapulco, 143
> Acton, Harold, 142–7, 213
> Alcazar, Siege of, 221–5
> Alimony, HRH pays, 172, 247, 367, 453
> Anaxagoras, 35, 67, 69–78, 481
> Apollinaire, 98
> Arden, Elizabeth, 189, 194, 376–84
> *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas, The* (Stein), 112
> Avignon, birthplace of HRH, 9–13; childhood holidays, 27; research at Pasteur Institute of Ophthalmology, 101; attempts to restore anti-Papacy, 420–35

From a formal perspective, it is impossible to classify this text as a narrative because it lacks the necessary features. It is often said that a mere collection of events, such as those found in annals, does not constitute a narrative because some causal and explanatory connections between those events are also necessary (see Lamarque 2004: 400; Livingston 2009: 29; Vice 2003: 95; White 1980: 9–10). This is not

the case in Ballard's story. The text quoted earlier suggests, for example, that there is a link between Acapulco and Harold Acton, because both entries refer to the same pages of the biography. However, it does not say anything else about that link. Did HRH and Harold Acton talk about Acapulco? Did they go there? Did they accidentally run into each other at the beach? Moreover, there are absolutely no links between Anaxagoras and Elizabeth Arden.

By contrast, from a cognitive perspective we can see that there is at least one evident connection between any two entries in the index: the assumption made by the reader that all of them are part of the life narrative of HRH, a person whose life must be understood through the narrative mode of thought. In this sense, when we interpret the text as containing a life narrative, we stop seeing it as a collection of unrelated events and come to see it as a story with a huge number of spots of indeterminacy. However, as reader-response criticism holds, having spots of indeterminacy is a necessary feature of every narrative because nothing can be *completely* told (Iser 1972: 284–5). An event can always be placed in a wider context to better understand it; thus an essential feature of every narrative is containing unnarrated parts. Therefore, these spots of indeterminacy do not pose a problem because, whenever there is a gap in a text, we can fill it by bringing into play our own faculty for establishing narrative connections.[3] Thus, although having a huge number of spots of indeterminacy can make it difficult, or even impossible, to emplot a text—that is, to give coherence, meaning and emotional import to it—having a huge number of spots of indeterminacy does not imply that it is impossible to emplot a text. Indeed, despite whatever one may think at first glance, 'The index' can easily be emplotted and interpreted as a narrative. In fact, that is the only way in which one can enjoy reading it.

Returning to the topic at hand, we may now see that, if we rely on a cognitive framework, the criticisms launched by anti-narrativists against the comparisons between literary characters and ourselves miss their point. The fact remains that it is most likely easier to

[3] I do not distinguish at this point between spots of indeterminacy, gaps and blanks.

emplot a literary text than a life narrative. However, although that can be the origin of further problems that will be addressed later, it cannot justify the claim that we should not compare ourselves with literary characters because we do not understand ourselves in narrative form. In any case, narrativists should keep in mind that, if they want to make these kinds of comparisons, they cannot define literary narratives from a formal perspective but must do so from a cognitive perspective, such as those provided by reader-response criticism or cognitive poetics (see last section).

Finally, before I continue on to the next section, I would like to make a last remark with regard to the claim that the sense in which we understand ourselves in narrative form is trivial. Although Lamarque's criticisms focus on the formal notion of 'narrative' that I have ruled out, Strawson and Christman make certain comments that may still be applied to the cognitive notion. With regard to Strawson, I am referring to his famous example of the coffee-making narrative—'if someone says, as some do, that making coffee is a narrative that involves Narrativity, because you have to think ahead, do things in the right order, and so on [. . .] then I take it the claim is trivial' (Strawson 2008: 198). With regard to Christman, he expresses his view in this way:

> If one grants that the individual in question is a conscious reflecting interpreter of experiences, then [the claims made by narrativists] will be achieved whenever the interpreting subject can make minimal sense of her experiences [. . .]. The further insistence that the experiences of which she is a subject be narrative in form adds nothing to the analysis. (Christman 2004: 706)

I agree with Christman and Strawson to the extent that, when narrativists say that we understand ourselves in narrative form, all they are saying is that we understand ourselves in a meaningful way. However, as Rudd correctly noted, the term 'narrative' is not superfluous here, because there are alternative scientistic models of action explanation against which it is important to defend the narrative position (Rudd 2007: 63). Moreover, the term 'narrative' stresses the similarities

between literary characters and ourselves. In this sense, the claim that our self-understanding must take a narrative form is by no means a trivial point.[4]

2.3 Our Identity Does Not Depend on Our Narrative Self-Understanding, They Insisted

The second reason that anti-narrativists provide to argue that we should not make comparisons between literary characters and ourselves is that, although it may be true that we understand ourselves in narrative form, our identity is not constituted through this narrative self-understanding, which means that the narrative self-constitution thesis is false. According to Lamarque, narrative identity theories conflate personal identity and self-conception, because, although the narratives we tell about our lives may help us to develop a conception of ourselves, they do not ground our personal identity (Lamarque 2004: 404–5). Ironically, we may better understand this point if we attempt to compare ourselves with literary characters. Given that the identity of literary characters is bound to the narrative by which they are described, any change in the narrative changes their being (Lamarque 2007: 120). By contrast, the narratives we tell about our past life do not have an influence on the real events in which we were involved. Indeed, most people return to the major events in their lives and recount them over and over in different narratives, but these retellings do not change reality (Lamarque 2004: 405). This

[4] According to Christman, even if the term 'narrative' is taken as merely the name of the process through which we make sense of ourselves, 'it is a misleading name, for it strongly suggests that there is an independent condition of linear (or some such) connectedness that experiences must conform to in order to constitute a self' (Christman, 2004: 709). This is perhaps what made Schechtman give up the term, as I pointed out in the introduction. However, I think that stressing the similarities between literary characters and ourselves is useful for understanding both persons and characters. It is advantageous to understand the term 'narrative' in a cognitive way even when dealing with literary narratives and, in this sense, I think it is better to use the term here even if it may cause some (e.g., Lamarque and some narrativists) to go wrong.

makes it clear that our identity does not depend on the narratives we tell about ourselves, which means that using literary characters as a model to understand how we constitute our identities is completely inappropriate (Lamarque 2007: 129).

A second argument put forth by anti-narrativists to argue that we do not constitute our identity through the narrative of our lives relies on the fact that most of our lives are never explicitly narrated. Nobody will ever know what I did yesterday night at 11 o'clock because I will never tell a narrative about it. However, there is no doubt that I existed at that time. Furthermore, apart from those who write an autobiography, we do not attempt to articulate a wider narrative that unifies our lives, even ignoring their trivial aspects. At most, all that we ever tell are small narratives about life fragments (Christman 2004: 710; Currie 2010: 24–5; Lamarque 2004: 405; Velleman 2006: 222–3). In this sense, even if we understand ourselves in narrative form, our narratives do not give unity to our lives in the same way that literary narratives give unity to the lives of characters, and thus, they cannot ground personal identity.

The most common response to this challenge consists in positing an implicit narrative that is somehow already present in our minds, so that, even if we almost never articulate a narrative of our lives as a whole, we could do it under request (Schechtman 1996: 114–9). However, this idea of an implicit narrative is problematic, at least in the way it is usually conceived (*cf.* Jongepier 2016). As I discussed in the previous section with regard to the ambiguity problem, most narrativists use a formal notion of 'narrative' when they make their strongest claims. In this sense, when they talk about an implicit narrative, they seem to be thinking of a narrative that, although it has not been told aloud, is somehow a kind of text. We may see an example of this if we pay attention to the way that Goldie discusses narratives.

According to Goldie, narratives are not necessarily public because the notion of 'narrative' can be widened to include narrative thinking. Thus, narratives need not be explicitly told, but they simply can be thought through (Goldie 2012: 3). This is a good point and we may appreciate Goldie's attempt to widen the notion of 'narrative'. However, when he defines what a narrative is, he focuses on public narratives that are already codified in texts: 'To start with, I will follow

the tradition of narrative theory, and speak of a narrative as something that is already publicly narrated, and is thus accessible to an audience or to a reader' (Goldie 2012: 14). Thus, when he states that his 'rough outline of what a narrative is [. . .] can readily and naturally be extended to include narrative thinking' (Goldie 2012: 25) I just cannot follow him. Even if he states that, in narrative thinking, there is no text (Goldie 2012: 14), his definition seems to imply that what he means is that, in narrative thinking, there is no *publicly available* text, because, otherwise, I cannot see how his notion could 'readily and naturally be extended to include narrative thinking'.

Goldie does not claim that his notion of narrative thinking implies the existence of an implicit narrative that gives unity to our lives. He is well aware of the fact that our narratives, even our thought-through-not-publicly-narrated-but-somehow-codified-in-a-text narratives, can only be about life fragments and that our thinking is too messy to conceive a coherent narrative of our lives as a whole. However, his notion of narrative thinking may be taken as a model to understand what other narrativists mean when they talk about an implicit narrative. In this sense, given that from a formal perspective there is no narrative without narration (Lamarque 2004: 404), it is clear why these criticisms seemed so relevant to Schechtman when she attempted to respond. In fact, she left them unanswered as the key questions for future research (Schechtman 2011: 415).

However, the problem with these criticisms made by anti-narrativists is, again, that they are off the mark for two reasons. First, they rely on the formal notion of 'narrative' that I ruled out in the first section. Second, they do not actually take into consideration how narrativists conceive persons, and thus, they cannot say that narrative theories do not give an account of how we constitute our identity as such.

Regarding this second point, we must note an important shift that recently occurred in the debate on personal identity. Traditionally, philosophers interested in this topic have used the terms 'self' and 'person' more or less interchangeably. The proponents of the classic narrative approaches to the problem—for example, MacIntyre, Taylor, Dennett, Schechtman—also used them in this way. However, in order to answer certain criticisms directed at narrative theories, in recent years a distinction

between these terms as referring to different entities has been established (e.g. see Johnston 2010; Menary 2008; Stokes 2012). According to this new narrative approach, the concept of 'self' would be linked to the way we subjectively experience our lives, and the concept of 'person' would account for the demands that society imposes on our self-understanding. This distinction is somewhat imprecise, and narrativists still diverge on how we should understand it. For example, some argue that the self should be conceived as an entity that exists prior to any narrative (see Zahavi 2007), while others insist that selves constitute themselves through their narrative self-understanding (see Schechtman 2007). In this sense, it is difficult to give an appropriate response to Lamarque and the anti-narrativists with regard to our identity as selves. Thus, I set aside the problem of self-identity and focus on personal identity because I think it is easier for narrativists to reach an agreement on this subject.

As I have noted elsewhere, some of the early proponents of narrative identity theories highlighted the importance of the narratives told by others about ourselves in the constitution of our own identity. For example, recall MacIntyre's claim that we are never more than the co-authors of our own narrative (MacIntyre 2007: 213). Ricoeur, for his part, agrees with MacIntyre on this point (Ricoeur 1994: 160). Even Dennett, despite the huge differences between his theory and those proposed by MacIntyre and Ricoeur, seems to claim something similar in this regard:

> 'Call me Dan,' you hear from my lips, and you oblige, not by calling my lips Dan, or my body Dan, but by calling *me* Dan, the theorists' fiction created by . . . well, not by me but by my brain, acting in concert over the years with my parents and siblings and friends. (Dennett 1991: 429)

Given their interest in accounting for egocentric concern, many narrativists have ignored this idea in past years. Thus they seem to think that what constitutes one's identity is what one thinks about oneself. As Don Quixote would put it, 'I know who I am' seems to be their motto, and, in this regard, Lamarque is right. Some narrativists have conflated personal identity and self-conception. However, the recently established distinction between selves and persons has once again brought the narratives told by others into the arena. In this sense, we can see how

Schechtman expands her earlier views on personal identity in her most recent book by noting the role that others play in constructing our personal identity:

> This role is twofold: First, the recognition of one's narrative by others is an essential feature of identity for mature adults; an identity-constituting narrative is not just a story you have about yourself but also the stories others tell about you. Second, those without the wherewithal to narrate their own lives (e.g., infants and those with cognitive deficits) can be given an identity through narratives created by others. (Schechtman 2014: 103–4)

Taking these claims into account, I have elsewhere formulated what I call the *social narrativity thesis*, according to which personal identity is constituted through a narrative negotiation between our own life narrative and the narratives told by others about ourselves. I think most narrativists would agree that this thesis is essential to narrative theories and that they would be willing to frame the problem of personal identity from this perspective. In fact, as we have seen, many of them already accept it (see also Rudd 2012: 178–9; Taylor 2011: 36). In this sense, I think that the criticisms raised by Lamarque and the anti-narrativists should be addressed from the conception of personhood the social narrativity thesis implies.

First, with regard to the claim that our narratives cannot ground our personal identity because the events in which we were involved are not affected by our stories, we must consider that persons are social entities, and thus, their lives are determined by the roles they play and the social relationships they establish. In this sense, we may consider the documentary *Capturing the Friedmans* (Andrew Jarecki, dir. 2003). The film depicts the real life of an upper-middle-class family after the father and the youngest son are charged with child abuse. Given the adverse conditions in which the trial is going to take place, they decide to plead guilty in spite of the fact that they consider themselves innocent. After watching the documentary, one comes to think that there was no conclusive evidence of their crimes and that most likely the son was not even a paedophile. Although undoubtedly it is either true or false that the Friedmans abused several children in the basement of their home, we do not (cannot) know what physically happened there. However, the

fact is that both father and son were sent to prison, and although the son was released after serving a 13-year sentence, he is now a convicted criminal and most likely nobody would be willing to hire him as a baby sitter. Regardless of the fact that we do not know whether he actually abused the children, there was a trial and he confessed. His social identity, that is, his identity as a person, is bound to the narrative he (and all the witnesses) told at that moment. That narrative constitutes his identity despite the fact that before (and after) the trial he has always maintained his innocence.

With regard to the second reason provided by anti-narrativists to claim that the narrative self-constitution thesis is false, that is, that our narratives are always fragmentary and do not contain our lives as a whole, we may see that it is based on a formal notion of narrative. If we rely on a cognitive notion, the fact that our life narratives contain unnarrated parts is irrelevant, because, as noted earlier, that is a necessary feature of every narrative. We may consider Laurence Sterne's novel *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* as a perfect example because its main theme seems to be precisely the inexpressibility of human life. In this eighteenth-century novel, the narrator makes explicit his plan to write his whole life, even the most trivial details, until he reaches his present moment. However, the plan reveals itself to be impossible at the very outset of the novel: in order to be able to tell us how he was born, Tristram first needs to tell us about the sexual habits of his parents, the content of their marriage contract, which specified the conditions that his place of birth should fulfil, the fact that there was only one midwife in the area, the relationship between the midwife and the priest, the debates among theologians over the possibility of baptising a baby before he is born, etc. The result, in short, is that, after 200 pages, the narrator has not yet been able to narrate his birth. Just like Sterne's character, we will never be able to tell the story of our lives as a whole. Even so, to understand it, we must use the same narrative mode of thought that we use to understand a novel.

In this sense, our fragmentary narratives may give unity to our lives and constitute our personal identity in the same way that they give unity to the lives of literary characters. When Tristram Shandy abandons his original plan and starts to narrate random events in his life, we do not

think that we are dealing with a different person in each of those events. Neither do we think that Tristram Shandy is some kind of fragmentary being who constantly pops in and out of existence, meaning that there is no unity in his life. His narrative is fragmentary, but he is not. To understand the novel, we must assume that all the events depicted in the narrative are related to the same fictional person, Tristram Shandy. Thus, when we are faced with the huge number of spots of indeterminacy present in the novel, we are allowed—even encouraged—to fill those gaps by assuming that Tristram Shandy existed in those moments (see Palmer 2004: 175–83). Not only that, we are also allowed to assume that what happened in a certain gap fits perfectly with what happened before and after it. We most likely cannot know anything else about what happened at that time, but that does not posit a problem for the unity of his life. Likewise, most of the time we do not know what happened to our friends since the last time we saw them—besides the fragmentary narratives that they and other acquaintances may tell us in this regard. However, if we are to understand them and the world in which we live, we are allowed to assume that they existed across time all along. Thus, we can fill the gaps in their narratives to give unity to their lives by using the narrative mode of thought. Moreover, if we actually need to know what exactly happened to them, we can ask them to tell us more fragmentary narratives to help us fill the gaps.

2.4 And It Is Potentially Harmful to Do It, They Concluded

Finally, some anti-narrativists claim that, regardless of whether the psychological narrativity thesis and the narrative self-constitution thesis are true, comparing ourselves with literary characters is misleading, because literary narratives have certain features that our life narratives do not. For example, some narrativists tend to think that the concept of 'narrative' implies the concept of 'fiction', given that both terms are usually linked in literature (Lamarque 2004: 397–400). Dennett could be considered the greatest exponent of this trend because he has come to think of the self as a fictional entity, as it is constituted through a narrative (Dennett 1991: 429). However, although there is an evident

connection between literature and narrative—novels and stories are both things—we are dealing with two different concepts. Nor every literary work is narrative—poetry, drama and the essay can have no narrative features at all—neither do all narratives have the complexity and the artistic intention of literary works—a man talking about what he had for breakfast is creating a narrative but not a piece of art. In this sense, narratives are not necessarily fictional. Moreover, if it were true that all narratives distort reality, the claims that narrativists themselves make on morality would be seriously undermined because making ethical success depend on some kind of distortion of self-knowledge is not desirable (Strawson 2008: 202).

On the other hand, even if certain narrativists do not conflate the concepts of 'narrative' and 'fiction', they should still avoid comparing ourselves with literary characters, because the interpretative stances that we may adopt with regard to literary narratives are different from those we may adopt with regard to life narratives. For example, when we are dealing with a literary narrative, we may ask for the aesthetic function of every single detail (Lamarque 2007: 123) or look for a unifying theme that allows us to make sense of events that, from the perspective of causality, may be disconnected (Christman 2004: 705). By contrast, events in our lives do not have an aesthetic function because they are simply things that happened (Lamarque 2007, 130–1). Also, our lives do not have a unifying theme, but, at best, they may have several organising ideas through which certain projects and periods may be understood (Christman 2004: 706). To think otherwise, as some people do when writing their autobiographies, is to aestheticise, if not fictionalise, real life (Lamarque 2007: 132). Moreover, trying to understand our own lives through this literary lens, 'thinking of ourselves *as if* we were characters in stories [is also] potentially dehumanising' (Vice 2003: 105). As Strawson puts it:

> My guess is that it almost always does more harm than good – that the Narrative tendency to look for story or narrative coherence in one's life is, in general, a gross hindrance to self-understanding: to a just, general, practically real sense, implicit or explicit, of one's nature. (Strawson 2008: 205)

Again, we may concede certain points to the anti-narrativists, but most of them can be addressed if we just rely on a cognitive notion of 'narrative'. As Livingston has demonstrated, the main disagreements over the epistemic value of narrativity usually concern different notions of 'narrative' (Livingston 2009: 26). In this sense, we may see that, even if some narrativists seem to think that narratives are fictional *per se*, we may correct their theories simply by accepting that the relevant notion of 'narrative' for their points is the one I presented in the first section. From this cognitive perspective, the term 'narrative' refers, above all, to a mode of thought. It is a mental strategy oriented towards the knowledge of a specific domain of the world. That being the case, it is not only possible to have a perfectly accurate narrative of an event, but there are some events—those regarding ourselves—that can only be understood in this way.[5]

It is worth noting that this seems to imply that, in some sense, the events depicted in a narrative are created by the narrative itself (Lamarque 2004: 399–400). This may lead us to an anti-realist position, in which there is no objective reality, only narratives about reality. Not in vain Bruner himself was an anti-realist (Bruner 1986: 104–5). In any case, it is not obvious that by accepting that the events in our lives can only be understood in narrative form we will be committed to accept anti-realism (see Carr 1986: 121–3; Rudd 2007: 62–6). Furthermore, even if we were committed to doing so, that would not mean that any narratives we could tell would be equally accurate. The only thing we would have to accept is simply that, in order to know if a narrative is accurate or not, we would have to compare it with other narratives about the same events, not with the non-narrative 'real' (whatever 'real' is supposed to mean here) facts, as some anti-narrativists suppose.

[5] In any case, we may note that narrativists can still claim that our life-narratives are fictional, if they want to. The only thing they would need to accept is that they are fictional not because they are narratives, but, for example, because human memory is unreliable. This would create further problems for the topics of personal identity and moral responsibility, but I will have to discuss these issues in some other place. For a recent discussion of the empirical evidence in favour of the existence of a narrative mode of thought and its possible influence on the fictionalization of our self-understanding see Walker (2012).

Finally, the problem regarding the different interpretative stances that we may adopt was accurately answered by Schechtman, who drew inspiration from Ricoeur. According to Schechtman, we may classify three different roles with respect to narrative: those of character, author and critic (Schechtman 2011: 412). Lamarque focuses on the perspective of the critic when dealing with literature—what he calls the external perspective (Lamarque 2007: 120)—and, thus, he thinks of literary narratives as artefacts whose details are potentially significant because the author put them there for some reason. By contrast, he takes the role of character when dealing with life narratives—the internal perspective, in Lamarque's terminology (Lamarque 2007: 120)—and, from this perspective, all those details are merely contingent. They happened in that way in real life, and so they appear in our narratives, but there is no further meaning to them. However, we are not restricted to taking only one of these roles when dealing with our life narratives. We may take the role of author because we are not merely moved about by external forces. We are constantly leading our lives, making choices about what to do next. We must adopt the perspective of the character as well because we must acknowledge that our lives are constrained by the facts of the social and natural worlds in which we find ourselves—we must remember that we are at best co-authors of our own lives. Finally, we may also assume the perspective of the critic, reflecting on our own lives and in what sense we are responsible for them, given that we are at least their co-authors.

There is no doubt that taking the perspective of the critic over a literary work is more fruitful than taking it with regard to a life narrative. Literary narratives were written to be especially interesting from a critical perspective. However, that does not mean that we should avoid adopting the role of the critic with regard to our own lives. We can do it—in fact, we must do it if we want to be responsible persons—if we keep in mind that parts of our lives are not of our own authorship and that, therefore, we should not ascribe a meaning to them that is inappropriate. Surely, some persons will go too far and will understand their lives as if they were exactly like a literary work. However, even in those cases, comparing their lives with literature could be beneficial for them: they should simply remember what happened to Don Quixote.

2.5 Why We Read Literature

As I noted at the beginning of this chapter, Lamarque claims that the comparisons between persons and literary characters are not only misleading with regard to us, but also with regard to characters. According to this author, what makes literature valuable is that it is interesting from the perspective of the critic, from a perspective that is external to the fictional worlds depicted in literary works (Lamarque 2007: 120). When we confront a novel, for example, he notes that our attention is drawn not only to the events depicted in it but also and especially to the modes of presentation of those events. In this sense, he claims that literature is valuable because, among other things, we can ask for the aesthetic function of every single element in a literary work (Lamarque 2007: 123). Moreover, we can look for the role that each of those elements plays in the completed artistic structure of the work (Lamarque 2007: 125–6). Above all, literary works have a unifying theme that encapsulates their significance and what Lamarque calls their 'moral seriousness' (Lamarque 2007: 127). Because these features are, according to Lamarque, the most important ones of the literary realm, and it is only possible to appreciate them from the external perspective, adopting it is necessary to appreciate the value of literature. Thus, although readers may engage with literary works from another perspective that is internal to the fictional worlds—the internal perspective—when they do so, they are ignoring all those features that make literature distinctive and valuable (Lamarque 2007: 118–9). From the internal perspective, we come to see characters as ordinary people just like ourselves, and in doing so they cease to be literary.

The problem with this position is that Lamarque departs from a clear distinction between great literature and fiction of a non-literary kind, such as what he pejoratively calls 'genre fiction' (Lamarque 2007: 120). However, I cannot see how one can maintain that distinction unless one thinks that all great literary works fulfil some requirements that works of genre fiction do not. This is a quite implausible claim. To offer just one example, I do not think that Lamarque would dare to hold that none of the elements depicted in a science fiction novel—for example, Philip

K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*—have an aesthetic function. By contrast, when dealing with a great literary novel—such as the previously discussed *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*—one should be cautious and remember that even Freud is supposed to have remarked once that sometimes a cigar is just a cigar. In this sense, I think that we should not restrict the term 'literature' in the way Lamarque does and that it would be better to widen it to include genre fiction, as well. If we understand literature more broadly, we cannot support the claim that what makes literary narratives distinctive and valuable is that they have certain features that genre fiction does not because genre fiction is literature, too. Instead, we should define literature based on what great literature and genre fiction both share: the use of language to construct fictional worlds (e.g. see Doležel 1998; Pavel 1986).

I think this kind of approach to the literary phenomenon—which is akin to the one that reader-response criticism and cognitive poetics adopt—is more suitable for the aims of narrativists. Thus, for example, according to Iser, the anthropological foundations of fiction lie in the fact that thinking of ourselves as being someone else in a fictional world—someone we could have been—is the only way to come to know who we are (Iser 1990: 953–4). For her part, Zunshine thinks that fiction, in general, and literature, in particular, are to be seen as a kind of evolutionary tool that we use to better understand persons. They are a way to expand our comprehension of ourselves and develop our theory of mind (Zunshine 2006: 16–22). Thus, from this perspective literary fiction may be interpreted as a practice field through which we imagine persons and events to know what we would feel if those imaginary events came to pass. In this sense, the primary function of literature would be linked to what Lamarque calls the internal perspective, that is, to the immersion of the reader in a fictional world *as if* it were real. From this perspective, comparisons between persons and characters are something that is commonplace and that has occurred since the very origins of literature. This is not because we understand persons as if they were characters but instead because we understand characters as if they were persons (Margolin 1990: 844–5; Robinson 2010: 78).

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3

What Does Self-Deception Tell Us About the Self? A Sartrean Perspective

David Mitchell

3.1 Introduction

There is something strangely intimate about self-deception. That is, the secrets we keep from ourselves, and our methods for accomplishing this, seem to go to the heart of who we are in an essential way. And so too is this the case for our understanding of humanity in general. For, as Fingarette has noted, 'were a portrait of man to be drawn we should surely place well in the foreground man's enormous capacity for self-deception'.[1] Indeed, we might even say that man's ability to deceive himself about everything from sexual desire to death is what fundamentally distinguishes him. And this is not, as Morris has suggested, merely some idiosyncrasy that might occur 'from time to time'[2]. In other words,

[1] Fingarette, *Self-Deception*, p. 1.

[2] 'From time to time people "lie to themselves", as we say. . . .' (Morris, *Sartre*, p. 76).

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self-deception is not just a contingent 'error' occasionally affixing itself to the functioning of an otherwise rational self. Rather, as is the case in our own lives, the nature of what we disguise points towards something more significant about who we are. In short, in the individual case and the general, the secrets we hold from ourselves seem to offer a unique road to understanding the mysteries of the self.

Yet this is not we can say, despite this, a possibility that many philosophers have taken seriously. And we should ask why this is so. That is, we should ask why, given its apparent significance, an analysis of self-deception has not served as a more common and productive starting point for grasping the nature of the self. For whilst, of course, much work has been done on both self-deception and selfhood separately, the two have rarely been explored properly *together*. Or, put differently, self-deception has, despite its popularity as an isolated topic, rarely been viewed as essential to an understanding of the self. And part of the reason for this lies in the apparent dead ends that result from the theoretical problems arising here. That is, the reason for this separation lies in the fact that either the problems of self-deception appear intractable or that the 'solutions' to them seem to succeed only by side-stepping what is so potentially illuminating about the phenomenon in the first place. Consequently, it is then to gain an understanding of self-deception and selfhood that we must first address what exactly these problems are. And Sartre provides us with a good place to start on this issue. For, as he says, contrasting self-deception to ordinary deception,

> . . . the one to whom the lie is told and the one who lies are one and the same person, which means that I must know in my capacity as deceiver the truth which is hidden from me in my capacity as the one deceived. Better yet I must know the truth very exactly *in order* to conceal it more carefully- and this not at two different moments . . .—but in the unitary structure of a single project. (Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 49)[3]

In other words, a 'lie' in general involves a deceiver who knows the lie told is *untrue* and a deceived who does not know or believes the lie *to be*

[3] From here on *BN*.

true. And it is apparent why this is a problem if the deceiver and the deceived are the same person. This is because, as Mele says, then, 'self-deceivers intentionally deceive themselves into believing something, *p*, and there is a time at which they believe that *p* is false while also believing that *p* is true'.[4] That is to say, in the case of a lie to oneself the person must ostensibly both believe the lie and be aware of it *as* a lie. And this it seems, as Mele argues, 'is not a possible state of mind'.[5] In short, it is not clear how a lie in this sense could possibly succeed.

3.2 Other Theories of Self-Deception

However, where does this leave us? Where are we left in our discussion when confronted with this 'paradox' of self-deception? One way of seeing things would be to take these problems as intractable and give up on self-evasion as a means for shedding light on the self. Another, though, would be to try and show how potential resolutions to such puzzles might in fact allow us to see the self and its relation to the world in a new way. That is, in addressing the problem of how self-deception *is possible* we would seek to reveal something new and distinctive about our understanding of the self. And certainly the Freudian resolution to the problem appears to offer precisely just that. This is because Freud's account of the unconscious not only presents a radical view of selfhood, but seems to solve the paradox just outlined. That is, Freud's theory solves the puzzle of self-deception by, as Sartre explains, replacing 'the duality of the deceiver and the deceived, the essential condition of the lie, by that of the "id" and the "ego"' (BN, p. 51). And this works since the unconscious can then 'lie' to the conscious mind, or withhold secrets from it, without the conscious mind being aware of the subterfuge. All that is apparently required for this is that the secrets or truths to be withheld are subject to a process of 'repression'. For, as Freud has stated,

[4] Mele, 'Emotion and desire in self-deception', p. 163.

[5] Mele, 'Real self-deception', p. 92.

'the essence of repression lies simply in the function of rejecting and keeping something out of consciousness'.[6]

Unfortunately though, it is this very process which is problematic. In other words, for repression to occur, there must be something that determines which drives are permitted into consciousness and which ones are not. And, as Sartre says, 'we are compelled to admit that the censor must choose . . . ' (BN, p. 52). Yet it is also apparent that if the censor is choosing 'it must be the consciousness (of) being conscious of the drive to be repressed, but precisely *in order not to be conscious of it'* (ibid.). Put differently, in order that the censor can choose between what is permitted and what is not, it must be aware of that which it is repressing. And in this way the censor must be an awareness both of the repression *and*, as it is connected to consciousness, ignorant of the act of repression. Thus in this way we are back with the puzzle of self-deception. For it is unclear then how the censor can in turn repress, in the very moment of repression, awareness of what it is doing.

Little wonder then that given this some theorists have suggested the paradox can have no resolution. Rather they contend, as Mele says, 'that the attempt to understand self-deception on the model of paradigmatic interpersonal deception is fundamentally misguided'.[7] That is, for them, puzzles of 'self-deception' stem from illegitimately framing the phenomenon in terms of the deceiver–deceived relation of the ordinary lie. And Canfield and Gustafson are typical in this regard. For they argue that 'all that happens in self-deception . . . is that the person believes or forgets something in [belief adverse] circumstances'.[8] In other words, when we say we are 'self-deceived' we are really just adopting an erroneous belief which, given the evidence, it is unreasonable to have. And likewise Mele develops this point when he says that 'beliefs that we are self-deceived in acquiring or retaining are a species of *biased* belief'.[9] In short, self-deceiving beliefs are beliefs we acquire

[6] Freud, 'Repression', from Goleman, *Vital Lies, Simple Truths*, p. 112.

[7] Mele, 'Real self-deception', p. 91.

[8] Canfield and Gustafson, 35, see Fingarette, *Self-Deception*, p. 22.

[9] Mele, 'Real self-deception', p. 93.

due to a strong emotional desire for something to be true, and in which evidence is twisted to suit this end.

Thus it is clear, with this, that the paradox is then resolved. If we simply *come to hold* a questionable belief, due to a persistently selective relation to evidence, then we can be 'self-deceived' in this sense without having to be simultaneously aware and not aware of a lie. Yet it is also clear that this approach is unsatisfying. That is to say that, whilst getting round the puzzles of self-deception, the 'deflationary' strategy also seems to miss something essential about the phenomenon. Pedrini touches on this when he talks about 'a distinction between self-deception and motivationally biased beliefs'.[10] But it is Bach who most succinctly captures what it is missing when he points out that such a view 'does not reckon with the fact that in self-deception the truth is dangerously close at hand and must be repeatedly suppressed'.[11] In other words, there is a difference between avoiding a certain truth which immanently threatens consciousness and gradually coming to affirm an error. For, whilst the latter may be called 'self-deception', it clearly differs from instances where we turn immediately from disturbing thoughts that come to mind. In one case, we have a spurious belief accrued and cemented potentially over many years, whereas with the other we have an immediate act of distraction from something that is all too present. And in this sense it is evident here that something essential has not been dealt with. In sum, it is apparent that the deflationary accounts have resolved the paradoxes only by ignoring a significant part of the meaning of self-deception.

So is there another possibility? Is there an alternative beyond the Freudian or deflationary answers to the puzzle of self-deception? And thus is there another way of using an analysis of how self-deception is possible to shed light on the self? Before we discuss Sartre's attempted answers to such questions, it is worth looking at what Fingarette has to say. For unlike the deflationary accounts, he does use the problem to say something new about the self, as well as more properly engaging with the

[10] Pedrini,'Self-deception: what is to blame after all', p. 151.

[11] Bach, 'Thinking and believing in self-deception', p. 105.

experiential reality of self-deception. Further, he does this by first arguing that we can understand the lie to oneself by distinguishing between two modes of consciousness. Corresponding to Sartre's notion of the reflective and pre-reflective, this can be framed as the difference between conscious or explicit 'attention' and absorbed or non-focused awareness. And Fingarette uses the example of writing to clarify this point. As he says, 'When I am writing as I normally do, I *take account* of the complex and varying physical and orthographical requirements for putting my thoughts on paper, but I do not focus my attention on these things'.[12] In other words, we can be aware of different aspects of an activity, and its surrounding context, without necessarily making either a reflective 'theme' for consciousness. And, critically, we can do all this *whilst* being potentially still able at any moment to explicitly thematise a salient object in our environment.

But how does this then help solve the puzzle of self-deception? And how does this in turn reveal something new about the self? Part of the answer lies in that very point just stated, that we exercise a certain pre-reflective control over what we make reflectively explicit. In other words, as Fingarette says, 'we actively and selectively direct our attention on the basis of reasons provided by our appraisal of our situation' (ibid., p. 168). And this is significant if we consider that explicitly focusing on certain things can be painful. Say, I feel shame for something I did the previous evening. On a pre-reflective level, we can avoid thematising this. This is because, as Fingarette argues, 'I can take account of my situation and detect a condition which is relevant to my interests, but which would gravely disrupt my mental equilibrium if my attention were to focus on it' (ibid., p. 169). And what this means is that on a pre-reflective level we can have an embryonic sense of something as being potentially distressing *if* it were brought to focused awareness. Thus this sense in turn allows us pre-reflectively to withhold attention from the potentially painful object. Consequently, we can say, on this basis, we can then deceive ourselves without being entangled in paradox. For if we can withhold attention from an intentional object in pre-reflective awareness that is of obvious

[12] Fingarette, 'Self-deception needs no explaining', in *Self-Deception*, p. 163.

potential reflective interest to us, we are self-deceiving. Yet as all this occurs without our ever being reflectively aware of the thing we are avoiding, then there is also no obvious paradox involved. In short, there is no paradox as we can 'turn away' from the potentially distressing object without having to be explicitly aware of the strategy and intention of our avoidance.

3.3 Sartre and the Coquette

Returning to our argument, therefore, it seems that Fingarette has indeed answered the questions raised. This is the case since he has indicated how the puzzle of self-deception might be solved and concomitantly revealed something about the self's relation to the world. However, his explanation still remains only partial. For, whilst Fingarette takes us further than the Freudian or deflationary accounts, he still leaves the problem of a *certain kind* of self-deceiving relatively untouched. In other words, whilst explaining how self-deception is possible in our everyday dealings with the world, he does not adequately do this regarding a mode of more exceptional self-deception. That is, his account seems more applicable to a general self-deceiving 'evasion' of truth, rather than specific and immediate acts of self-deception. And it is for this reason then that, as Sartre says, 'If we wish to get out of this difficulty, we should examine more closely the patterns of bad faith and attempt a description of them' (BN, p. 55). Put differently, it is for this reason that we must now give a more thorough, *phenomenological*, account of such an act. Or, to elaborate again, it is for this reason we must give an account of that self-deception Sartre calls 'bad faith'; the state of a consciousness contradicting itself *within a specific moment*. For one limitation of previous theories is that they have taken the phenomenon of self-deception for granted. That is to say, they have overlooked the descriptive specificities and subtleties of what actually happens in a concrete situation involving such an act. And it is because of this that they have struggled to resolve the paradox of the lie to oneself. Consequently, it is to properly resolve this problem, and to gain a deeper understanding of the self, that we must instead look to do what they have not. In sum, it is for this reason that we

must return to a concrete case of immediate self-deception, to effectively describe it, and to draw out what is actually going on there.

Yet where do we begin in this enterprise? Following Sartre, we start with a description of what Stevenson calls a 'charming little cafe scene'.[13] And this involves a coquette 'who has consented to go out with a particular man for the first time' (BN, p. 55). Furthermore, the general context in which she falls into self-deception is that 'she does not quite know what she wants' (ibid.). That is to say, she is aware of the man's sexual interest in her and of the decision she will be compelled to make regarding it but, because of her ambivalence, wants to pretend that nothing is being asked of her. The critical question for our account then is how she accomplishes this. And the answer, first of all, is that she suppresses the temporal, transcendent, aspect implicit in the situation. Or, put another way, she ignores, in 'transcendence', that which is constitutively part of the situation but not explicitly seen, or 'immanent'. What this means concretely then is that she ignores the way the man's conduct towards her is leading up towards what Sartre calls 'the first approach' (BN, p. 55), the initiation of physical intimacy. And she achieves this by making totally immanent those aspects of his behaviour which allude to possibilities beyond their immediate signification. As Sartre says then, 'She restricts this behaviour to what is in the present; she does not wish to read in the phrases which he addresses to her anything other than their explicit meaning' (ibid.). So, for instance, when he says to her 'you have beautiful hair' she interprets this as just referring to a statement of fact and to the man's charming character.

Thus, continuing our description, in this way the woman disarms the situation of its worrying, transcendent, aspect and evades the decision which this transcendence implies. Yet, at the same time she does not want to deny the sexual element in the situation altogether. As Sartre says, 'She would find no charm in a respect which would be only respect' (ibid.). And it is this that distinguishes her as a coquette. For whilst 'desire cruel and naked would humiliate and horrify her' (ibid.), she at the same time enjoys the excitement which his desire and the

[13] Stevenson, 'Sartre on bad faith', p. 256.

concomitant sense of sexual possibility lends to the scene. Consequently, the coquette again engages in a move with which to maintain these contradictory wishes. As Sartre explains, 'This time then she refuses to apprehend the desire for what it is; she does not even give it a name; she recognises it only to the extent that it transcends itself toward admiration, esteem, respect' (ibid.). In other words, her response now is the inverse of what it was in relation to the transcendent possibilities latent in the man's conduct. That is to say, just as there the coquette stripped his conduct of all transcendence, at this moment she strips his desire of all immanence. For what she does then, in relation to this desire, is to transform it into a pure transcendent. In other words, she purges it of its bodily aspect and sees in it only a lofty 'concern' for her. And in this fashion, therefore, she succeeds in enjoying the excitement and tension of the moment whilst avoiding the brute fact of sexuality and the choice it necessitates.

Nevertheless, in Sartre's example, her artful dancing around the situation in this way and the choice it demands of her does not end there. For, 'suppose he takes her hand' (BN, p. 55). Such an action, we can say, now threatens her carefully constructed evasions because it seems to demand an immediate choice on her part. In other words, if she leaves her hand there she is implicitly consenting to his advance. Conversely though, if she removes it, as Sartre points out, she would 'break the troubled and unstable harmony which gives the hour its charm' (BN, p. 55). Consequently, in her bid to both postpone a decision and to maintain the *élan* of the moment constituted by sexual possibility, she engages in a final procedure of evasion. What is this? As Sartre describes it, 'The young woman leaves her hand there, but she *does not notice* that she is leaving it' (BN, pp. 55–56). And she achieves this by applying to her own being a similar strategy that she used for the man's desire. That is to say, she strips her being of all immanence and imagines she is pure transcendence. Engaging in lofty 'sentimental speculation' (BN, p. 56) about the nature of life, she enacts a separation from her body and discloses herself as being, essentially, only a consciousness. Thus by doing this she abdicates responsibility for her hand. That is, the hand, now not being *truly part of her* becomes merely a passive object in relation to which the man's touch can carry no significance.

Concluding then, the coquette succeeds here, in addition to the other two devices, in evading the decision which the situation seemed to demand of her. In this way, she succeeds in both enjoying the peculiar tension the man's desire lends to the scene whilst at the same avoiding confronting that desire and the choice it implies. And Sartre says, as such 'we shall say that this woman is in bad faith' (ibid.). But why to clarify is this the case? Or, rather, why is she self-deceived? And what, to return to the general concern of our discussion, has been gleaned about the nature of this phenomenon from such a description? To take the former questions first, we can say that the woman is in a state of self-deception because she hides from herself something at the very moment that she brings it to attention. So, for instance, in the case of the man's conduct, she reduces it to being only its immanent meaning precisely because she is aware of its threatening transcendence. That is, she reduces the intimation of future physical contact in his conduct to a purely immediate meaning. And she does this precisely because she is aware of what his behaviour signifies. Likewise, it is because when the man touches her hand she senses 'profoundly the presence of her own body . . . ' that '. . . . she realizes herself as *not being* her own body' (ibid.). In short, the woman is in bad faith because she not only attempts to deceive herself, but because she does so at the very moment that awareness of that thing to be avoided seems unavoidable.

However, we may now wonder, to look at our second question, whether we have thereby made any progress in understanding how this phenomenon is intelligible. That is to say, if a description of this immediate concrete self-deception was supposed to show how the puzzles of self-deception could be resolved, are we not still left with our central problem? In short, are we not still left with the problem of how such a contradictory state of self-evading consciousness can be maintained? In one sense 'yes', insofar as this description has not in itself yielded all the necessary answers. However, in another sense, we can also say we have made some progress. This is the case since, considered properly, this phenomenological description has, in revealing something about the self, pointed the way to a possible answer to our problem.

And what this is, and that which we can take up as a guiding thread towards an answer, is the nature and relation of facticity and

transcendence.[14] For, as Sartre says, 'the basic concept which is thus engendered, utilizes the double property of the human being, who is at once a *facticity* and a *transcendence*' (BN, p. 56). What this means then is that the woman somehow succeeds in her self-deception, as we have seen, because she is able to exploit something about this relation. To explain, she is able to deny the nature of the situation just as she is aware of it because she can exploit the fact that man is *neither* entirely facticity nor transcendence. So, for example, her strategy of separating herself from her body, when her hand is touched, works because in one sense it is true that she *is not* her body. Or, put differently, her strategy works because on one level human reality always transcends its facticity. Conversely, she succeeds in denying the temporal, transcendent, aspect of the man's behaviour because it is also true that man's conduct, in a sense, is what it is. That is, it is true that in one sense we are *not* our future, transcendent, possibilities.

As such, then, the aspect of the transcendence-facticity relation which she is able to exploit is that man, as Sartre argues, '*is not* what he is, and *is* what he is not' (BN, p. 67).[15] If man were straightforwardly self-identical, and just *was* either his body *or* disembodied consciousness, such strategies would not be possible. And in this way it is man's 'double property', his non-coincidence with himself, which must serve as the guiding thread in understanding self-deception. But then where do we go in terms of exploring this aspect of man in relation to self-deception? Further, where do we thus go in terms of grasping how such strategies of radical self-evasion can work? Sartre says now that 'a quick examination of the idea of sincerity, the antithesis of bad faith will be very instructive in this connection' (BN, p. 58). Why sincerity? Sincerity, the ideal that 'a man be *for himself* only what he *is*' (ibid.) seems essentially connected to the relation between self-deception and man's non-self-coincidence. As such although the 'concept of transcendence-facticity' (BN, p. 57) discloses something

[14] Stevenson, 'Sartre on bad faith', attempts in contrast to understand bad faith in terms of Sartre's reflective pre-reflective distinction, pp. 256–257. This effort is then criticised by M. Hymers, 'Bad faith', pp. 397–402.

[15] Also *BN*, pp. 58 and 63.

about man's non-self-identity, it remains only a particular mode of this. In short, being only a particular mode of man's 'non-being' it cannot reveal its whole truth. And this means that if we want to explore this more fundamental relation of non-self-identity to self-deception, we have to look beyond that specific case. We have, in brief, to look to the more universal aspiration of sincerity. And by doing this we then hope to show how the puzzles of self-deception might be resolved.

3.4 Sincerity, the Waiter and the Impossible Ideal

So then, to continue our exploration of self-deception we have to look more closely at the nature of man's non-self-identity. In particular, we have to look at his 'not being what he is', and do this by investigating the general project of sincerity. How in turn are we to accomplish this? Sartre begins by noting that sincerity is 'not merely an ideal of knowing but an ideal of *being*' (BN, p. 59). In other words, sincerity is not, as much of the contemporary literature on self-deception suggests, purely a case of what we say or believe, but a pursuit. That is, sincerity is a *project* we actively try to realise in our lives. And it is for this reason again that Sartre turns to a concrete description of such a pursuit to explore what 'sincerity' means in this case. That is, he turns to the example of the waiter in the cafe. For such a waiter is evidently trying to 'become what he is'. As Sartre indicates,

> His movement is quick and forward, a little too precise, a little too rapid. He comes toward the patrons with a step a little too quick. He bends forward a little too eagerly; his voice, his eyes express an interest a little too solicitous for the order of the customer. Finally there he returns, trying to imitate in his walk the inflexible stiffness of some kind of automaton while carrying his tray with the recklessness of a tight rope-walker by putting it in a perpetually unstable, perpetually broken equilibrium. . . . (BN, p. 59)

In other words then, the waiter is attempting a project of sincerity. As Sartre says, 'He is playing at *being* a waiter in a cafe', and he 'plays with his condition in order to *realize* it' (BN, p. 59). Occupying nominally

the position of a waiter, he is acting in such a way as to somehow make this constitute what he *is* in a more fundamental sense. But what exactly is the nature of this attempt to *be* a waiter in this way? And what does it reveal about man's non-self-identity and his sincerity? We can begin by saying that the waiter's attempted 'sincerity', his efforts to coincide with the being of a waiter, does not mean he seeks to make of himself in a straightforward sense a thing in-itself. That is, he does not seek to make himself exist literally like an object or automaton.

As such then, we reject the claim of Hartmann, inferred here, that 'sincerity is simply the project of making my whole self an in-itself'.[16] For, to attempt to *be* a waiter here does not mean, as Phillips also suggests, 'To say "My life is to wait at table"'.[17] In other words, even at the moment I am involved in this 'act', to make this effort does not mean attempting to believe I am 'nothing other' than this waiter. It does not mean to subsume my entire existence in that role. Indeed, attempting to be this waiter I could still also be aware, for example, of my existence as a husband, father or an aspiring actor, or even of my time off afterwards. Likewise, my efforts to live up to a certain role do not, as McCulloch argues, 'represent attempts to become absorbed in the role, and so to enjoy a thing-like, choiceless existence'.[18] This is because, in employing the 'dance' of the waiter, I do not thereby assert that I am determined solely to be a waiter, or that this is all that I could ever do. In fact, even in attempting to *be* a waiter we could still be aware of a potential future choice to change profession.

So then, what does the waiter's attempt to *be* a waiter mean? That is, what does it mean if we reject these possibilities, which centre on him becoming simplistically a thing in-itself? We can begin to answer this question by observing that although this is a particularly explicit case of the project of sincerity it is by no means exceptional. In other words, not only, as Phillips has observed, is the behaviour Sartre describes the norm

[16] Hartmann, *Sartre's Ontology*, p. 56.

[17] Phillips, 'Bad faith and Sartre's waiter', p. 27.

[18] McCulloch, *Using Sartre*, p. 58.

amongst waiters,[19] but, as Sartre says, 'this obligation is not different from that which is imposed on all tradesmen' (BN, p. 59). And what this means is that we begin to understand the waiter in terms of a more ubiquitous, if unacknowledged, phenomenon. For, what we find in all these cases and in all jobs is a more subtle effort which is simply about 'being' that thing in a more familiar and everyday sense. And what we mean here is indicated by Sartre when he says, regarding the waiter, that 'he knows well what it "means:" the obligation of getting up at five o'clock, of sweeping the floor of the shop before the restaurant opens, of starting the coffee pot going *etc.*' (BN, pp. 59–60). In other words then, it is not that the waiter is enacting some elaborate deceit or 'act' in his efforts here. Rather, he does indeed perform all these duties and exists as a waiter in an ordinary human way, which takes up part of his life. That is to say, he seeks to *be* a waiter in the same way that I might say ordinarily 'I am a student', or 'I am a teacher'. And as such therefore, the waiter's attempt to *be* a waiter is just a variation of what we all do. In short, what the waiter is doing here is a variation of what we all do when we believe a particular role somehow gives content to, or is a 'real' part of, our lives.

Yet, the critical point is that it is precisely *this* everyday sense of 'being' which necessarily eludes us. For, as Sartre argues, such being is only ever a form or 'ideal' perpetually escaping our grasp. As he says then, 'It is a "representation" for others and for myself, which means that I can be he only in *representation*' (BN, p. 60). In other words, there is some kind of real or 'solid' life of a waiter which I can never quite be. Like the waiter in Sartre's example, I can make more of an effort to adopt that role, to 'represent' that being, but I thereby just confirm that this is precisely what I am not. Further, this non-being is not just a void or empty abstraction. For, as Sartre says, 'there is no doubt that I *am* in a sense a cafe waiter—otherwise could I not just as well call myself a diplomat or reporter?' (ibid.). And in this way we can say that my non-being is defined precisely by a certain reality and 'closeness' of that ideal. It is like, we can say, a form perpetually on the periphery of my vision. That is, it is something I feel like I am always *almost* apprehending and touching, but which nonetheless always just succeeds in evading my gaze.

[19] Phillips, 'Bad faith and Sartre's waiter', pp. 27, 24–25.

Moreover, as Sartre points out here, 'we are dealing with more than mere social positions; I am never any one of my attitudes, any one of my actions' (ibid.). In other words, what we are absent from in this way is not merely the 'ideals' of particular public roles or positions. What we are absent from is instead everything which can be said to give substance to our lives. As Sartre says then, 'Perpetually absent to my body, to my acts, I am despite myself that "divine absence" of which Valéry speaks' (ibid.). And our body acts as a particularly relevant example of the point here. For, as a phenomenological account of the body reveals, we can never actually fully grasp the character of our own physical appearance.[20] Even though I ought to be better acquainted with this than anyone, and might spend hours each day in the mirror, what I actually look like, for myself, can never quite be fixed. Likewise, in another example, Sartre argues this strange absence from the 'ideal' of being applies to our emotions. As he says, citing melancholy here, 'sadness perpetually haunts my consciousness [of] being sad, but it as a value which I cannot realize; it stands as a regulative meaning of my sadness . . . ' (BN, p. 61). In other words, as we saw with the waiter, it is not a case of saying that in a straightforward sense I am not sad. My sadness is on one level real, and I feel it, as opposed to feeling happy or bored, and it 'haunts my consciousness'. However, as with the 'ideal' of the waiter, my sadness is something which nonetheless is always just outside my grasp. Like my sense of joy or regret, it is something, that is, which I can never *really* feel in myself; something which always seems to be given under the auspices of a certain pretence.

3.5 The Impossibility of the Ideal Applied to Belief

But to return, where does all this leave our discussion of sincerity and man's non-being? We can say that an elaboration of the former from the waiter example has shown that sincerity… is '. . . a task impossible to achieve, of which the very meaning is in contradiction with the structure

[20] See *BN*, Part III, Chapter 2.

of my consciousness' (BN, p. 62). In other words then, and against McCulloch who argues sincerity is possible in certain cases,[21] the attempt to be what one *is* is universally impossible. And further, we can say, this impossibility is part of the structure of our being. As Sartre states, 'This impossibility is not hidden from consciousness; on the contrary, it is the very stuff of consciousness; it is the embarrassing constraint which we constantly experience; it is our incapacity to recognise ourselves, to constitute ourselves as being what we are' (BN, p. 62). Consequently, we can say that an investigation of sincerity has disclosed, in a new way, the nature of man's 'non-being'. That is, it has revealed the nature of that phenomenon to which our first concrete example of the coquette had led us. For sincerity has revealed man's strange absence from himself as fundamentally linked to his most basic project. In short, we can see that an impossible attempt to be what we are not, in trying to coincide with the elusive 'ideals' of our being, is what characterises the very effort of our existence.

Yet continuing, if this 'incapacity to recognise ourselves' has been revealed, where in turn does this leave our discussion of self-deception? Where does this leave our attempt to understand how a contradictory state of consciousness can be maintained and thus how the puzzle of self-deception can be resolved? The answer is that it provides a crucial part of the solution. For if consciousness, as seen with sincerity, is characterised by a continual failure entirely to coincide with an ideal of being, then this must too apply to *belief*. In short, our beliefs, and our ability to believe, must too be afflicted with this failure, 'the divine absence', inherent in our entire existence. And this is what Sartre describes in his final section on bad faith. For, as he says there, 'every belief is a belief that falls short; one never wholly believes what one believes'(BN, p. 69). In other words, when we consider closely our belief we realise there is an absence at its heart. We realise, when we look carefully enough, that I cannot be genuinely sincere about any of my beliefs. For we apprehend that behind even the most 'heart felt' belief is a failure or a strange incongruity. And, as such, belief in this way resembles every other aspect

[21] McCulloch, *Using Sartre*, p. 62.

of our existence. That is, we can imagine ourselves 'believing' in the manner that a character in a novel or another person might, but fundamentally we sense that such belief does not really apply to us.

So, to elaborate, a character in a novel might seem to be defined by their belief. That is to say that the sincerity of their belief seems to consist in the way it is a real and substantial part of who they are. And indeed this is the common-sense view of the matter. In other words, the ordinarily accepted view is that beliefs adhere to, and stem from, us like height or the colour of our hair. In this way, we are said to 'hold' beliefs and carry them with us. However, on the Sartrean picture, belief is always afflicted by a strange elusiveness. As such, just as we cannot *quite* be a waiter, a husband or any other ideal of being, then we can never wholly identify with any particular belief. The moment we attempt to lay claim to, and thematise, belief, rather we are put at a distance from it. It is, as with the waiter, then, as if on a certain level it is an act, as if the person holding or asserting the belief is not *really* oneself. In short, it is as if, on the level of an existential relation, we try to play the role of 'believing', but always find ourselves as already, imperceptibly, having surpassed it. And moreover, this seems to be something it is possible to intuit in experience. For whilst a full elaboration of this point depends upon further analysis of 'non-being', we can say that this is something a sensitive phenomenology of belief is still able to discern. In other words, if we set aside ingrained assumptions regarding the necessity or importance of genuinely holding beliefs we find belief is indeed menaced by this kind of failure. And we begin to see further how this then ties in to a view of the self as 'a sort of escape from the self...' (BN, p. 25). Put differently, with this we begin to discern the sense in which, for Sartre, the self is a perpetual flight from anything which gives selfhood any definite substance or form.

In any case, returning to our argument, this last conclusion about the elusive nature of belief helps to address our problem only when combined with another point. And this point, which gets us to the heart of self-deception, is that we are *necessarily aware* of this failure of belief. That is, as Sartre says, 'To believe is to know that one believes, and to

know that one believes is no longer to believe' (ibid.). Just as, then, the impossibility of sincerity in general 'is the very stuff of consciousness' (BN, p. 62), so too is this failure of belief something of which we are always implicitly aware. And the reason why these two points combined help us here goes back to our example of the coquette. In particular, the reason they direct us to a solution goes back to a 'strategy' we saw adopted by her to disguise awareness of her body from herself. For just as there she did this by 'playing' with awareness of the two different kinds of non-being, we see the same 'game' at play with regard to two different senses of belief. This is because, as Sartre explains,

> Every belief is a belief that falls short; one never wholly believes what one believes. Consequently the primitive project of bad faith is only the utilization of this self-destruction of the fact of consciousness. If every belief in good faith is an impossible belief, then there is a place for every impossible belief. My inability to *believe* that I am courageous will not discourage me since every belief involves not quite believing. I shall define this impossible belief as *my* belief. (BN, p. 69)

In other words, to start, what we have as with the coquette is two different senses of 'non-belief', or 'impossible belief'. First of all then, there is the ordinary sense of impossible belief, something I know in the more mundane sense not to be the case. That is, there is that sense of non-belief applying to *particular* beliefs such as 'I am courageous'. Then there is the second sense of 'impossibility'. This is the sense of non-belief which we have just revealed in our discussion, applying to all belief, and the impossibility of ever *truly* believing anything. And what the consciousness in self-deception does, given its implicit awareness of this second mode of 'non-belief', is to conflate the two senses. That is to say, it uses the impossibility of belief in the second, 'existential' sense to dismiss as impossible both kinds of belief. As Sartre says,

> It has disarmed all beliefs in advance- those which it would like to take hold of and, by the same stroke, the others, those which it wishes to flee. In *willing* this self-destruction of belief . . . it ruins the beliefs which are opposed to it, which reveal themselves as *being only* belief. (BN, p. 70)

What it does then is to destroy all beliefs in the first, 'mundane' sense by judging them according to the ideal of *sincere belief*. All particular beliefs thus now become equally impossible. However then, having destroyed ordinary belief by seeing it in terms of sincere belief, it now moves back to the mundane mode. That is, it now wants to reinstate the truth of whichever beliefs it chooses, but now in the ordinary sense of belief. And it can do this since all such ordinary belief has now been reduced to the same level.

Like the born-again Christian's sin then, the belief of bad faith reduces all belief to nought, so that it can resurrect, with awareness of the futility of all belief, whatever it chooses. Bad faith thus exploits the fact that we already *essentially* feel ourselves playing a game 'of mirror and reflection' (BN, p. 66) regarding belief in order to believe what is convenient. And in this way we can see the connection to our central question. That is, we can understand with this how the impossibility of genuine belief, and our implicit awareness of this, allows for self-deception. For if we sense that all belief somehow 'falls short' then my adoption of a contradictory belief can be maintained. In other words, if we sense somehow that all belief is a 'game' anyway I can believe even that which appears impossible. And furthermore it does not matter that this strategy of sliding between the two senses of belief is itself in bad faith. In short, it does not matter, as Sartre says, that 'I shall not be able to hide from myself that I believe in order not to believe and that I do not believe *in order* to believe' (BN, pp. 69–70). Or put another way, it matters not that an assertion of belief, my *actually* believing a contradictory idea, is justified precisely by first saying that *nothing* can be believed or asserted. For, as Sartre makes clear, bad faith is in bad faith right down to its very roots. As he says, 'Bad faith must be itself in bad faith' (BN, p. 68). And there is then no underlying 'reason' therefore to be appealed to; our refusal to be honest in our relation to belief runs to the very core of our being.

Moreover, we can expand on this point when we consider again what the nature of the self is for Sartre. For we can say, to start, returning to a claim made by Fingarette, that immediate self-deception occurs on the basis of, what Sartre calls, 'the spontaneity of the non-reflective cogito' (BN, xl). That is, we are not here talking about a reflective 'choice'

regarding how or what to deceive oneself about. Our intentions, or what is desirable to believe in a given moment, *and* the strategy for accomplishing this, rather take place on a level prior to reflective awareness. And, as well as what we desire, say avoiding a decision, what we are pre-reflectively aware of is also the nature of the self. In other words, we are aware of the self as a perpetual flight from what *is*, from its facticity. Or, as Sartre puts it, we are aware of the self, as 'an ideal distance within the immanence of the subject in relation to himself, a way of *not being his own coincidence*, of escaping identity . . . '(BN, p. 77). And we can now see how this then expands on our previous point regarding the possibility of self-deception. This is because, in a broader sense, if we are implicitly aware of existing in this ambiguous liminal state of flight we can utilise this to maintain contradictions. What this means is that if we exist without substance, perpetually caught between definite modes of being, then we are implicitly aware of the difficulty of properly apprehending anything. And this difficulty, pre-reflectively intuited, opens the space further for adopting beliefs which intentionally resist consistent meaning. In short, it is the very difficulty of being honest regarding the elusiveness of the self and its connection to the world that makes contradictory belief in relation to self, and hence self-deception, so achievable.

3.6 Self-Deception and the Self

Yet, concluding, where does this now put us regarding the central question of our chapter? That is, where are we left in terms of what we said was the connection between self-deception and the self? For, did we not suggest at the beginning that we could shed new light on the self by pursuing an analysis of this phenomenon? We did. And we also began by observing that since 'I must aim at the object of my flight in order to flee it' (BN, p. 43). it is difficult to see how the lie to oneself can succeed. In other words, pointed out was how *prima facie* hard it is to grasp how we can both be the author of the lie and be taken in by it. Thus we said that an understanding of the self through self-deception would have to emerge from attempts to solve this puzzle or paradox. And we began in this enterprise by looking at some familiar responses to the problem. As

such we encountered, and rejected, the Freudian and deflationary accounts, respectively. Likewise, though an advance, Fingarette's approach, based on the idea that 'we can take account of something without necessarily focusing our attention on it',[22] was itself seen as limited. This was because it still conceived self-deception passively. In other words, it still ignored the fact that regarding self-deception 'one is not infected with it . . . but consciousness affects itself' (BN, p. 49). And it was to grasp then this active and immediate self-deceiving that we looked to describe more thoroughly what was going in a situation where it was actually experienced. In short, we looked to give a concrete phenomenological description of self-deception. For, as Heidegger says, 'the term "phenomenology" expresses a maxim which can be formulated as "To the things themselves!"'[23], and we hoped to find a way out of the puzzle by this method.

Consequently, we gave a phenomenological account of a woman engaged in a project of self-deception. And we found that it was 'the double property of the human being' (BN, p. 56), the fact man both is and *is not* his facticity and transcendence, that allowed her to deceive herself there. In short, we saw that it was something about man's non-identity with himself that allowed self-deception to take place. Assuming therefore that 'non-identity' might hold the key to grasping self-deception, we thus next looked at sincerity. This was because, as Sartre said, 'examination of the idea of sincerity, the antithesis of bad faith, will be very instructive in this connection' (BN, p. 58). That is, to explore self-deception further, we looked at this paradigmatic project of trying to deny one's non-self-identity and achieve identity with oneself.

Furthermore, we did this by looking at another concrete example. In other words, we looked at the instance of sincerity wherein a waiter is 'playing at *being* a waiter in a cafe' (BN, p. 59). However, we disagreed with the familiar interpretations of what the waiter's attempt to *be* a waiter represented. That is to say, we disagreed with the idea that he was trying simplistically to become an object or a 'thing in-itself'. Instead, we

[22] Fingarette, *Self-Deception*, p. 164.

[23] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 50.

argued, what the waiter was trying to live up to was a more everyday 'ideal' of being that people have in relation to all aspects of their lives. And it is this which the waiter could never quite be. Moreover, finally, we said that it was this non-identity, '. . . . our incapacity to recognise ourselves, to constitute ourselves as being what we are' (ibid.) which in turn allowed us to understand the nature of self-deception. For this sense of not *truly* ever being able to realise an ideal must apply to belief as well. In other words, we saw that we can never *quite* believe, and hence, as Sartre says, 'Every belief is a belief that falls short' (BN, p. 69). And this last point, as we have seen, provides a solution to the initial problem of self-deception posed. For by conflating the impossibility of belief in this 'ideal' sense with such impossibility in an ordinary sense, we can maintain self-deception. In sum, by applying the former mode of impossibility to the latter we can destroy all ordinary belief and then resurrect in a mode of pseudo-belief whatever we wish.

Concluding, therefore, we have seen that with this a solution to the puzzle of self-deception has been intimated. For, we witnessed how it was possible, by utilising awareness of the failure of belief, to maintain even contradictory beliefs and states of consciousness. And in this sense we saw how it was possible to believe the very 'lie' we were telling, even at the moment we were aware of telling it. Yet, returning to our original concern, has this analysis then revealed much about the self? Has this account of how self-deception is possible shed new light on the nature of selfhood as promised? In one sense, certainly it seems that it has. This is the case since in the process of our analysis we have seen that the type of being for whom self-deception is possible is one characterised by a certain kind of 'non-being'. In other words, we have seen that it is the fact that man must exist '. . . in the perpetual mode of detachment from what is . . . ' (BN, p. 35), lacking any substantial or present self, which allows self-deception to take place. And this is significant.

This is because whilst the exact meaning of this 'detachment' requires further analysis, it has at least suggested that the self is far stranger than thought. That is to say, that the self must be 'a sort of escape from the self . . . ' (BN, p. 25) runs counter to all ordinary, common-sense intuitions of what we are. And in this way our analysis of self-deception has, we can say, also laid the ground for a more disturbing possibility. This

further goes to the heart of our self-understanding. For, it is suggested that we are deceiving ourselves not merely about particular unpleasant truths or problems but about the very relation we have to our own self. It is, as Nietzsche says then, that 'we remain strange to ourselves out of necessity'.[24] Or put another way, it is as if there must be something about the structure of the world which compels us to so systematically elide the truth of who we are. And it is this problem then which can serve as the theme for further research. In short, it is this question of how man comes to be so thoroughly deceived about himself which can serve as the thread in future phenomenological analyses of the self.

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[24] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Preface, p. SS1.

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Part II

Politics, Authenticity, and Agency

4

Being My-*Self*? Montaigne on Difference and Identity

Vincent Caudron

4.1 Introduction

Within the framework of contemporary individualist accounts of identity, the experience of subjective difference that is at the core of human consciousness is considered to be an obstacle to authentic selfhood. The gap between the "I" and its "self" as is obvious from propositions such as "I wasn't my-self", "Just be your-self," etc., is taken to reveal an inner difference or lack of selfhood that needs to be overcome by the individual in order to attain a form of personal identity as the condition for authentic judging and acting.[1] A commitment to authenticity supposes that an individual tries to connect as directly and immediately as

[1] Since every act *as a motivated act* presupposes a prior judgment as to what should be done, it is not necessary to systematically distinguish between "act" and "judgment." Human agency indeed implies that a judgment precedes an act as that what allows a subject *to act* in the proper sense of the word.

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possible with his inner self. He has to eliminate all differences that may estrange his ego from his self, because as long as there remains a gap between his judging ego, on the one hand, and his self, on the other, there is a possibility that his judgments and acts do not authentically express who he really is; they can, for instance, be influenced, modified or even manipulated by something that is external (heteronomous) to the subject's inner reflexivity. At least from a popular point of view, such type of thinking has become widespread and seems to correspond with our contemporary views on authenticity and identity. The recent and very "popular mindfulness" movement, for example, urges people to listen to the actual contents of their consciousness through meditation and reflection in order to connect with their true selves, whereas various high schools and universities claim that their educational programs will help students to gain self-knowledge so that they can discover who they really are and what they really want.

In this chapter, I criticize the way contemporary individualism accepts the existence and accessibility of an individual "self" as a necessary condition for authentic selfhood. I do this by discussing Michel de Montaigne's *Essays* (and to a lesser extent to the first book of Pierre Charron's *On Wisdom*) because they contain an account of authentic selfhood that is widely at odds with the (Cartesian) idea of a true self. In particular, I will claim that the *Essays* are a process of differentiation that is rooted in a preoccupation with self-deception and inauthenticity. As such, I argue that they allow for a strong critique of individualism in that they try to "deconstruct" our natural beliefs in the existence of a personal self. Indeed, I believe Montaigne's account of authentic selfhood is radically opposed to individualism and I will argue for this by discussing his notion of "difference" (as opposed to identification) as a necessary condition for authentic selfhood. I conclude that early modern accounts of authentic selfhood such as those of Montaigne and Charron can offer a valuable correction of the individualist model of authentic selfhood in that they question the existence of the "self" as such, a consideration the absence of which may lead to individualist excesses like fundamentalism and nationalism.

4.2 The Invention of the "Self" Part 1: The Self as the Necessary Counterpart of a Psychological Account of Authentic Selfhood

In answering Kant's second philosophical question ("What ought I do?"), ancient and medieval philosophers tended to rely on a metaphysical idea of human nature as the focus of the moral good. For a human agent to realize a morally good life, it was widely assumed that both his actions and judgments should connect with his true nature or essence.[2] Within the boundaries of such a metaphysical framework, the idea of "authentic selfhood" is somewhat of an oddity; if anything, individuality and selfhood were considered to be obstacles that stood in the way of the complete subordination of one's life to the ruling metaphysical idea of human nature, rather than concepts that needed to be explored in view of the moral good. As a matter of fact, there is a good case to be made that the concept of "the self" as such did not even "exist" before it was "invented" by thinkers who tried to understand the rise of individualism in early modern times.[3] Historical and philosophical analysis of the relation between the fundamental political, social and cultural transformations that characterized the end of the Renaissance and the change of mind-set that consisted in people's growing awareness of themselves as individuals indeed paved the way for "the self" as a concept unique to the beginning of modernity.[4] Most decisive in this respect were no doubt the various intellectual developments that caused the paradigm shift from Aristotelian science to modern, mechanistic science, not in the least because they allowed for a radical challenge of the possibility of a metaphysical approach to human nature. The nominalist debate on the

[2] In what follows, I will refer to this approach as the metaphysical approach.

[3] See, for instance, Caroline Walker Bynum, "Did the 12th century discover the Individual", in *Jesus as Mothers. Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*, 1982.

[4] For an insightful discussion of the invention of the self in the Renaissance and a comprehensive overview of the scholarly literature on the issue, see G. Baldwin, "Individual and Self in the Late Renaissance", *The Historical Journal*, 44(2) (2001), pp. 341–364.

problem of universals, for instance, ruled out either the sheer realism of an idea of human nature or at least the knowability of such an idea, whereas both the decline of scholasticism with its Aristotelian concept of human form and the revival of ancient (Pyrrhonian) skepticism rivaled even more with the claims of the metaphysical approach. Montaigne, for example, in his famous *Apology for Raymond Sebond,* explicitly evokes both the nominalist and skeptic tradition in order to deny reason's capacity to grasp substances and correspondingly to hackle (ancient) philosophy's attempts at determining man's essence.[5] Anthropological descriptions of the indigenous people of the Americas and the Far- and Middle East that reached the old world via the testimonies and stories of explorers and seafarers alike added even more to the rejection of the metaphysical approach in that they manifestly conflicted with the concept of one overarching human form. When reading Montaigne's *Essays*, it is indeed striking to see how the recognition of the diversity in human customs and beliefs has fueled his rejection of a transcendent, metaphysical idea of human nature.

The early modern rejection of the *metaphysical approach* to human nature favored thus a *psychological account* of authentic selfhood that broke with the former in that it installed the concept of an individual "self" as the point of action of the morally good life. Those who shared the rejection of the metaphysical approach massively abandoned metaphysical speculations about human nature and instead turned toward the psychological description and study of their individual "self" as the only possible source of knowledge about human nature. Montaigne and Charron indeed paid considerable attention to intensive efforts of self-description and introspection as a means to acquire morally valuable self-knowledge. Some of the opening lines of Charron's lengthy treatise *Of Wisdom,* for instance, read as follows:

[5] M. De Montaigne, *The Complete Essays* (trans. M.A. Screech) (London: Penguin Classics, 1991). The references between brackets in the text indicate the book, the number of the essay and the page. II,12,680:

> [. . .] if you should determine and to try and grasp what Man's *being* is, it would be exactly like trying to hold a fistful of water: the more tightly you squeeze anything the nature of which is always to flow, the more you will lose what you try to retain in your grasp.

> The truest Glass we can consult, the most improving Book we can read, is *Our own Selves*, provided we would but hold our Eyes open, and keep our Minds fixed with all due Attention upon it; so bringing to a close and distinct view, and watching every Feature, every Line, every Act and Motion of our Souls so narrowly, that none may escape us. (I,7–8)

Montaigne's *Essays* are an even better example of such a psychological approach in that they not only frame self-description as the way to realize a morally good life, but also because they illustrate what this adds up to as a performative act of self-description. By reading the *Essays*, the reader may very well get to know Montaigne pretty intimately in that he shares with him the dynamics and contents of his own consciousness, yet what is more important in this respect is Montaigne's claim that these descriptions have allowed him to lead a morally good life. *On Repenting* is a revealing essay in this respect since in it Montaigne establishes a clear link between the satisfaction with which he looks back at his own life and the self-knowledge he has gained through self-description.[6] The reason why Montaigne claims he is not bothered by repentance or a guilty conscience is indeed that he has mainly behaved "ordinately *secundum me*" (III,2,917), which comes down to saying that "his doings were ruled by what he was and in harmony with how he was made" (III,2,916). Arguably the most explicit phrasing of this thought is found a couple of pages earlier, where Montaigne says the following:

> Just take a little look at what our own experience shows. Provided that he listen to himself there is no one who does not discover in himself a form entirely of his own, a master-form which struggles against his education as well as against the storm of emotions which would gainsay it. (III,2,914)

Nothing seems to stand in the way then of an interpretation of Montaigne's account of authentic selfhood in terms of an individualist model: it indeed

[6] This is obvious from multiple passages, for example: "If I had to live again, I would live as I have done; I neither regret the past nor fear the future" (III,2,920); "I rarely repent and my conscience is happy with itself" (III,2,909); "I cannot do better: and the act of repenting does not properly touch such thing as are not in our power [...]" (III,2,917).

seems justified to conclude that the *Essays* contain a seminal individualist model in that they contend that self-description is a sufficient condition with regard to the morally good life because through it the individual can gain sufficient self-knowledge to live his life in maximal accordance with his "self." Montaigne's *Essays* are certainly the earliest and probably the most appealing and original exploration of the self as a source of morally relevant knowledge. In *On practice* (II,6), he explicitly defends his project of self-description as a necessary undertaking with regard to the morally good life, a claim he subsequently repeats several times and finally justifies in *On Repenting* by reference to the idea that each "man bears the whole form of the human condition" (III,2,908), that is, by contending that his individual self *as* a particular human self contains all that is necessary with respect to a morally good life: "We tell ourselves all that we chiefly need: let us listen to it" (III,13,1218). It was, however, his admirer Pierre Charron who most paradigmatically voiced the all-importance of self-knowledge as a necessary and sufficient condition for a morally good life:

> There is not in the World any Advice more excellent and divine in its own Nature, more useful and beneficial to us, nor any at the same time less attended to, and worse practiced, than that of studying and attaining to the *Knowledge* of our selves. This is in Truth the Foundation upon which all *Wisdom* is built, the direct and high Road to all *Happiness*.[7] (I,1)

There are, however, two elements that I believe are fundamentally irreconcilable with such an individualist interpretation of the *Essays*. In what follows, I will address both of them and I will start by discussing a different hypothesis why the concept of "the self" got invented at the end of the Renaissance. Although I do not think that it conflicts with the rejection of the metaphysical approach I discussed in Part 1, I do believe that it is quintessential in order to understand what really is at stake in an early modern psychological account of self-description.

[7] P. Charron, *Of Wisdom* (Taylor 2001).

4.3 The Invention of the "Inner Self" Part 2: The Self as a Necessary Presupposition for Authentic Being

Simply put, the aforementioned "invention" of the self concerns the idea that those who rejected a metaphysical approach to moral perfection in favor of a conceptualization of moral perfection as authentic selfhood as it were "invented" the self as the indispensable counterpart of their psychological method. The moral dimension of such a shift to the self is well documented in Montaigne, Charron and even Descartes and has drastically influenced the way philosophy after them would tackle the problem of the morally good life: an immediate relation to one's particular self has indeed become both the necessary and sufficient condition for authentic selfhood and eventually a morally good life. In addition to the idea that the concept of the self came to the fore as the necessary counterpart of the psychological approach that replaced the receding metaphysical accounts of human nature, however, there is a good case to be made that a notion of "the self" emerged as well in order to allow for virtues such as *authenticity, sincerity*, *honesty* and *integrity* in a context of deceit and public performance.[8] The best way to clarify this is to take into account the fact that by the beginning of the seventeenth century, humanism, in general, and rhetoric, in particular, had pervaded the public domain. In a society that was going through some radical changes, it provided a ready-made and reliable guide to appropriate public and more in particular political behavior. Especially against a background of increasing (religious) uncertainty and relativism, early modern thinkers drew on the revival of ancient texts on politics and virtue in their search for political ethics.[9]

What is crucial in this respect is the fact that central to such a humanist approach to politics was an idea of imaginary identity, representation and deception. The idea that politics was primarily about rhetoric, that is,

[8] Cf. Baldwin, *op. cit.*

[9] Hobbes, for instance, is heavily influenced by the Greek philosopher and historian Thucydides, whereas Montaigne refers numerous times to the stoics and more in particular to Cicero.

convincing the public and conveying the desired impression on it, made that political virtue was increasingly believed to consist primarily in the ability to use the appropriate rhetorical skills in order to impress the public. Much more than an involvement with the truth and the good, the political and public life in general were conceived of as scenes of representation on which individuals became quite literally actors playing public roles. In particular, a rather heterogeneous group of thinkers commonly referred to as "the moralists" made the idea of public representation into the focal point of their critical descriptions of human behavior.[10] Consequently, their critical descriptions assumed something like an "inner self": in order to be able to criticize the insincerity and inconsistency of one's public behavior, they indeed had to presuppose more or less explicitly a kind of inner realm that not only could resist vitiation by the demands of public sphere, but that as well could function as the locus of sincerity and authenticity.[11] Montaigne's acknowledgment of the possible conflict between the private ("the honorable" / *l'honneste*) and the public ("the useful"/*l'utile*)—Montaigne was both mayor of Bordeaux and a diplomat in the quagmire of sixteenth-century France—is most telling in this respect. When it comes to discussing his role as the mayor of Bordeaux, for instance, he explicitly makes a difference between his public or outer self and his inner or private self as the necessary condition for sincerity and authenticity:

[10] See, for instance, M. Moriarty, *The Age of Suspicion* (Oxford, 2003) and J. Starobinski, *Montaigne en mouvement* (Paris, 1982), A. Goldhammer, trans., *Montaigne in Motion* (Chicago, 1985).

[11] Cf. Baldwin, *op. cit.*, p.347:

> I would like to argue that there was, in the later Renaissance, a new discussion pertaining to the self which served both to show how problems raised by humanist ethics and politics could be limited, or at least circumvented, and to demonstrate how the individual could best cope with living within such a culture. This involved strategies for understanding the world in which appearance differed from reality, and truth differed from what was said, as well as living with the psychological strains arising from the presentation of fictive *personae*. [...] The way in which this inheritance was employed would involve discussion of something some contemporaries called the *self*, a construction that would enable individuals to deal with the vicissitudes of life.

> Most of our occupations are farcical: "*Mundus universus exercet histrioniam*." [Everybody in the entire world is acting a part.] We should play our role properly, but as the role of the character which we have adopted. We must not turn our masks and semblances into essential realities, nor adopted qualities into our attributes of our self. We cannot tell our skin from our shimmy! It is enough to plaster flour on our faces without doing it to our minds. I know some who transubstantiate and metamorphose themselves into as many new being and forms as the dignities which they assume: they are prelates down to their guts an livers and uphold their offices on their lavatory-seat. I cannot make them see the *difference* between hats doffed to them and those doffed to their commissions, their retinue of their mule. [. . .] The Mayor and Montaigne have always been twain, very clearly distinguished. (III,10, 1144)

Montaigne invokes his "inner self" in order to uphold that it is perfectly possible to become involved in public life, while nevertheless remaining sincere to his deepest convictions, that is, to him-*self*. He asserts that he is able to fulfill his public duties without having to be untrue to himself, nor without becoming alienated from himself due to his engagement with the dynamics and turmoil of the public sphere thanks to his inner self: "I have been able to engage in public duties without going even a nail's breadth from myself, and to give myself to others without taking myself away from me" (III,10,1139). The attitude with which Montaigne claims to perform his public functions, however, is still one of honest conscientiousness. He most certainly does not plead for an attitude of carelessness, but argues for a frame of mind that is characterized by a kind of indifference and detachment that is made possible by the assumption of an (incorruptible) inner self in that it allows for the dutiful execution of public tasks without interfering with his conscience and personal identity: "I have no whish that anyone should refuse to his tasks, when the need arises, his attention, his deeds, his words, or his sweat and his blood [. . .]. But it will be in the form of an incidental loan, his mind meanwhile remaining quiet and sane [. . .]" (III,10,1138–1139). In short, the assumption of the "inner self" as the counterpart of the "outer" or "public self" is the number 1 concept of those who, like Montaigne, tried to deal with the psychological strain that arises from

their somewhat schizophrenic representation on the scene of the public sphere. The "self" is indeed the condition of possibility to strike a balance between the obligations and requirements of a public role (the useful), on the hand, and the demands of conscience, on the other (the honorable), in that it functions as an inner realm that allows an individual (even as a public figure) to believe in his own sincerity and good conscience:

> We must go to war as a duty: the reward we should expect is one which cannot fail any noble action, however obscure it may be: we should not even think of virtue but of the satisfaction which a well-governed conscience derives from acting well. We must be valiant for our own sakes, and for the advantages of having our minds lodged in a place which is firm and secure against the assaults of Fortune. (II,16,708)

4.4 Self-Description as an Instauration of Difference

The fact that moralists like Montaigne and Charron explicitly frame the idea of an inner self as a necessary presupposition for authentic selfhood in a context of deception and representation excludes, I claim, a full individualist interpretation of their texts. In fact, I believe that Montaigne's *Essays* contain a thorough critique on the individualist model because Montaigne's self-description is not so much an introspective *search* for a true, deeper self, as a radically critical *process* that is rooted in the aforementioned fear for self-deception and that as such aims at alienating the conscious ego from the contents of consciousness it inclines to identify with. The early modern process of self-description is indeed not a *search* but a *process* because contrary to a search a process has no clearly defined aim that can bring it to an end; Montaigne's process of self-description is first and foremost the constant effort of creating and maintaining a difference between his ego and his presumed deeper self. Accordingly, the "self" for Montaigne is not so much a substance as is the case in individualist accounts of authentic selfhood, as it is a kind of transcendental unity that is never fully actualized yet necessarily presupposed; the self is always *to-be-realized*, it is what lingers

at the horizon of true authenticity and what allows me to remain an *être pour soi*. The terms that Charron and even more so Montaigne use to qualify the process of self-description are most revealing in this respect since they manifestly conflict with the interpretation of a search for a deeper self the contents of which would be readily available to an attentive ego.

First, they show that both Montaigne and Charron acknowledge that it is extremely difficult for an individual to attentively introspect the contents of his own conscientiousness. Regardless of the fact that self-description should primarily aim at the instauration of difference, they seem to oppose the philosophical tradition of self-presence and logocentrism that states that the subject has immediate access to the contents of his consciousness, in general, and his ideas, in particular. Although they both recognize that self-knowledge is of paramount importance for the morally good life, it is indeed clear from their descriptions that they highly doubt the subject's capacity to be present to his own self. Montaigne, for instance, time and again claims that the intrinsic difficulties of self-presence may preclude the existence of a deeper "self" altogether. The fact that it is such a "thorny undertaking [. . .] to follow so roaming a course as that of our mind's, to penetrate its dark depths and its inner recesses, to pick out and pin down the innumerable characteristics of its emotions" (II,6,424) in particular leads Montaigne to believe that the existence of a self as the core of one's true identity is an unjustified assumption.[12] The first essay of the second book (*On the inconstancy of our actions*) is highly illustrative in this respect. Based on the exceptional diversity and inconstancy of people's actions and behavior, he not only concludes that there "is as much *difference between us and ourselves* as there is between us and other people" (II,1,380), but he moreover humbly admits that "there is nothing he can say about himself as a whole simply and completely, without intermingling and admixture" (II,1,377). Rather, the opposite is the case: "Anyone who studies himself attentively finds in

[12] A position defended by scholars like V. Carraud in *L'invention du moi* (Paris, 2010) and J.-L. Marion, "Qui suis-je pour ne pas dire *Ego Sum, Ego Existo*", in: V. Carraud et J.-L. Marion (Eds.), *Montaigne: scepticisme, métaphysique, théologie* (Paris, 2004). J. Lyons' claim that Montaigne's does not contain a concept of the self should be read along the same lines; J. O. Lyons, *The Invention of the Self: The Hinge of Consciousness in the Eighteenth Century* (Carbondale, 1978).

himself and in his very judgment this whirring about and this discordancy" (II,1,377). Consequently, it seems untenable to read the *Essays* as an account of authentic selfhood that understands authenticity in terms of an identification of the ego with its self. Both Montaigne's concept of the elusive "self" and his comprehensive fear of self-deception and inauthenticity indeed decisively exclude such an individualist reading:

> My mind does not always move straight ahead but backwards too. I distrust my present thoughts hardly less than my past ones and my second of third thoughts hardly less than my first. [...] "I" now and "I" then are certainly twain, but which "I" was better? I know nothing about that. (III,9,1091)[13]

Secondly, from the terms Montaigne uses to qualify the project of the *Essays,* it is also clear that his aim consists above all in the instauration of a difference between his ego and the contents of his consciousness. Even if the "self" would exist, on account of man's doubleness and hypocrisy, Montaigne (nor Charron) believes man to be capable of piercing through his own appearances and representations in order to attain his true self. Deeply preoccupied with the threats of sincerity and deceit, both thinkers stress that the primary goal of the process of self-description is the creation of a difference between one's public roles and one's true self, that is, that what remains after all the veils that man has dressed up when he plays his role on the public stage have fallen: "You can lay no stress upon what you see of him, till *you make a difference* between the Person of the Comedian he plays, and the Person represented by him" (*Of Wisdom*, 11–12). As such, the *Essays* should be read as an attempt to uphold subjective "difference" as a necessary condition for authenticity and finally the morally good life. Rather than trying to describe him*self* in view of uncovering contents of consciousness that may be attributed to a substantial self, Montaigne's preoccupation with self-deceit and insincerity pushes him to maintain and

[13] I cannot go in to this here, but I think there is a good claim to be made that Montaigne's account of the elusive self is an important anticipation of Hume's "Bundle theory of the self."

maximize the difference that is constitutive for the experience of self-consciousness as such. The detached writing process of the *Essays* is of paramount importance in this respect since through it Montaigne explicitly wants to break open the spontaneous involvement of his ego with the contents of his own consciousness: "I do not love myself with such lack of discretion, nor am I so bound and involved in myself, that I am unable *to see myself apart and to consider myself separately as I would a neighbor or a tree*" (III,8,1067). Accordingly, it seems more appropriate to speak of the *Essays* in terms of a testimony than in terms of a self-description, since much like a witness or a registrar, Montaigne tries to limit himself to impersonal registration of what goes on in his consciousness.[14] The remarkable lack of structure of the *Essays,* for example, as well as their wide range of subjects and even their internal contradiction, convincingly suggests that Montaigne considered them first and foremost as the deposition of "some commotion and revolution of his thoughts" (III,9,1070). Not unlike writers who use the stream-of-consciousness method, Montaigne first and foremost engages in an interior monologue to alienate the contents of his consciousness as much as possible from his interpreting and "glosing" ego[15]:

> My pen and my mind both go a-roaming. [...] I intend my subject-matter to stand out on its own: it can show well enough where changes occur, where the beginnings are and the ends, and where it picks up again, without an intricate criss-cross of words, linking things and stitching them together for the benefit of weak and inattentive ears, *and without glosing myself*. (III,9,1125–1126)

[14] Cf. B. Sève, "Témoin de soi-même. Montaigne et l'écriture de soi", in: P. Magnard et T. Gontier (Éds.), *Montaigne*, Paris, Les Éditions du Cerf, 2010, pp. 23–44.

[15] Virginia Woolf, in particular, was highly interested in the relation between Montaigne's writing process and his concept of the self. Cf. V. Woolf, "Montaigne", in: *Collected Essays* (Toronto: The Hogarth Press Ltd, 1967), Volume 3, pp. 18–26; see also D. M. Marchi, "Pater and Woolf: A Modernist Renaissance", in: D. M. Marchi, *Montaigne Among the Moderns. Receptions of the Essais* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1994).

4.5 Conclusion: An Ethics of Authentic Selfhood?

The question that remains, then, is whether Montaigne's *Essays* can allow for a concept of authentic selfhood at all. If the "self" as the necessary presupposition for concepts such as personal identity and authenticity is either unknowable and even inexistent, there indeed seems no space left for an ethics of authenticity whatsoever. The answer to this question, I believe, should be sought in the way the process of installing and maintaining a difference between the ego and the contents of its consciousness can provoke a form of alienation that in turn can lead to a more humble and reserved attitude of an individual toward his supposedly "authentic" judgments and actions. Once again, the notion of a *process* as a relentless effort of an individual to distinguish him-self from everything that does not essentially pertain to it is crucial to understand what is at stake since as such it amounts to the very intention of the individual to be authentic, that is, to resist the temptation to identify too hastily with a particular content of consciousness. For Montaigne, a sincere desire for authenticity translates as it were in a fear of unjustified and hasty identification that accordingly calls for an ongoing process of difference and alienation. That is not to say that Montaigne's differential process per se excludes the possibility of authentic identification, yet given its roots in his vivid fear of self-deception it seems unable to come to a stop. In a sense, the *Essays* themselves are the best example of this process: Montaigne has indeed modified and augmented them until the last days of his life without ever insinuating that he would be able to finish them altogether, no doubt because he realized that the "self" as the focal point of a desire for authenticity was not so much a given object as a construction that depended entirely on the act of writing (or "differentiating") for its very existence: "By portraying myself for others I have portrayed my own self within me in clearer colors than I possessed at first. I have not made my book any more than it has made me—a book of one substance with its author, proper to me and limb of my life" (II,18,755). [16]

[16] An obvious yet rather underexplored connection between Montaigne and Derrida seems possible. Cf. D. M. Marchi, *op. cit.*, p.91: "[...] The *Essais* anticipate a Derridean attitude in

What remains then as a by-product or epiphenomenon of the individual's constant effort to differentiate himself from the contents of his consciousness is an accrued experience of self-consciousness. Because it stimulates an individual to keep on doubting the presumed "truth" of his identifications and corresponding actions and hence allows for a more humble and literally a less self-possessed outlook on things, it arguably underpins Montaigne's ethics and art of life.[17] It seems justified to assume that the realization that even one's dearest and most important meanings are indeed different from one's "true self"—for instance, because they are volatile and do not resist an attempt of differentiation—will allow for an attitude of restraint and caution toward one's judgments and actions.

Because Montaigne's search for authenticity *as a desire not to be deceived* sets in motion a differential process as a permanent endeavor to make one question one's obvious identifications, I believe that his account of authentic selfhood reveals a recognition of doubt and vulnerability that is lacking in most individualist models of authentic selfhood. Without wanting to claim that authentic selfhood through judgment and action is as such impossible or at least unjustified, I indeed think that individualism could greatly benefit from such an acknowledgment in that it would enable one to realize that identification with one's "true self" is not as straightforward and trustful as it appears. At the least, it would lead to a more restrained mode of judgment and action as far as the other is concerned. When one recognizes that one's convictions and beliefs may be nothing but the outcome of the rather contingent dynamic of consciousness instead of meanings that are related to one's true self, the conclusion that one will be both less inclined to enforce one's beliefs using violence and more likely to accept conflicting beliefs seems warranted. Just like Montaigne, who criticized religious violence, paternalistic colonialism and the inquisition because of their manifest lack of relativism and ultimately self-knowledge on behalf of the perpetrators, one may become more disposed to respect the other's difference by gaining more awareness of

which meaning is never absolutely present outside of a play of differences, a position that puts systematic thought into question [. . .]."

[17] Interestingly, the English word "self-consciousness" contains both meanings: it is the state of being aware of oneself, yet being self-conscious also denotes an experience of doubt and uncertainty, for instance, when one has to address a large audience.

one's own difference. Especially in times when people are increasingly committing the most horrible deeds in the name of their convictions and beliefs, the instauration of an inner difference may therefore prove a morally valuable complement to the rather one-sided moral focus on one's true *self*.

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5

Specifically Human? The Limited Conception of Self-Consciousness in Theories of Reflective Endorsement

Irene Bucelli

5.1 Introduction

Human beings act, and it is intuitive to think that they are agents in a rather unique way, one that is different from other animals. Human beings can act for reasons. In particular, human actions can be subject to normative considerations, raising the issue of whether one should or should not act in a certain way under certain circumstances.

This intuition has led some philosophers to think that human agency exhibits the distinctive feature of being self-controlled, self-governed and autonomous. Some authors identify a form of agency, sometimes called full-blown, strong or *par excellence,* with which we can only credit human beings, and which is taken to be distinctive of some human actions. Within this framework, a prominent understanding of the

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notion of self-governance[1] conceives it in terms of the agent directing and governing his own practical thought and actions. This position not only holds that self-governance is required for our behavior to count as a full-blown action, but it also identifies the condition of self-governance with the agent's reflective endorsement: with the commitment to his own doings by means of his reflective capacities.

Consider the following passages that illustrate this idea:

> I believe that human beings differ from the other animals in an important way. We are self-conscious in a particular way: we are conscious of the grounds on which we act, and therefore are in control of them. When you are aware that you are tempted, say, to do a certain action because you are experiencing a certain desire, you can step back from that connection and reflect on it. You can ask whether you should do that action because of that desire, or because of the features that make it desirable. And if you decide that you should not then you can refrain. This means that although there is a sense in which what a non-human animal does is up to her, the sense in which what you do is up to you is deeper.[2]
>
> When a person acts because she desires or intends or the like, we sometimes do not want to say simply that the pro attitude leads to the action. In those cases we suppose, further, that the agent is the source of, determines, directs, governs the action, and it is not merely the locus of a series of happenings, of causal pushes and pulls. A skeptic might doubt that there really is an important distinction between (merely) motivated behaviour and action determined and governed by the agent and it is true that in any case of motivated behaviour the agent in some sense acts. Nevertheless many of the cases that suggest a gap between desire-based motivation that is and that is not appropriately related to the agent's normative deliberation also suggest a distinction between (merely) motivated behaviour and, as I will call it, full blown agency. An agent moved by desires of which he is unaware, or on which he is incapable of

[1] For important more or less recent examples, see, for example, Frankfurt, 1971; Bratman, 2007; Korsgaard, 2009; Velleman, 2007.

[2] Korsgaard, 2009, p. 19.

> reflecting, or from whose role in action he is, sometimes say, estranged, seems himself less the source of the activity than a locus of forces.[3]

According to these views, there are two kinds of agency: on the one hand, we find merely purposive behavior, which some nonhuman animals can also perform; on the other hand, there are full-blown actions, which are specifically human and spring from the agent's self-governance and from his control over his motives. Furthermore, these views stress the role played in human agency by the specific capacity for self-consciousness, through which one comes to reflectively endorse one's motives and perform actions that are self-governed. The human-specific conscious reflective capacities are taken to give a clear threshold between these kinds of agency.

In this chapter, I present and criticize the understanding of self-consciousness that underlies this picture. I focus on the work of two philosophers that can be seen as advocating this view of human agency: Christine Korsgaard and David Velleman. For both philosophers, it is crucial for defining agency that we distinguish between two levels of selfhood: mere first-personal awareness, on the one hand, and an objective self-conception, on the other, which Korsgaard and Velleman characterize in terms of practical identities and self-narratives, respectively. This latter form of selfhood is distinctive of human subjectivity and it is a condition for the distinctive sense of ownership and authorship required by human agency. In both authors, we find two reasons to hold that the agent's objective self-conception plays a pivotal role: firstly, they claim that only this level defines the specificity of human self-consciousness as opposed to the basic form we can credit some other animals with. Secondly, they claim that only the high level of self-consciousness so described places behavior at the level of reason. I question both these points: I will claim that this model of selfhood mischaracterizes minimal human reflexivity and pushes the threshold of the specificity of human self-consciousness up to an extremely high level of complexity. I argue that this level of complexity is unnecessary both

[3] Bratman, 2007, p. 91.

to establish the specificity of human self-consciousness and to place human behavior within the domain of reason. I claim that this picture is wrong in understanding the capacity for self-consciousness simply as *added on* a first-personal perspective that other animals capable of consciousness also have. Instead, a realistic view of self-consciousness needs to account for the fact that our rational and self-conscious capacities thoroughly modify that first-personal perspective and, therefore, our first-personal perspective is already specific to human self-consciousness. I will firstly present Korsgaard's and Velleman's position showing how they conceive two kinds of agency, associated with two dimensions of selfhood. This will clarify the role of self-consciousness in full-blown actions. I will then critically appraise the view of self-consciousness the two projects rest on.

5.2 Korsgaard: Actions, Endorsement and Practical Identity

According to Korsgaard, while animals are determined by their urges, human beings are capable of being *self*-determined: we can control our behavior so that, by committing to some of our motives, we regard them as reasons and perform the relevant behavior in light of them. Thus, because of our cognitive reflective capacities, our actions are not mere outcomes of whatever state we are in. Self-consciousness allows human beings the peculiar possibility of having a "reflective distance" from their own mental states. Once I have distanced myself from my mental states, they cannot move me to act as they did in the case of lower forms of agency. Self-consciousness is precisely what creates the psychic complexity[4] that gives human agency what Korsgaard believes are different constitutive standards and different conditions of possibility. Self-consciousness is a condition for self-governance, but for something to count as an action, and hence for my behavior to count as self-governed, it needs to pass the reflective scrutiny at the end of which the agent

[4] Korsgaard, 2009, pp. 125, 213; and Korsgaard, 1996, p. 94.

commits to a certain course of action, avowing it for reasons. An action is self-governed iff it has passed the Reflective Endorsement test, and Korsgaard characterizes such a test in terms of the Kantian categorical imperative.[5]

According to Korsgaard's model, then, in acting I determine the "kind of causality"[6] I am as an agent: I act under the idea that I am self-governed, that my action is attributable to the whole person, not to something *within* me. Korsgaard claims that this makes "autonomy" a metaphysical property[7] of action that sets the normative standards for behavior to count as an instance of agency. A last piece to be added to this picture is the understanding of how, in determining the "kind of causality" I am, I am determining "who" I am: Korsgaard claims that a self-governed action is an action governed by a self-conception, which Korsgaard defines as a kind of practical identity. The notion of practical identity is a part of Korsgaard's philosophy that has been widely discussed[8] and appeals to the intuitive idea that each of us recognizes different values and concerns that are associated with various social and personal roles that we have in our lives. Korsgaard believes that your identity as a person refers to a plurality of these roles you value and consider relevant in your life, so that in defining who you are you put these many roles together. The most important characteristic of this conception of the self is that it must in itself be considered as an activity of unification of these different practical identities. In this sense, the endorsement necessary for self-governance and agency is an activity of identification, necessary to gain psychological unity. Because it is an activity, my self-conception is something I am in charge of: it is the result of my commitment and as such embodies the principles that ultimately guide my action. Since the categorical imperative is the constitutive principle of agency, my very identity as a moral agent is the one that guides action.[9]

[5] Korsgaard, 2009, p. 51.

[6] Ibid., pp. 82–83, 127.

[7] Korsgaard, 1999, p. 13.

[8] See, for example, Cohen and Korsgaard, 1996, or Velleman, 2006, pp. 284–311.

[9] Korsgaard discusses extensively how self-governed action requires a self-conception of a particular kind: since the categorical imperative is the constitutive principle of agency, actions that result from alternative principles are less than self-governed. See 2009, pp. 161–171.

Our practical identities can fail to guide us in the way required for the resulting behavior to count as autonomous, which, for Korsgaard, means that it does not count as an actual instance of action. This is the case when an alternative force, which is alien to the principle of practical reasoning, opens the possibility for your unity to fall apart since there can be an occasion in which not *you*, but, instead, this force—a desire or an inclination for example—causes your action, which will not then be a full action. The behavior of a fanatic, whose sectarian ideology commits him to maxims that are not truly legitimately universalisable, or that of a wanton, who is completely at the mercy of his impulses, are paradigmatic examples of these failures of agency.

5.3 Velleman: Agency and Narrativity

Velleman also endorses the view of there being two kinds of agency. Velleman contrasts actions with slips or unconsciously motivated movements: my breaking the old inkstand because of a desire for my sister to buy me a new one is a motivated doing. However, my behavior is not guided by my motive *as a reason* and indeed in the performance I am not even aware of this desire of mine. Thus, for Velleman, this doing counts as a slip rather than an action. On Velleman's conception of reflective endorsement, motives can count as reasons only when the subject reflects on them and *reinforces them by self-understanding*. It is important to notice that Velleman's model has two starting points: one is the endorsement of Davidson's project of identifying that "causal mechanism that has the function of basing one's behaviour on reasons";[10] the other one is the view that Davidson's picture is insufficient: standard causal theories fail to distinguish between actions and mere activities. In fact, motivated activities of the sort described by Davidson can be attributed to some lower animals and do not capture the specifics of human agency.[11] In order to improve on Davidson's model, Velleman says, there must be something we need

[10] Velleman, 2000, p. 6.

[11] Velleman, 2000, pp. 10–11.

to add to "bring the agent back into the picture" and, if we are to hold on to the reductive inspiration of the causal theory, there must be some psychological element that functions as the agent and plays its role.[12] It is in order to fulfill this role that Velleman introduces an "intelligibility drive":[13] this drive does not merely push one to know what one is doing but also why one is doing it. One's self-knowledge reinforces certain courses of actions rather than others because people have a motive to do what makes sense to them. When I judge that "yes, all things considered, φ-ing makes sense" my motives of self-understanding strengthen the desire that motivated me in the first place and as such can be causally efficacious, in much the same way the standard causal theory assumes. Practical reasoning therefore surveys the agent's motives, inhibiting some of them and reinforcing others. Ultimately then, reasons can be causes because the intelligibility drive reinforces the original motivation to perform those actions associated with motives that count as reasons.

Once the mechanisms leading to action are in place, we still need to establish the condition for something to "make sense." This is where one's objective self-conception plays a role. Velleman holds that we can associate these two kinds of agency to two levels of selfhood: a minimal, purely first-personal perspective, and an objective self-conception that Velleman conceives as a story, a narrative self-conception. The distinction of two levels of selfhood defines the terms of endorsement: the condition for something to be endorsed is that it passes what Velleman calls a *coherence* test, against the background of one's own narrative self-conception.[14] In testing his motives against this background, the agent can identify his competing motives and throw his weight behind some, reinforcing them via his endorsement. Minimal self-reference is insufficient for full actions, given that my self-conception needs to function as a coherence test by which my acts, under certain descriptions, can be

[12] Ibid., p. 6.

[13] By which he means a tendency to make sense of what we do and what goes on around us but that, unlike our reasons, does not need to figure among our conscious motives. This distinction is explicitly stated in the new introduction to *Practical Reflection*, in which Velleman still speaks of a "desire,", rather than a "motive," for self-understanding. See Velleman (2007) p.xx.

[14] Velleman, 2006, p. 218.

judged as fitting with a certain narrative or not. According to this picture, the higher (full) level of agency is possible only when a subject acts through such self-representation: narrativity is characteristic of all full agencies. When a person thinks of performing a certain act that fits with her self-interpretation, she does so attributing a certain act description to her action. And when she acts, she instantiates it. Actions are the fulfillment of the agent's narrative self-conception. So, for example, a child is in the position of choosing whether or not to lie to his parents and skip school to be with his friends.[15] According to Velleman, only inasmuch as he can somehow coherently fit the lie within his self-conception will he be willing to tell it. The self-governed agent is conceived as a narrator enacting his own autobiography.

5.4 A Limited Conception of Self-Consciousness

I evaluate these two theories in depth elsewhere;[16] here I will focus on one fundamental problem that emerges from the understanding of self-consciousness they present. I showed that both models associate two kinds of agency with two kinds of subjectivity. This is possible because the distinction between kinds of agency ascribes a fundamental role to self-consciousness, considered as a distinctive human capacity. Both thus hold that the "self," as a distinctive product of the human capacity for self-consciousness, plays an essential role in defining the threshold of human agency, connecting *self*-consciousness and *self*-governance.

So, Velleman claims the following:

> As we have seen, self-awareness gives me an objective conception of the person who I am. That conception bears on practical reasoning, to begin with, by giving me access to objective knowledge of what I am doing.

[15] If the boy finds a way to reconcile the lie with his self-conception—a story to tell himself about telling the lie, which would amount to a rationale for telling it—then his practical reason condones telling a lie and he is consequently "willing" to tell it (Velleman, 2006, p. 251).

[16] Bucelli, 2014.

> Of course, a cat is also aware of doing things, such as hissing at someone by whom it feels threatened. But a cat's awareness of its own doings never extends to the knowledge that they are being done by a creature in the world. It represents them from the perspective of the one doing them, without representing the creature occupying that perspective. Thus, even when cat is aware of hissing at you, and even if it is hissing with the thought of scaring you away, it cannot be thinking that you will be scared of this hissing creature—scared, that is, of its hissing self—because it has no conception of being one of the world's creatures, and hence no sense of self.[17]

And we can read Korsgaard as agreeing with Velleman when she asserts:

> I believe that human beings differ from other animals in an important way. We are self-conscious in a particular way: we are conscious of the grounds on which we act, and therefore are in control of them . . . This means that although there is a sense in which what a non-human animal does is up to her, the sense in which what you do is up to you is deeper. When you deliberately decide what sorts of effects you will bring about in the world, you are also deliberately deciding what sort of cause you will be. And that means that you are deciding who you are.[18]
>
> The reflective structure of the mind is a source of "self-consciousness" because it forces us to have a *conception* of ourselves . . . It is better understood as a description under which you value yourself, a description under which you find your life to be worth living and your actions to be worth undertaking. So I will call this a conception of your practical identity. Practical identity is a complex matter and for the average person there will be a jumble of such conceptions.[19]

Both philosophers allow that we can sometimes act in a way that is animal-like. When behaving in this sort of way, we are able to recognize that we are the cause of that behavior: I know that it is me who knocked down the inkstand, and I know that it is me who shouted at my friend

[17] Velleman, 2006, p. 258.

[18] Korsgaard, 2009, p. 19.

[19] Korsgaard, 1996, pp. 100–101.

out of anger. Behavior that does not count as action, though, is not *owned* at what Korsgaard called "a deeper level," the level that matters for human self-governance and that exhibits the distinctiveness of human self-consciousness. In light of this, I consider both authors committed to what I call a "two levels of selfhood thesis," which distinguishes two forms of subjectivity and claims that one's objective self-conception is distinctive of human subjectivity and human agency. And this makes it a condition for this distinctive sense of ownership and authorship.

However, the formation of such self-representations seems to require the proper functioning of a variety of cognitive capacities, and it is to this aspect that I would like now to focus attention. This will lead me to identify the internal conditions for self-consciousness identified at the level of full action. I will start from Velleman's position and then show how these considerations apply to Korsgaard as well.

According to Velleman, one's narrative self-interpretation provides one of those third-personal ascriptions that are characteristic of this level of selfhood, as opposed to the egocentric perspective that allows animals to be conscious but not self-conscious. When one's behavior is guided by such considerations and it is made sense of in light of them, one considers oneself reflexively as the subject guiding one's actions. In this sense, one's objective personal conception and understanding enriches one's first-personal perspective. Now, the formation of self-narratives seems to require at least these two internal conditions: the capacity for minimal self-awareness and the capacity for engaging in reflective metacognition.[20]

The capacity for minimal self-awareness is necessary because self-narratives are possible only if one is able to refer to oneself by using the first-person pronoun: this gives a secure point of reference for creating a self-narrative. Velleman holds that we are in general *unselfconscious* about

[20] Here I am following Gallagher, 2003. Gallagher discusses what he considers are the four internal conditions for self-narratives. Next to the two I discuss here, he cites the capacity for temporal integration of information and the capacity for encoding and retrieving memories episodically. I considered these aspects not immediately relevant for the present discussion, in light of my understanding of Velleman's view of narrativity. I discuss this in detail in Bucelli, 2014.

the reference to oneself when engaging in genuinely first-personal thought.[21] This means that one does not need to fix a target of self-reference: it is assumed. This secures the fact that I cannot be mistaken in my self-reference. Consider Emma's case:[22] Emma reflects on over the fact that she is angry at Harriet, that the thought of Mr. Knightley returning her friend's love is painful and that she thinks it is much worse that Harriet is in love with Mr. Knightley, than with Mr. Churchill, etc. She thus recognizes that she must be in love with Mr. Knightley herself. We can see no attempt to identify oneself because in her self-attribution the reference is fixed. In fact, Emma might be mistaken in attributing a set of properties to herself: she might be wrong about being in love. In this sense, it would make sense to ask, "Are you sure that you are in love?"; what would not make sense to ask is, "Are you sure that it is *you* who is in love?". Although she can be mistaken about the self-attribution of a certain set of properties, she cannot be mistaken about the self-reference: indeed, we can consider this a case of misattribution only because she has correctly self-referred. In this sense, as a condition for autonomous agency, we see that there is a basic reflexivity that we need to associate to one's self-understanding, so that one's reflective objective self-conception can be integrated with the essentially first-personal, and genuinely first-personal, standpoint of the agent.

The capacity of reflective metacognition enables the interpretational process that we have discussed already: narratives require reflective consideration of certain events and self-attributions. This means that one understands these events and ascriptions by fitting them together semantically: by assigning a certain significance and meaning to them.

[21] As opposed to when we are imagining being in someone else's shoes, for example, see Velleman, 2006, pp. 170–202.

[22] "Emma's eyes were instantly withdrawn; and she sat silently meditating, in a fixed attitude, for a few minutes. A few minutes were sufficient for making her acquainted with her own heart. A mind like hers, once opening to suspicion, made rapid progress; she touched, she admitted, she acknowledged the whole truth. Why was it so much worse that Harriet should be in love with Mr. Knightley than with Frank Churchill? Why was the evil so dreadfully increased by Harriet's having some hope of a return? It darted through her with the speed of an arrow that Mr. Knightley must marry no one but herself!" This is an example, from Jane Austen's *Emma*, considered by Crispin Wright in his discussion of phenomenal avowals; see Wright, 1998, p. 16.

A narrative is more than a simple chain of remembered events or causal relations and one's objective self-representation shapes self-attributions into a narrative, enhancing the product delivered by self-ascriptions.

These considerations seem to apply to Korsgaard's view if we consider the characteristics necessary for the phenomenon of "identification" that is central in her model. Her conception of human self-consciousness also pulls together the essentially first-personal perspective of the agent with the third-personal self-conception of one's practical identity. This idea requires both the agent's minimal self-awareness and reflective metacognition: identification is not the mere ascription to oneself of some practical identity. It considers one's practical identity "as a description under which you value yourself, a description under which you find your life to be worth living and your actions to be worth undertaking."[23]

Both authors rely on the "two levels of selfhood thesis" for two reasons: firstly, they claim that only the high level of self-consciousness so described places behavior at the level of reason. Secondly, they also claim that only this level defines the specificity of human self-consciousness. I will now question both of these points, starting from the second.

Consider the following quotation from Velleman:

> Throughout the paper I assume that "first-personal" thought is not necessarily personal, in that it need not involve the concept of a person. Creatures who lack the concept of a person can nevertheless manifest behavior that is to be explained by their having egocentric representations of their surroundings – representations whose content cannot be expressed without the help of first-person pronouns. We cannot explain the stalking behavior of a cat, for example, except in terms of perceptions expressible as "There's a mouse in front of me", "I'm close enough to pounce on it," and so on. Yet the attribution of such first-personal thoughts to the cat does not imply that it thinks of itself, or of anything else, as a person.[24]

[23] Korsgaard, 2009, p. 20.

[24] Velleman, 2006, p. 180n.

In this passage, Velleman starts off by claiming that a first-personal perspective need not involve the concept of a person, and this seems right to me. Nevertheless, when he explains in what way it is possible to have a first-personal thought without the concept of a person, he assimilates this to the kind of perspective that creatures with nonconceptual capacities have. Velleman is here making a clarification of our use of first-person pronouns in explaining animals' behavior: these attributions of first-personal thoughts require us to employ first-person pronouns, which are unavailable to the animal itself. Does this mean that, in the case of beings like us, who are endowed with the capacity of actual first-personal reference, first-personal thought implies the reference to oneself as the person occupying such a perspective? This seems to be what Velleman thinks: if "I" thoughts are specifically human, and the difference between our awareness and a cat's awareness of its doings is that the cat's does not extend to the knowledge that they "are being done by a creature in the world,"[25] it then seems that my first-personal awareness expressed in "I" thoughts requires a representation of the creature occupying my perspective.

Now, I believe that this view is a misunderstanding of first-personal awareness. If "I" thoughts are conceived thus, one's subjective reflexivity, which does not require the representation of the person occupying one's perspective, is just assimilated to the egocentric framework that we can associate with creatures having nonconceptual egocentric sensitivity. In assimilating "I" thoughts with the concept of a person, we have a view of self-consciousness that acknowledges only a high level of complexity. This view ignores the possibility that a more basic first-personal awareness is a pervasive characteristic of all our conscious states and is already distinctively human. As a result, the "two levels of selfhood" thesis gives a picture that opposes a nonconceptual egocentric framework to a full-fledged objective self-conception, with a substantial gap between the two. I believe that if we gave an account of this dimension of self-consciousness that these views ignore we would not need the level of sophistication and cognitive complexity assumed by the self-representation presented by these models

[25] Ibid. p. 258.

to explain the specificity of human agency. Both models emphasized the role of one's objective self-conception, conceived in terms of one's narrative or in terms of practical identities, with the result that these views flatten one's purely first-personal perspective to the one we can associate with other animals capable of consciousness. This seems to give a picture in which the capacity for self-consciousness simply adds on this first-personal perspective. This view is not realistic because it fails to take account of the fact that our rational and self-conscious capacities are not simply added on, but they thoroughly modify that first-personal perspective altogether. The first-personal perspective is already specific to human self-consciousness and its understanding remains severely limited in these models.[26] While it goes beyond the purpose of this chapter to develop a full-fledged account of the characteristics and different dimensions of self-consciousness, the following discussion will clarify an important characteristic of this first-personal perspective: namely, its relationship to rationality.

Korsgaard and Velleman hold that their notion of self-consciousness is necessary for human agency because only the high level of self-consciousness so described places our behavior in the domain of reason. I do not think that this is the case: in fact, this view overlooks the role actually played by self-awareness and first-personal reference in rational activity.

Velleman and Korsgaard link acting for reason to reflective endorsement, which provides the test that establishes whether something can count as a reason. One's objective self-representation, either in the form of a narrative self-representation or as a practical identity, gives the substantive evaluative standards for this test. Only attitudes that pass this test can count as my own, and this means that the standards for self-governance and autonomy coincide with those of reason. The sense of authorship and ownership required by both Velleman and Korsgaard is

[26] It is important to contrast the model of selfhood associated with the theories of reflective endorsement I analyze here with layered models of self-consciousness developed, for example, in Bermudez, 2000; or Peacocke, 2014. A consequence of the criticized view is that it is not clear how self-consciousness, as a real conceptual capacity, emerges in ontogeny or phylogeny. See Bermudez, 2000, for the claim that we need this kind of explanation if we want to make sense of self-consciousness as a genuine psychological capacity.

clearly not just the basic self-attribution that belongs to "I" thoughts. Again, I believe that this picture is misguided because it does not concern itself with a full account of the different dimensions of self-consciousness. As I said earlier, the objective self-representation that both models consider necessary for self-consciousness requires minimal self-awareness. Both views remain elusive when it comes to define this minimal self-awareness and focus on the distinction between an animal's nonconceptual egocentric framework and full-fledged human objective self-consciousness instead. I believe that they overlook the fact that the specificity of human reason can already be understood at a level of self-consciousness in which one's objective self-conception plays no role.

Thanks to a basic self-awareness and purely first-personal thought, I recognize that some attitudes or actions are mine without the concept of the person that entertains those attitudes to play a role. This is not a kind of self-awareness that we can attribute to a cat but neither it is one that requires my objective self-representation. In first-personal reference, one recognizes a thought as one's own and the basic ownership so expressed is the conceptual basis for any immediate rational relevance. When I self-attribute an attitude in the basic sense of having "I" thoughts, I fix the locus of responsibility that is necessary for reasons. The first-person reference attaches a judgment to a person, making the subject sensitive to the demands of rational evaluation. This step is prior to any full-fledged reasoning about one's attitudes through reflective endorsement. The first-person perspective, associated with one's basic awareness of being the author of one's action, does not allow that deeper sense of ownership reflective endorsement requires in order for one to provide substantive reasons. In this sense, one can hold that the agent's objective self-representation is needed to have the evaluative standards that define the conditions of endorsement. However, one's first-personal awareness is all that is needed for one to be sensitive to the demands of reasons. By fixing the reference and the locus of responsibility, this basic ownership makes it immediately incumbent to one to respond to rational demands. This is the case even when the subject responds to these demands by disowning his actions in the deeper sense required by Korsgaard's notion of identification or Velleman's narrative coherence. In light of this, there is no need to assume that the basic conditions for

reason-responsiveness are necessarily linked to a level of self-consciousness that requires the concept of a person and even less the objective self-conception of the person you are.

To sum up, I believe that placing the distinction between human self-consciousness and animal consciousness at the high level required for an objective self-representation does not provide an understanding of more minimal forms of self-awareness that are already specifically human and are involved in human agency. I have argued elsewhere[27] that this conception of consciousness bears on the account of reflection these models can give and on the range of actions they define.

For example, Korsgaard's model accommodates a quite limited range of actions, excluding our mundane and habitual behavior. Among these we can consider those "immersed" actions that involve what Dreyfus defined as "mindless coping" and of which driving the car is a classic example.[28] When I am engaged in one of these actions, I display just a basic self-awareness. I know what I am doing and I am aware of being the agent who is doing it. I might not know the details of how I am doing what I am doing. Marcel[29] has argued that what is distinctive of the basic self-awareness associated with this action is the fact that one's self is not an object of awareness at all. As he points out, in our activities, our consciousness is immersed in our projects. If we attempt to turn our reflective regard from our projects to the structure of consciousness, or the self, we alter our intentional structure, and "the self who had been immersed in those projects is now abstracted from them."[30] Since in these activities my objective self-conception plays no role, it is not surprising that Korsgaard's model does not consider them as actions. One's objective self-conception is necessary for that "deeper" sense of ownership that Korsgaard ascribes to human agency. The limitations of this account of self-consciousness are particularly evident if we consider the following passage:

[27] Bucelli, 2014

[28] Dreyfus, 2002.

[29] Marcel, 2003; Gallagher and Marcel, 1999.

[30] Gallagher and Marcel, 1999, p. 289.

> When we move voluntarily, we move consciously. But this is not to say we are conscious that we are moving. Much of the time when we move nothing is further from our minds than the fact that we are moving. But of course this does not mean that we move unconsciously, like sleepwalkers. It is crucial, in thinking about these matters, not to confuse being engaged in a conscious activity with being conscious of an activity. Perhaps such a confusion lies behind Descartes' bizarre idea that nonhuman animals are unconscious. In the direct, practical sense, an adult hunting animal which is, say, stalking her prey, knows exactly what she is doing. But it would be odd to say that she is aware of what she is doing or that she knows anything about it. What she is aware of is her environment, the smell of her prey, the grass bending quietly under her feet. The consciousness that is inherent in psychic activities should not be understood as an inner observing of those activities, a theoretic state. An animal's consciousness can be entirely practical.[31]

Here, Korsgaard draws a distinction between being engaged in a conscious activity and being conscious of an activity. One could be tempted to think that thanks to the introduction of this distinction Korsgaard can after all account for our mundane and immersed actions since they seem exactly the kind of conscious activity I simply engage in. Nevertheless, significantly, Korsgaard links being engaged in a conscious activity to the behavior of animals and talks of "voluntary movement" rather than action. The choice of words and the example used here are significant because they make clear that Korsgaard is not talking about the self-consciousness that is distinctively human and necessary for full-fledged action.

To sum up, I believe that both Korsgaard's and Velleman's models display this mischaracterization of self-consciousness: they assume that one's objective self-conception is necessary both to characterize the specificity of human agency and to link it to rationality. I argued that this picture of self-consciousness is not realistic and that, moreover, the reference to one's objective self-conception overlooks the specificity of human rational agency. This view is the very ground for undue restrictions of the range of actions that we find in both views of reflective endorsement.

[31] Korsgaard, 1989, p. 118.

5.5 Conclusions: Toward a Permissive Theory of Agency?

I believe that it is important to emphasize the Kantian legacy of the views I have thus far discussed. This legacy can be found despite some fundamental differences between these projects and Kant's. In Kant's, we do not find claims associating the self with a self-conception in the form we have found exploring the role of practical identities or self-narratives. Indeed, the formalism of the Kantian self has long been a target of criticism, and Velleman's and Korsgaard's projects can be seen as attempts to overcome some of the difficulties it raised.[32] Moreover, in Kant's, heteronomous agency is not some sort of lack of agency or a lesser degree of agency, as it seems to be in these accounts. Kant presupposes that heteronomous subjects are agents: they act on the basis of principles rather than merely respond to stimuli.[33]

Nevertheless, Kant is the inspiration of reflective endorsement theories in identifying the specificity of human agency. He thinks that, unlike animals, human beings are not determined or necessitated by their desires. This is the capacity of the human will to work on self-imposed principles, which Kant calls "spontaneity."[34] Spontaneity entails a negative definition of freedom by which the human will can operate independently from alien causes.[35] As we have seen, Korsgaard and Velleman also consider that the specificity of human agency resides in the agent's self-governance and control over his desires.[36] Kant's view of reason and its relationship with

[32] For an extensive discussion of how these projects develop a "concessive" Kantianism, see Velleman, 2006, pp. 284–311.

[33] Allison, 2004, p. 135.

[34] Kant, Rel 6: 24; 19.

[35] Allison, 2004, pp. 136–137.

[36] Consider the following picture presented in the *Conjectural Beginning of Human History*: "The fourth and final stage, by means of which reason completely raised the human being above its society with animals, was that he understood (however vaguely), that he was actually the end of nature . . . The first time that he said to the sheep, "'the coat that you wear was given to you by nature not for you, but for me," and stripped it of this coat and put it on himself (v. 21*)*, he became aware of a privilege that he, by virtue of his nature, had over all animals . . . This view of things also implies (however vaguely) the

human self-consciousness and freedom sees autonomy as resulting from *one* faculty that defines human nature and human agency. Human self-conscious capacities open a gap with the rest of nature and result from rational faculties endowing human animals with freedom.

Similarly, reflective endorsement models belong to an approach in philosophy of action that strives to find and isolate that *one feature* that makes some activity into an action. There are various commitments that these views have: firstly, they rest on the idea that actions are a species of activity, and secondly, they hold that there is *one* feature that gives us the differentia in terms of which we can understand the contrast; this differentia is self-governance, which is interpreted in terms of reflective endorsement. In fact, in defining one feature as that which grounds full agency, reflective endorsement views of the sort I have criticized conceive of several characteristics of actions as standing or falling together. So, for example, a self-governed agent is, on these views, one that is autonomous, active, self-controlled and who, in Korsgaard's case, identifies with his motives. Vice versa, when someone is alienated from his motives, he is passive in a way that diminishes his agency. I believe that the doubts I have raised about the conception of self-consciousness underlying these models highlight the commitments of this kind of position and offer guidelines to assess other theories attributing a central role to the agent's reflective endorsement.

This view of self-consciousness is at the center of a theory of action that strives to do justice to the idea that human actions are in some way different from animal actions and tried to explain such a difference. To conclude, I will hint at the possibility of preserving this intuition through a more permissive view of agency, one that avoids the commitment to an implausible view of self-consciousness. While it is not the

thought of its contrary: that he may not say such a thing to another human being but should rather regard the latter as an equal recipient of the gifts of nature." "From this portrayal of the first history of humankind it follows that the emergence of the human being from the paradise that reason presents to him as the first dwelling of his species had been nothing other than the transition from the brutishness of a merely animal creature to humanity, from the leading reins of instinct to the direction of reason, in a word, from the guardianship of nature into the state of freedom." (Kant, 2006)

aim of this chapter to fully explore such a theory, I will make some suggestions about how such a theory could be developed.

By a permissive theory of agency I mean one for which agency is a capacity of organisms to bring things about and which has different characteristics depending on the other capacities the organism is endowed with and which define it. In light of this, a permissive theory of agency need not have a special notion of agency for humans: it simply holds that human agents are human beings who act. In this sense, there need not be any different *kind* of agency, enjoyed by human beings only. Such a theory does not deny that human actions are different from those of other animals or that human actions present characteristic or specific features, but, in allowing for such a difference, it does not claim that there is a different kind of agency, characterized by a fundamental constitutive property (such as autonomy, according to Velleman's and Korsgaard's Kantian projects). In fact, one could argue that actions can be seen as exhibiting different characteristics and credentials according to the different capacities we attribute to their agents. While this seems intuitive and not particularly remarkable, it does allow us to understand differences in the actions performed by agents displaying different cognitive capacities in a continuum, according to a principle of gradualism, rather than with a precise leap where the faculty of *reason* comes into play, as it happens in projects inspired by Kantian faculty psychology. Moreover, such a permissive theory can still allow self-consciousness to be a distinctive human capacity, without considering that it provides a clear-cut threshold to define kinds of agency. The idea that human agents are human beings that act has the consequence that what they do is specific of their form of life throughout: it means that even those doings that the models I examined considered as mere activities, rather than actions, are expressions of human agency, nevertheless. If we understand that the specificity of human actions is brought by the employment of the distinctive cognitive capacities for self-consciousness, and we see that in every, even minimal, instance of human agency there is a relevant dimension of this self-consciousness, even when it does not involve a full-fledged objective self-conception, then it seems that really every minimal instance of agency is specifically human.

By dismissing the idea of kinds of agency defined by autonomy or self-governance, the definition of actions in this permissive view holds no

constitutive relation to one's behavior being self-controlled, autonomous, etc. I believe that this can be considered a positive upshot of a permissive view of agency because, in fact, it allows us to separate and distinguish elements that should be kept separate, and which the views I have criticized tend to identify. For example, the kind of ownership of behavior, that the views I examined claimed was necessary for agency, entailed that agents are not alienated from their actions, or that their actions conform to their deeply held values, their practical identities, etc. I argued that this *augmented* sense of ownership is in fact a problem for these theories because of the kind of self-consciousness it entails and because it excludes a substantial range of actions (e.g., immersed and mundane actions) that do not display it. In a permissive view of agency, such a conception of ownership does not play the same fundamental role. While it is an important phenomenon that we experience the distress of feeling alienated from our actions, the phenomenon of alienation does not put into question whether or not one is acting. Human beings who act cannot fail to be agents because their actions lack some capacity or because they are estranged from their behavior. Their actions can fail to possess certain qualities that we might find remarkable or desirable, and they are in this sense defective, but this does not entail that we question their status as actions: they might lack the characteristics that make them rational, autonomous, self-controlled, intentional, etc. This means that, for example, in deeming a subject's behavior as compulsive one is not denying that the subject is acting. Because these characteristics are not essential and constitutive features of human agency, we can have an understanding of them that is independent of the definition of agency.

Moreover, because a permissive view of agency need not hold a connection between autonomy, authenticity, alienation and identification, and activity and passivity, it gives the grounds for a discussion about their definitions and their relations that does not commit one to unify these different characteristics through its conception of agency. The result of unifying these different aspects is that the understanding of certain problematic cases remains obscure. For example, akratic agents might fail at being self-controlled but can still be active, and possibly authentic and not necessarily alienated from their motives. In the case of someone's angry reaction with his friend, we might see the person

as passive but also authentic, despite his experiencing his reaction as something out of his control. A permissive view of agency need not deny the importance of these aspects or the interest in understanding their connections but it can in fact draw clearer distinctions among them because it does not strive to connect these different elements to the *one constitutive feature* defining of agency altogether.

I believe that it is important to stress how issues concerning self-governance, self-control, identification, etc., need not cease being of great interest just because one wishes to untie them from one's definition of agency. So, for example, undoubtedly the notion of identity remains central in ethics as well as in debates around multiculturalism,[37] even if one denies a constitutive relation between our practical identity and the conditions for agency. In fact, the kind of conception of practical identity that is defined by reflective endorsement views risks, on the one hand, to produce an unclear picture of identity by tying it to those elements that, I have claimed, would be best to keep separate; on the other hand, by privileging those aspects of identity that are connected to the agent's activity, deliberation and self-control, this conception does not provide a full understanding of the biases and constraints that are at play in defining one's identity, nor does it make sense of the role that identity can play in automatic behavior. Similarly, a permissive view of agency need not deny the importance of narratives in our lives. Indeed, even without making narrativity a condition for agency, there are several reasons why the role of narratives should not be belittled. Our narrative practices are at the core of our thinking about our past and future and play an important role in understanding ourselves and others because they organize and integrate our experiences, enabling us to make sense of ourselves, our actions and the actions of others. It is of great interest how the role of narratives can be essential in certain contexts,[38] and more generally in living flourishing lives as individuals.

[37] See Sen, 2006.

[38] For example, in the context of understanding and treating certain illnesses, such as schizophrenia, see Mackenzie and Poltera, 2010.

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6

Making the Case for Political Anthropology: Understanding and Addressing the Backlash Against Liberalism

Rockwell F. Clancy

6.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the concept and contemporary importance of political anthropology, attempting to understand and address the backlash against inclusive liberal values on this basis. "Political anthropology" refers to an understanding of political activities and notions belonging to the political sphere—such as "justice," "rights," etc.—on the basis of philosophical anthropology, classically conceived in terms of conceptions of human nature. Although classic and modern thought has traditionally grounded its analyses of the political with reference

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to human nature, the mainstream of contemporary thought has—for good reasons—largely abandoned this approach. Abandoning this strategy has itself often been understood as a precondition for justice, a line of thought associated with liberalism.

However, this shift is problematic for at least two reasons: first, the possibility of this approach—whether one can ever fully divorce philosophical anthropology from political thought; second, its desirability—whether this approach is itself beneficial. My claim is that the contemporary backlash against multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism, and generally inclusive liberal values evident in forms of political conservatism and religious fundamentalism can be understood in terms of an attempted abandonment of political anthropology. As opposed to simply pushing ahead with this abandonment—bewailing the irrationality and conservatism of those grounding their sociopolitical claims with reference to understandings of human nature—the only way to understand and address this backlash is by returning to accounts of philosophical anthropology.

To do so, this chapter is divided into four parts. First, I develop an understanding of liberalism as an attempted abandonment of political anthropology. Next, I discuss the extent to which this abandonment is impossible, elucidating the conception of human nature on which liberal commitments are based. Third, I explain the negative consequences of this attempt, describing the philosophical anthropology implied by these consequences as an alternative to a liberal conception of human nature. Finally, I develop this alternative political anthropology with reference to a variety of perspectives, showing not only how it can make sense of but also help to lessen the backlash against liberalism. Given the centrality of idealist commitments to liberalism and the mainstream of the Western philosophical tradition, I explain and argue for the importance of various materialist perspectives that emphasize the body and deemphasize the discontinuity between human existence and existence in general—associated with East-Asian thought, extended theories of mind, and Science, Technology, and Society Studies—in formulating this alternative philosophical anthropology.

6.2 Liberalism: An Attempted Abandonment of Human Nature

Political thought, including the related fields of ethics and law, has traditionally grounded its analyses of concepts belonging to these spheres in terms of human nature, taking accounts of philosophical anthropology as a touchstone to understand concepts belonging to the domain of politics. To understand the nature of justice, for example, Plato appeals to an account of the soul via the *polis* in the *Republic*. Similarly, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle says man is born for citizenship, that the function of man consists in this type of life. This activity or action of the soul implies a rational principle.[1] He reiterates these same points in the *Politics*, claiming the state is a creation of nature prior to both the family and individual, and that, by nature, man is a political animal. Insofar as the polity is an outgrowth or reflection of human nature, on this understanding, the *polis*—versus the family—is the most sovereign and self-sufficient social unit, an outgrowth or reflection of the highest part of human nature.[2]

In early modern thought, Hobbes appeals to human existence in a state of nature to explain the basis of sovereignty in the social contact. Likewise, Spinoza claims that the positions he develops throughout the *Political Treatise* proceed "from the necessity of human nature" (308).[3] With good reason, however, the mainstream of contemporary political thought has largely abandoned such an approach.

Here, "human nature" has been conceived as unchanging—an essence in terms of which the characteristic behaviors of persons and peoples can

[1] Although this perspective is evident throughout, see especially Book 1, Chapter 7.

[2] Again, although this perspective is evident throughout, see especially, Book 1, Part Two. For a discussion of these points and their contemporary significance, see Hadley Arkes *First things: An inquiry into the first principles of morals and justice*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1986. 12.

[3] This perspective is also, of course, evident in the thought of Rousseau—especially the *Social Contract*—although in a much different form from thinkers in the liberal tradition. For a discussion of these themes in Rousseau's thought, see R. Clancy "Civil religion as an antidote to political conservatism and religious fundamentalism? Navigating the course between inclusive universalism and exclusive particularism," *Europeana*, forthcoming.

be understood. Given the existence of competing and mutually exclusive accounts of human nature, one can conclude that these result more from contingent factors—such as cultural, ethnic, and religious orientations—than the convergence of these conceptions on any "matter of fact" regarding what it means to be human. Such accounts imply and support competing and mutually exclusive conceptions of the good life, which often result in or justify strife—if not terrible atrocities—between persons and peoples. Abandoning this strategy has itself been understood as a precondition for an analysis of notions belonging to the political, a line of thought associated with "liberalism."

Slavoj Žižek describes its program as one where "politics should be purged of moral ideals" (2010, p. 34).[4] In this respect, "liberalism conceives itself as a 'politics of the lesser evil,'" where "its ambition is to bring about the 'least worst society possible,' thus preventing a greater evil, since it considers any attempt to directly impose a positive good as the ultimate source of all evil" (Žižek 2010, p. 38). Evidence of this shift begins with Hobbes, whose project Hadley Arkes describes as an "effort to scale down the ends of politics, to remove from political life those questions about the highest moral ends which proved so enduringly contentious, and which were so often productive of civil war" (Arkes 15).

In a different tradition but similar conceptual vein, Jacques Rancière asserts that Hobbes criticized the position of the ancients as being "utopic in its assertion that human beings are by nature cut out for the polity"[5]; "one must refute the very idea of some kind of natural political aptitude in the human animal that would predestine them to any good other than simple survival" (Rancière 77). In these respects, the thought of Hobbes and the liberal tradition it inaugurates departs sharply from Aristotle and the natural law tradition.

The merit of liberalism thus consists in neutrality with respect to these competing conceptions of human nature and the best possible life: "Its central idea is that government should be neutral toward the moral and

[4] *Living in the End Times*. New York: Verso, 2010. 34.

[5] *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*. Trans. Julie Rose. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999. 76.

religious views its citizens espouse. Since people disagree about the best way to live, government should not affirm in law any particular vision of the good life. Instead, it should provide a framework of rights that respect persons as free and independent selves, capable of choosing their own values and ends."[6] This neutrality acts as a negative principle in which making robust claims with respect to human nature is itself bad, as the good consists in establishing a broad framework of negative rights that allow people to discover and pursue such accounts for themselves.[7]

Versus robust claims regarding the nature of morality, the good life, etc.—based on "thick" conceptions of personhood or human nature—liberalism sets aside such questions. John Rawls writes, for example, that "accepting the political conception [of justice]" associated with liberalism "does not presuppose accepting any particular comprehensive religious, philosophical, or moral doctrine."[8] However, this move is problematic for at least two reasons: the first concerns the possibility of this approach—whether one can ever fully divorce philosophical anthropology from political thought. The second concerns its desirability—whether this approach is itself beneficial.

6.3 Problem 1: The Possibility of This Abandonment

With regard to the first of these problems, William Galston says that "every contemporary liberal theory that begins by promising to do without a substantive theory of the good ends by betraying that promise."[9] Referring

[6] Michael J. Sandel's *Democracy's Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996. 4.

[7] On this, see Isaiah Berlin's classic formulation and defense of negative rights and freedom in "Two Concepts of Freedom." *Four Essays on Liberty*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969. 118-172.

[8] "The Priority of Right and Ideas of the Good." *Collected Papers*. Ed. Samuel Freeman. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999. 450.

[9] "Liberalism and Public Morality." *Liberals on Liberalism*. Ed. Alfonso J. Damico. Totowa: Rowman and Littlefield, 1986. 143.

to "the characteristic error of anti-perfectionist liberalism," Robert George unpacks this claim as follows: "[liberalism] falsely purports to justify a regime of law that is strictly neutral on the question of what makes for a morally valuable life . . . which itself presupposes no particular position on the question of what makes for a morally valuable life."[10]

Hence, while Rawls, for example, claims to remain neutral with respect to such questions, attempting to bracket "comprehensive doctrines," "justice as fairness" itself implies a specific conception of human nature, where human beings are rational and disinterested while at the same time risk avert. Rawls writes that "one feature of justice as fairness is to think of the parties in the initial situation as rational and mutually disinterested,"[11] with regard to economic dimensions of his conception of personhood, that "the concept of rationality must be interpreted . . . in the narrow sense, standard in economic theory, of taking the most effective means to given ends" (Theory of Justice, 14). All cooperate because collective well-being depends on this cooperation (Theory of Justice, 15). Behind the veil of ignorance, no one knows the position they occupy in society, such that no one is prejudiced in the principles they choose (Theory of Justice, 18).

Moreover, at times Rawls endorses a kind of moral formation indicative of the paternalism to which liberalism is supposed to be opposed: "certain initial bounds are placed upon what is good and what forms of character are morally worthy, and so upon what kinds of persons men should be" (Theory of Justice, 32).[12] According to George, Rawls is thus committed to a conception of the person and the good: "The 'persons' in the original position choose liberal principles because they are 'persons' as a certain form of liberalism conceives them" (George 133).[13]

[10] *Making Men Moral: Civil Liberties and Public Morality*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002. 159.

[11] *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971. 13.

[12] Additionally, see his subsequent discussions of education, which further bring out Rawls' paternalism (Theory of Justice, 469-70).

[13] Again, the neutrality at the heart of a liberal conception of justice thus implies a conception of human nature as rational, disinterested, and risk avert, where the integration of individuals into community is based on mutual aims and shared interests, where people *naturally* tend toward

Similarly, against those who champion only negative freedom and a liberal conception of right, Charles Taylor argues this emphasis is itself already informed by a broader conception of the good life—indicative of a conception of human nature.[14] Hence, as much as one might like and try, it is difficult, if not impossible, to divorce an understanding and analysis of the political from human nature. This issue gives rise to a second problem concerning the liberal tradition—the desirability of such an approach.

6.4 Problem 2: The Desirability of This Abandonment?

The recognition of and appreciation for cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity associated with inclusive liberal values—evident in liberalism, multiculturalism, and cosmopolitanism—have not materialized to the extent expected. Whether conservative political movements in Europe, fundamentalist forms of religion throughout the Middle East, or the combination of the two in increasingly right-wing trends in the US Republican party, the tendency exists to understand and explain religiously fundamentalist and politically conservative movements as simply throwbacks, attempts at establishing older, more traditional forms of political and religious organizations.[15] Although intuitively plausible, this perspective can obfuscate important features and consequences of these movements.

agreement through discussion. Although dialogue and communication are less pronounced in Rawls' earlier work, they seem to figure more prominently by the time of *Political Liberalism*. Of course, dialogue and communication lie at the heart of Habermas' political and ethical work, much of which is indicative of and has contributed to recent liberal thought. See especially Habermas 1984 and Habermas 1998.

[14] "What's Wrong with Negative Liberty?" *Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers* vol. 2. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

[15] The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), for example, is often explained in terms of its attempts at establishing an older, more traditional form of Islam, insofar as it attempts to strictly enforce Sharia law. G. Wood, "What ISIS really wants" *The Atlantic*, March 2015 http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/03/what-isis-really-wants/384980/

Far from being simply premodern or throwbacks, insofar as forms of fundamentalism and conservatism utilize specifically modern technologies—televangelism, suicide bombing, and execution videos, for instance—these phenomena would be specifically modern.[16] Further, insofar as the most salient characteristic of postmodernism would be its critique of modernity—questioning and criticizing its basic suppositions—as fundamentalist and conservative movements consist in reactions against modernity, they could even be considered "postmodern." The suppositions with which fundamentalism and conservatism seem to be the most concerned are those regarding philosophical anthropology—ethical and political consequences that follow from metaphysical commitments concerning the nature of being human. Fundamentalism and conservatism's fixation on issues involving sexuality and women, for example, concern human reproduction[17] and relations between men and women, in turn, revolving around questions of what the best type of human life consists in—what it means to be human. These tendencies appear in contrast to those of liberalism and other social and political programs aimed at inclusive universalism, as reactions against them.

The soft political philosophies associated with cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism, and inclusive universalism, expounded by the likes of Richard Rorty and Jacques Derrida, for instance, have given rise to a backlash.[18] Here a strong religious or national identity seems to provide an antidote to the perceived shortcomings of the openness associated

[16] For an understanding of religious fundamentalism along these lines, see K. Armstrong, *The battle for god*, New York, Ballantine books, 2001.

[17] See S. Amin and S. Hossain, "Women's reproductive rights and the politics of fundamentalism: A view from Bangladesh", in *The American University law review* 44 Spring 1995 and R. Feldman and K. Clark, "Women, religious fundamentalism and reproductive rights", in *Reproductive health matters*, Volume 4, Issue 8 November 1996.

[18] In the case of Rorty, this program could be characterized as one where people engage politically, recognizing these engagements as ultimately groundless. In the case of Derrida, such a program could be characterized as "let's wait and see," recognizing that one's political commitments are tentative and always in need of further revision. See, for example, Rorty's *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989 and Derrida's *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*. Trans. Peggy Kamuf. New York: Routledge, 1994, respectively.

with inclusive liberal values, an "exclusive particularism" directed against inclusive universalism. Not only are extremist tendencies increasingly pronounced in minority and immigrant populations such as those associated with Islam, but one also sees increasingly conservative tendencies in the social and political spheres, in traditionally open societies such as the USA, the Netherlands, and Denmark.[19] In these cases, a strong national identity (exclusive particularism) seems to provide an antidote to the perceived shortcomings of the openness associated with inclusive liberal values. Ironically, liberal ideals are themselves often invoked to justify conservative tendencies, stressing the extent to which these ideals provide the basis for Western society and must be protected against threatening foreign elements.

In his first speech as prime minister, for example, David Cameron announced the failure of multiculturalism in the UK. Although he singled out Muslim groups specifically, to combat extremist tendencies of all types, Cameron argued for the need to build a strong sense of national identity.[20] Despite criticisms and a show of support for inclusive liberal ideals by the left, the positions expressed there are indicative of a growing sentiment.

In this way, inclusive liberalism appears threatening to Western society. If society is itself under threat, then neither the projects associated with liberalism nor the ideals on which they are based seem to serve the ends of social order. Rather, they appear as disembodied liberal dogma, disconnected from and incapable of addressing concrete social concerns. In both its political and academic manifestations, the left has been largely incapable of mounting an effective response. Parties toward the left of the political spectrum acquiesce to the demands of global capitalism, while theorists grasp desperately at the reeds of a bygone era on which to hang their hopes. In political, social, and religious matters, people have grown increasingly impatient, weary of bracketing

[19] For a discussion of these issues in a philosophical context, see Rudi Visker's "In Praise of Visibility." *Levinas Studies* vol. 3, 2008. 171-191. Much of the work of Visker and Paul Moyaert explores precisely these issues in the context of Levinas' philosophy and Lacanian theory.

[20] "State multiculturalism has failed, says David Cameron." BBC News: UK Politics. 5 February 2011. http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-12371994

or refraining from staking their claims with respect to conceptions of the good life and the nature of human existence. One can recognize the intellectual manifestations of these tendencies in the political work of Žižek and Alain Badiou and the "new atheists."

The emphasis both Žižek and Badiou put on militant action and the role of the party in their political thought are evidence of this backlash, the former's discussions of political "decisions" and the latter's talk of "fidelity" to an event.[21] These tendencies seem indicative of a breaking point, a point at which one is finally fed up with attempting to understand and make oneself understood. Public atheists such as Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Christopher Hitchens, and A.C. Grayling seem as intolerant of religious belief, persons, and peoples as those they criticize.[22] Biologist Kenneth Miller points toward this intolerance—putting evolutionary thought in the service of atheism—as one of the major reasons religious people reject evolutionary theory. This concerns less their ignorance or confusion regarding the science involved and more the way this militarized Darwinism-in-the-service-of-atheism threatens their worldviews, undermines the way they think about themselves and the ethical views these self-conceptions support.[23]

[21] See Badiou's relatively accessible—albeit incomplete—account in *Ethics*. Trans. Peter Hallward. New York: Verso, 2002. 40-44. In that work, Badiou explains his own "hostility to contemporary consensus on questions of democratic-liberal procedures, human rights, and our much-vaunted respect for cultural difference" (107). Describing the "political act," Žižek says, "the unity and law of a civil society is imposed onto the people by an act of violence whose agent is not motivated by any moral considerations" (Žižek 2010, 32). This perspective fuels his endorsement of Leninism: "With Lenin . . . the point is that revolution *ne s'autorise que d'elle-même*: one should take responsibility for the revolutionary *act*" (Žižek 2010, 33).

[22] See, for example, Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion*. New York: Mariner Books, 2008 and Daniel Dennett's *Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life*. New York: Simon and Shuster, 1995.

[23] *Finding Darwin's God: A Scientist's Search for Common Ground Between God and Evolution*. New York: Harper Perennial 2007. 169 ff. See my comments on this in "Review of A.C. Grayling's *Ideas that Matter: The Concepts that Shape the 21st Century*." *Metapsychology Online Reviews* vol. 15 issue 13 March 29, 2011. http://metapsychology.mentalhelp.net/poc/view_doc.php?type=book&id=6008&cn=394.

These instances point toward not only the inability of divorcing political thought from philosophical anthropology but also the perils involved in attempting to do so. In the case of both individuals and community, strong tendencies exist to understand and stake out claims concerning the nature of existence. The intense, emotional natures of these current tendencies are only explicable as reactionary phenomena, reactions against the "let's wait and see" mentality, the inclusive universalism characteristic of liberalism, cosmopolitanism, and multiculturalism.

Perhaps the irony is that Western liberalism is open to and welcoming of cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity assuming, of course, that, at bottom, these share the same ideals. Indeed, these ideals are themselves rooted in a conception of human nature, an understanding of human life in terms of rationality and the mind. Inclusive universalistic movements such as liberalism, cosmopolitanism, and multiculturalism suppose persons and peoples are capable of forming one—more or less—global community. Guided by reason, common goals and mutual aspirations provide the basis for relations between individuals and community. Whatever differences exist between persons and peoples in terms of material culture or cultural differences, the mind and rationality would allow persons and peoples to transcend these differences, providing a universal condition for the possibility of inclusion in a global community, inclusive universalism. However, failures of and backlashes against liberalism, multiculturalism, and cosmopolitanism seem to call this understanding of human nature into question.

An inclusive universalist framework neglects the central importance of material conditions to human existence, as well as the importance of differences between these conditions to persons and peoples—the importance of particularism in an understanding of human existence. The problem presented in the failures of multiculturalism and its backlash thus concern a tension between an inclusive universalism and exclusive particularism as they bear on an understanding of human nature. Insofar as these ideals are based on a philosophical anthropology, this backlash should be considered from the perspective of philosophical anthropology. Just as these ideals are themselves neither accidental nor incidental—but rooted in a universal philosophical

anthropology—so too should their failures be considered from the perspective of philosophical anthropology.[24]

A reflexive urge to understand human existence seems itself to be characteristic of a uniquely human life, which stands at the heart of religious belief and practice, the liberal and fine arts, the social and even hard sciences. It is precisely this tendency that leads Heidegger to approach the broader question of being through being human, a being whose existence is itself an issue.[25] As became increasingly clear to Heidegger, however, this activity is by no means exclusively individual but also concerns community.[26]

Attempts to divorce an understanding of political thought from philosophical anthropology thus stifle this inherently human urge to explore and stake out claims regarding what being human consists in. Heidegger's own commitments to National Socialism might be understood from this perspective: his talk of the rootedness of a people, their world, earth, etc., and Nazi propaganda concerning race, blood, history, etc., all point in this direction, toward this urge within human beings to understand and establish themselves in a certain way. As is clear, far from idle speculation, this tendency results in real-life consequences. When this tendency manifests itself in politically conservative and religiously fundamentalist lines of thought and forms of action, however, rather than reflecting on the nature and basis of these thoughts and actions,

[24] See Žižek's discussions of multiculturalism in *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*. New York: Verso, 2002, as well as the New Americanists on their critique of liberal humanism and its complicity with a conservative ontology.

[25] "Dasein is an entity which does not just occur among other entities. Rather it is ontically distinguished by the fact that, in its very Being, that Being is an *issue* for it. But in that case, this is a constitutive state of Dasein's Being, and this implies that Dasein, in its Being, has a relationship towards that Being – a relationship which is itself one of Being." *Being and Time*. Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004. 32.

[26] This is already apparent in *Being and Time* when he writes, "Dasein has grown up both in and into a traditional way of interpreting itself . . . Its own past – and this always means the past of its 'generation' – is not something which follows along after Dasein, but something which already goes ahead of it" (41). This perspective becomes much more explicit in his later works such as "The Origin of the Work of Art" and "The Question Concerning Technology." Included in *Basic Writings*. Ed. David Farrell Krell. New York: Harper Perennial, 2008.

more often than not, proponents of liberalism simply renew their insistence on divorcing political commitments from comprehensive doctrines, bewailing the irrationality and conservatism of those grounding their sociopolitical claims with reference to understandings of human nature.[27]

6.5 An Alternative? Reconceiving Political Anthropology

Linked to accounts of philosophical anthropology in essentialist terms, the problem presented in the failures of liberalism and backlashes against it concerns a tension between an inclusive universalism and exclusive particularism in understandings of human nature.[28] The former refers to relations between individuals and community on the basis of some universal characteristic—such that all can be included in one community—whereas exclusion is the basis of the latter—belonging to a particular community consists in not belonging to another.[29]

Denying the particularity of relations between individuals and community makes identification with a particular group in contradistinction to another impossible, such that the price one pays for inclusive universalism is exclusive particularism.[30] In the first place then, a different

[27] See, for example, E. Beardsley, "After Paris Attacks, Voltaire's 'Tolerance' Is Back In Vogue", www.npr.com, February 15, 2015 http://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2015/02/15/385422239/after-paris-attacks-voltaires-tolerance-is-back-in-vogue

[28] Again, for a much fuller discussion of this point, see Clancy 2015.

[29] For empirical, social scientific findings regarding these dynamics in social identity theory, see N. Ellemers, R. Spears & B. Doosje "Self and social identity", *Annual review of psychology*, *53*, 2002, 161-186 and R.J. Fisher *The social psychology of intergroup and international conflict resolution*, New York, Springer-Verlag, 1990. With regard to the way this dynamic plays out in Chinese studying and working abroad, see H.C. Hail, "Patriotism abroad: Overseas Chinese students' encounters with criticisms of China", *Journal of studies in international education*, January 12, 2015, 1–16, and Tajfel 1978.

[30] See Freud 2001 and Lawrence 2005 for an understanding of social identity and group membership along these lines, as well as my commentaries in Clancy 2015.

account of philosophical anthropology would have to abandon an understanding of human existence in essentialist terms.

The philosophical anthropology of Sartre, for instance, emphasizes a specifically human mode of existence, although the basis of this specificity is not an unchanging form. Rather, his emphasis is on the way human beings *are*, not as an account of essence, but rather, existence and the parameters this existence demarcates in the formation of an "essence."[31] Rather than human *nature*—where nature would be conceived on the model of an unchanging form—Sartre's philosophical anthropology consists in the elucidation of a human *condition*, coordinates that form a framework in terms of which human existence plays out.[32] This is Gilles Deleuze's interest in his first book-length monograph on Hume, conditions in terms of which human nature takes shape, the formation of subjectivity on the basis of the association of ideas.[33] Rather than human *nature*—where nature would be conceived on the model of an unchanging form—an alternative philosophical anthropology would consist in the elucidation of a human *condition*, coordinates that form a framework in terms of which human existence plays out.[34] Related to this first characteristic then, an alternative philosophical anthropology would also have to consider a different conception of "nature."

Nature should not be conceived as a well-organized whole on the basis of an unchanging form, but in terms of what Deleuze, for example, refers to as "becomings," a chaotic maelstrom where relations are constantly changing. Here, the difference between human and other types of

[31] Given its specific conceptual history, the term "essence" here is probably inappropriate, although Sartre never himself ceases to use it. Hence, his dictum that "If God does not exist, there is at least one being in whom existence precedes essence, a being who exists before he can be defined by any concept." *Existentialism and Human Emotions*. Trans. Bernard Frechtman. New York: Citadel, 2000. 35.

[32] Describing the role of nothingness, the way nothingness acts as a condition of human existence, see *Being and Nothingness*. Trans. Hazel Barnes. New York: Washington Square Press, 1978. 138.

[33] See Deleuze 1991.

[34] For a similar understanding of human life with regard to the distinction between work (*werk*) and labor (*arbeiten*), see Arendt 1998.

existence is conceived as one of degree rather than kind. Philosophical anthropology does not refer to a fundamental distinction between human and other types of beings. Indeed, this is precisely how Spinoza—Deleuze's greatest philosophical inspiration—conceives the relation, emphasizing the continuity between human nature and nature in general.[35] Philosophical anthropology should focus on the continuity between human nature and nature in general, as well as the roles of technologies in human life. This account would support a critique of an understanding of political activity as a natural process, one where the integration of individuals into community occurs through natural processes. If one jettisons this understanding, however, then the question of how individuals relate to community comes to the forefront.

If relations between individuals and community are no longer the result of a natural process, then it is unclear how they can be brought together.[36] For Rancière, this is *the* problem unique to politics, precisely that agreement cannot be conceived as a natural process.[37] This perspective would take seriously the integration of individuals into community as a political problem, rather than conceiving community as a well-ordered and unified whole. Insofar as this critique and its alternative are intertwined, the merit of this account consists in not only

[35] "We do not here acknowledge any difference between mankind and other individual natural entities." *A Theologico-Political Treatise* in *A Theologico-Political Treatise and A Political Treatise*. Trans. R.H.M. Elwes. New York: Dover, 2004. 201. "[M]an . . . is part of nature, and . . . ought to be referred to the power of nature" (Political Treatise, 292). On this point, Deleuze writes that man "thus loses in Spinozism all the privileges owed to a quality supposed proper to him, which belonged to him only from the viewpoint of imitative participation" in God (Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza, 183). In the case of Deleuze, the political consequences of these commitments only become clear from a certain perspective, only after *Difference and Repetition* and the *Logic of Sense* and at the beginning of his collaborations with Guattari, in terms of his critique of psychoanalysis and praise for Anglo-American literature. Again, for extended commentaries on these points, see Clancy 2015.

[36] Deleuze writes that the "difficult part is making all the elements of non-homogeneous sets converge, making them function together" (Dialogues, 39).

[37] Rancière writes that the "foundation of politics is not in fact more a matter of convention than of nature: it is the lack of foundation, the sheer contingency of any social order. Politics exists simply because no social order is based on nature, no divine law regulates human society" (Rancière 16). "This means that politics doesn't always happen – it actually happens very little or rarely" (Rancière 17).

establishing a novel perspective, but also explaining the persistence of the above-mentioned impasses within liberalism, pointing toward their potential resolution.

Fundamentalism, exclusivism, and nationalism form the hardcore of an exclusive particularism directed against inclusive liberal values. Only by engaging in these lines of thought can one hope to combat them, understanding the forms of conservatism in terms of which the backlashes against liberalism develop. Reactions against inclusive universalism emphasize the importance of concrete, material conditions in an understanding of human existence. In the modern era, one could argue that the mainstream of Western civilization has failed to take cognizance of—and give proper credence to—both the body and community in an understanding of human existence. Insofar as liberalism fails to properly balance the body with the mind, and community with individuality, people swing too far in the other direction. This results in the individual either seeking immersion in a collective or attempting to join or form a group where relations between individuals and community would be based on exclusive particularism.[38]

Political anthropology should develop an account of relations between individuals and community characterized by inclusive anti-universalism, inclusive particularism. Unlike the *exclusive* particularism characteristic of fundamentalism and conservatism, this account would cultivate relations of *inclusive* particularism, thus striking a balance, an understanding of relations between individuals and community as variable and singular, avoiding pitfalls at either end of the spectrum. The theoretical basis of this position would be materialistic—understanding values, political activities, and notions belonging to the political sphere from the perspective of and in terms of materialism.

Here, "materialism" would be conceived in a broad, largely nontechnical manner, meaning simply that values should not be conceived as disembodied thought entities but as arising from and in response to concrete circumstances and conditions facing persons and peoples. I take

[38] See Lawrence 1995 for an understanding of social identity and group membership along these lines, as well as my commentaries in Clancy 2015.

this to be a broadly Marxist perspective based on Marx and Engels' notion of *praxis*—at least as this concept is presented in the *German Ideology*. Given the centrality of metaphysical commitments regarding idealism and the mind to not only liberalism but also the mainstream of the Western philosophical tradition, this materialism and a corresponding emphasis on the body would be important to the development of an alternative political anthropology, one that helps to not only explain but also overcome the backlash against liberalism. Insofar as the body is a locus in the mediation between individuals and the world, here the human body would play a central role in determining values and political notions.

In terms of values, in general, and cross-cultural values, specifically, the body could be understood as a kind of "lowest-common denominator" between different persons and peoples, serving as the basis of an inclusive particularism. Whatever differences exist in terms of thoughts and behaviors, embodied experience is a universal core of human existence, a point of reckoning in terms of which all persons and peoples would have to come to terms. This would constitute a limited universalism, thereby providing the basis for inclusivism. However, different values and political activities arise based on the material environments in which persons and peoples find themselves, thereby providing the basis for particularism. Insofar as values are understood as cultural variants from an evolutionary perspective, material—as opposed to simply ideal or mental—reality would play a role in the evolution of political values.[39] Emphasizing an account of ethics based on the body and embodied experience, oriented within East-Asian thought—in contradistinction to accounts based on the mind and rationality, central to the mainstream of the Western tradition—sinologist Edward Slingerland recommends such a conceptual framework in his approaches to and explanations of the Chinese notion of *wu wei* (无为).[40]

[39] On these points, see the work of geographer Jared Diamond, especially Diamond 1997, as well as anthropologist and environmental scientist Peter Richerson and Robert Boyd, especially Richerson and Boyd 2006.

[40] See especially *Trying Not to Try: The Art and Science of Spontaneity*. Generally translated into English as either non- or effortless action, Slingerland examines descriptions of *wu wei* in

Especially in the thought of Mencius and Zhuangzi, *wu wei*, claims Slingerland, is best understood as "effortless action," acting with a high degree of precision seemingly without effort, which he variously associates with muscle memory, "being in the zone," and test cases from flow psychology—denoting embodied experiences. Despite their points of origin and orientation in different times, geographies, traditions, and cultures, Slingerland says all of these phenomena point toward the priority within human life of primary, "hot," bodily cognition—understood in contradistinction to secondary, "cold," mental cognition. Eastern thought can be understood as offering ethical and political theories of embodied cognition more plausible from the perspective of common ethical intuitions and embodied human experience. These could thus be understood as inclusively particularist in nature.[41] Again, this common priority of the body points toward a universalism, where values and actions that originate with the body become particularized in different times and places. Although embodied theories of ethics go a long way in providing an explanatory basis for values, in general, and cross-cultural values, specifically, from a materialist perspective, it would be a mistake to stop there.

Given the centrality of technology to human life, an account of philosophical anthropology in terms of which to ground political claims should be cognizant of the ways technology shapes human values, acting as a point of limited universalism with regard to accounts of philosophical anthropology. Just as extended mind theorists consider pens,paper, cell phones, computers, etc., part of one's cognitive architecture—the materials in and through which cognition takes place[42]—so too should

Confucian, Daoist, and Zen texts—similarities in and differences between uses and understandings of this term in these traditions.

[41] With reference to the thought of Deleuze, much of Rosi Braidotti's work focuses on cultivating a similar embodied perspective on ethics. See especially Braidotti, 2011 and Braidotti, 2012.

[42] This thesis was first put forward in Clark and Chalmers 1998. See Nöe 2009, 81-82 for a discussion of its relation to theories of embodiment and consciousness. See Aydin 2013 for an excellent discussion of the relation between the extended mind thesis and technology, as well as Hansell and Grassie 2011 regarding the relation between technology and human nature from a variety of perspectives.

technological implements be considered part of one's material, "evaluative architecture," the materials in and through which values and politics occur. An understanding of the relation between human and nonhuman beings—living and nonliving stuff and relations—informs Bruno Latour's work on "Actor-Network Theory" (ANT).

In accordance with the need to understand philosophical anthropology in nonessentialist terms—in terms of the continuity between human existence and existence in general—ANT does not conceive of things and relations in terms of natures or essences but their capacities to "act"; nonaction in problematics—where breakdowns occur in stuff and systems of relations, similar to a Heideggerian framework—would also qualify as a kind of action. (In other words, my lighter not working when I'm desperate for a cigarette is also an act.)[43] Again, this framework allows for an understanding of technologies as providing the basis for and demarcating the limits of values in materialist, inclusively particularist terms.

Understood as *praxis*, as a value, caring about one's parents, for example, would not consist simply or primarily in feelings toward or thoughts about them. Rather, as a kind of value, caring is understood in materialist terms: the actions one takes using technologies—such as writing a letter, typing an email, making a phone call, sending a gift, or spending money—which give form to and demarcate the limits in terms of which values are expressed and can occur. As with the body, technologies here could be understood as lowest common denominators, providing points of universalism and, therefore, inclusivism between different persons and peoples. Technological implements would be actors comprising an "inorganic life" in a Deleuzian sense or the "flesh of the world" in that of Merleau-Ponty. The employment of new technologies would go hand in hand with the development of values and politics, and vice versa.

Again, this framework provides for an understanding and formulation of relations between individuals and community in inclusively particularist terms: on the one hand, technologies have a universal characteristic, insofar

[43] See Latour 1986 and Latour 1988 regarding ANT in general, and Latour 2004 with regard ANT's relation to politics.

as all persons and peoples use technologies, which provides for the possibility of different persons and peoples being included in a community. On the other hand, technologies have a particular characteristic, insofar as persons and peoples use technologies in different ways, where technologies are employed by persons and peoples to respond to the concrete, material circumstances and conditions of the environments in which they find themselves

6.6 Conclusion

Political anthropology refers to an understanding of politics with reference to philosophical anthropology. The problematic status of both "human" and "nature" should not, however, lead to a wholesale abandonment of philosophical anthropology, but, rather, a recasting of this discipline along different conceptual lines. This abandonment, I argued, lies at the heart of liberal thought. This liberal approach is itself problematic, however, as it seems doubtful one could ever fully divorce conceptions of politics from references to the nature of human existence, and attempting to do so gives rise to the backlashes against liberalism evident in forms of political conservatism and religious fundamentalism. Rather than attempting to push the liberal agenda even further—attempting to purge political anthropology from politics once and for all—politics should return to understandings of human existence to ground its explorations, albeit in different forms than it has traditionally done so.

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Part III

Feminism

7

The Decentred Autonomous Subject

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7.1 Introduction

According to the post-structuralist critique of the subject, we can no longer properly understand ourselves as a unified, sovereign subject, insofar as the overriding experience we have of ourselves is that of a decentred self, a subject that is constantly in process of becoming. While many feminists support this claim, others argue that endorsing it makes it impossible to develop an account of autonomy or political emancipation.

I will argue for a narrative understanding of the self as developed by Paul Ricoeur. I believe that his account of identity answers many of the concerns raised by some feminist thinkers about the decentred self. The suggestion I would like to put forward is that the narrative understanding of the subject supports a non-traditional account of autonomy. This non-traditional account involves a notion of autonomy as a set of competencies, which is compatible with a narrative account of the decentred self.

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7.2 Taking the Self Off Centre

One of the founding ideas of modern philosophy is the notion of the autonomous subject of knowledge and action, unified and unifying itself in knowing and acting in the world. This idea has since the second half of the twentieth century come under attack from a variety of sources. Instead of a unified and self-unifying subject, it has been argued that a more fitting way of thinking of the subject is as a being that is contextually determined, as fluid, as being in a process of change and becoming. This critique of the modern notion of the subject has been especially influential in feminist theory, even though it has not always been welcomed.

An influential strand in feminist thought is the idea that all women have 'something' in common, the possession of which makes all women 'women'. Moya Lloyd, for instance, identifies a variety of ontological, narrative and psychological forms which she terms shared and identifiable 'moments'. These moments provide a common starting point for thought and action. They have formed the basis for many feminist politics including those stemming from the liberal, radical and Marxist traditions.[1] Broadly speaking, this 'identity politics' is a form of political understanding that is based on the idea that some individuals have characteristics in common, which may include, but is not limited to, race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, etc. As Lloyd puts it, identity politics operate on an identarian logic where unity or sameness is sought beneath differences and diversity.[2]

The idea that there are essential or universal characteristics shared by all women is one that has been subject to a high level of criticism, and, furthermore, the attempt to accommodate all differences under the stable and homogeneous category of 'woman' has long been the source of intense and often heated debate in the history of feminist thought.

[1] Lloyd, *Beyond Identity Politics*, p. 13.

[2] Ibid., p. 36.

Moreover, Lloyd shows that the word 'difference' has been used in different ways in feminist literature. It has in the first place been used to describe differences between men and women. It has also been used to highlight differences among women (an idea that has been central to identity politics). Lastly, Derrida's notion of *différance* has also been used to argue that there is an inherent instability in all categories of thought, including that of 'woman'.[3] This has led to two forms of anti-essentialism in feminist thought, the assertion that there is nothing essential to the notion of woman even though there is such a thing as unitary self, and, secondly, the denial of such a unitary self. It is the latter two forms of difference that I will be concerned with here.

Identity politics, according to Lloyd, is an essentialist politics because it works on the assumption that the characteristics that are common to some individuals are intrinsic to them and that they also transcend history, culture and geography.[4] The concern of post-identity theorists such as Lloyd is that identity politics all too readily encourages uniformity and conformity and begins all too quickly to work as a normative ideal as to who can and cannot count as a 'woman'. By constructing a universal and essential identity, this type of politics works on an exclusionary basis.

The other type of essentialism that has been called into question, along with the idea that the category of woman denotes universal characteristics, is the idea of the individual subject as unified and self-unifying. This critique of the subject in feminist theory has issued largely from the psychoanalytic work of authors such as Lacan with his 'subject of lack' and from work in the philosophy of language such as Butler with her notion of the 'performative subject'.

Though there are doubtless differences between these critical theories of the subject, what unites them is the idea that there is no essential concept of woman that could adequately describe the realities of women's plural, multifaceted and complex lives. I believe that this critique of the subject succeeds in demolishing its target so successfully that it is impossible to return to the traditional notion of the subject. The Kantian notion of a

[3] Ibid., pp. 35–36.

[4] Ibid., p. 36.

transcendental subject, even Freud's rational subject of the Enlightenment, has successfully been shown to be illusory. Feminist theory, I believe, can no longer begin from a conception of the subject as stable and unitary but must instead find a way of incorporating into its politics a subject that is situated, in process, contingent and indeterminate.

To be sure, this position cannot be adopted without first considering some of the concerns raised against it. At the more extreme or radical end of post-structuralist theory, this position is often portrayed as being exhilarating and liberatory. If there is no essential or core self that defines who we are, then we are able to be the authors of our lives. We can pick and choose our identities, so to speak, we can try them on and discard them like the latest fashion. A similar notion is found in the idea of play as a means to develop personal identity and political agency, as in Rorty's interpretation of Freud, where he argues that Freud's work ends up showing that it is possible to abandon the idea of a true or inner self, with the consequence that we can be 'increasingly ironic, playful, free and inventive in our choice of self-descriptions'.[5]

However, as Guignon suggests, the concern for many writers is that such theories tend to advocate and carry the very real 'risk of fragmentation and dissociation of self as an agent in the world'.[6] Though such fragmentation is posited as a risk by Guignon, it is the case that some radical post-structuralist thinkers see this as the positive result of abandoning the traditional modern notion of the subject, so much so that Baudrillard goes so far as to celebrate the schizoid as the paradigm of subjectivity.[7] Guignon contends however that such thinkers do not seem to realise the damage that can be done by undercutting or demeaning the role of a centralised and cohesive self in dealing with psychotic disorders such as schizophrenia.[8] Sayers makes a similar point:

[5] Rorty, 'Freud and Moral Reflection', p. 155.

[6] Guignon, *On Being Authentic*, p. 123.

[7] McNay, *Gender and Agency*, p. 75.

[8] Guignon, p. 125.

> Assertions to the contrary notwithstanding, such a detached ironic, playful 'true' self is implicitly presupposed in much of this literature. Once this sense of identity really begins to disappear, once the self begins to dissolve without remainder into a series of fragmentary 'false' selves, then the self is on the road to psychotic breakdown, which few of these writers seriously advocate.[9]

Jane Flax makes a similar point. She suggests that those who celebrate and call for a decentred self are actually being self-deceptively naive. They are unaware of the basic cohesion within themselves that makes the fragmentation of experience something other than a frightening slide into psychosis.[10]

Along with the psychological issues raised by endorsing the decentred subject as a model in feminist theory, it has also raised political concerns. How is it possible to be self-determining and self-directed, how is it possible to challenge structures of oppression, on this model?

As Wendy Brown claims, arguments in favour of the decentred subject have incited 'palpable feminist panic'.[11] For authors such as Seyla Benhabib, post-structuralist theories of the decentred self undermine the very possibility of feminist politics. Margaret Whitford suggests that the deconstruction of the self 'continues to leave women in a state of fragmentation and dissemination which reproduces and perpetuates that patriarchal violence that separates women'.[12] Flax argues that the development of such theories is itself patriarchy working to protect itself:

> Postmodernists intend to persuade us that we should be suspicious of any notion of self or subjectivity. . . . However, I am deeply suspicious of the motives of those who would counsel such a position at the same time as women have just begun to re-member their selves and to claim an agentic subjectivity available always before only to a few privileged white men. It

[9] Sayers, 'Identity and Community', p. 157.

[10] Flax, *Thinking Fragments*, pp. 218–219.

[11] Brown 'Feminist Hesitation, Postmodern Exposures,' p. 71.

[12] Whitford, *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine*, p. 123.

> is possible that unconsciously, rather than share such a [revised] subjectivity with the 'others', the privileged would reassure us that it was really oppressive to them all along.[13]

Although Whitford and Flax were writing in the early 1990s, the problems raised by post-identity politics and post-structuralist thought are still an area of debate. As recently as 2014, Lois McNay has criticised post-identity and radical democracy theorists for positing ideals that are too abstract and that 'by disregarding the social conditions of possibility for effective agency, the important arguments of post-identity feminists remain rather ungrounded exhortations that do not connect to the embodied experience of the very subjects that they wish to mobilise'.[14]

McNay's concern is that the highly abstract nature of post-identity theorising, like that of radical democratic thought, leads to social weightlessness and ultimately 'the construal of radical agency as an empty process of flux and contestation rather than the embodied practice in the world'.[15] McNay makes an engaging and interesting argument which echoes Jean Grimshaw's much earlier argument that while feminist thought should engage critically with theories that deconstruct the distinction between the social and the individual and make problematic the idea of the authentic, unitary self, feminist thinkers should also maintain a connection with theories that are concerned with the practical and material struggles women face in order to achieve autonomy and control in their lives.[16] An idea so self-evident that it seems peculiar to have to make it explicit!

Although I believe that the post-structuralist critique of the subject is largely convincing, the idea, namely, that there is no true or inner self, it is necessary to be mindful of the psychological and above all the political concerns such an idea involves. In what follows, then, I will not argue for a notion of the self as a fiction or as radically fragmented

[13] Flax, p. 222.

[14] McNay, *The Misguided Search for the Political*, p. 99.

[15] Ibid., p. 208.

[16] Grimshaw, 'Autonomy and Identity in Feminist Thinking', p. 105.

and disjointed. Instead, I will focus on an account of the subject that is not premised on the idea of an inner self, but, rather, on the idea of a self whose stability and coherence is an achievement and is capable of autonomy or agency.

7.3 Narrative Identity

Let me begin with an overview of Ricoeur's narrative conception of the self. He describes his work on the self as a grafting of hermeneutics onto phenomenology. In keeping with this claim, he says that his 'hermeneutics of the self can claim to hold itself at an equal distance from the *cogito* exalted by Descartes and from the *cogito* that Nietzsche proclaimed forfeit'.[17] Ricoeur thus positions his hermeneutics of the self between the sovereign subject of traditional modern philosophy and the fragmented subject of post-structuralist theory.

Central to his work on narrative is his understanding of mimesis described as a threefold process (mimesis$_1$, $_2$ and $_3$). In its simplest terms, mimesis$_1$ is a process of pre-figuration, which involves semantic (X did Y to A because of B), symbolic (heroes are to be interpreted as 'good') and temporal (X did Y because of A's actions in the past) understandings. In other words, it is a pre-understanding of narrative.[18] Mimesis$_2$ is a process of configuration, of emplotment or *muthos.* Plot for Ricoeur is not a static structure but an integrating process. This enables Ricoeur to talk of emplotment as the 'synthesis of the heterogeneous'.[19] This synthesis takes place at different levels. There is a synthesis of events and incidents (which are multiple) with the story (which is unified and complete). There is a synthesis of heterogeneous components which produces a single story and endows the plot with a totality that encompasses both concordance

[17] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 23.

[18] Simms, *Paul Ricoeur*, p. 84.

[19] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, Volume One*, p. 66.

and discordance, or as Ricoeur likes to phrase it, discordant concordance or concordant discordance:

> Diverse mediations performed by the plot: between the manifold events and the temporal unity of the story recounted; between the disparate components of the action – intentions, causes and chance occurrences – and the sequence of the story; and finally, between pure succession and the unity of the temporal form, which, in extreme cases, can disrupt chronology to the point of abolishing it.[20]

This last point is key. Emplotment is not the mere organisation of events into a linear temporal succession. Events are related to each other in some sense by having a reason or a purpose for them to have occurred in that order. The difference then, for Ricoeur, between a narrative account and a mere impersonal description lies in the different understandings of events used in both cases. Narrative events, for Ricoeur, have at their heart an inversion whereby contingency becomes necessity.[21] What was mere occurrence, a surprise, an unexpected happening becomes an integral, necessary part of the story when understood after the fact, and this is what drives the story onward. Mimesis$_2$ can be seen, then, as the process by which all the elements of the plot are brought together in a meaningful whole. This process though implies the existence of a reader who must perform the work of reading the text in order to bring the elements together.[22] This is mimesis$_3$.

Mimesis$_3$ is the process of refiguration. It describes the point at which the world of the text and the world of the reader intersect, or the point at which the text is applied to the world. Mimesis$_3$ is the understanding we gain after encountering narrative within the world, which thus exemplifies the hermeneutic circle: our understanding of the world enables us to understand narrative, and this in turn allows us to understand the world. Ricoeur highlights the temporal dimension of this process when he notes that narrative follows 'the destiny of a prefigured time that

[20] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 141.

[21] Ibid., p. 142.

[22] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, Volume One*, p. 71.

becomes refigured time through the mediation of a configured time'.[23] Having showed why time and mimesis together equal narrative and why this understanding of narrative is fundamental to our understanding of human life, Ricoeur turns to consider our understanding of self-identity.

Personal identity for Ricoeur is the site of conflict between two uses of the concept of identity, identity as sameness (*idem*) and identity as selfhood (*ipse*). It is when we consider questions about permanence in time, notably 'am I the same person I was five years ago?', that the confrontation between these two uses of identity becomes apparent. Permanence in time is usually linked to the concept of *idem*-identity, the permanence of a substance in time. Ricoeur also considers whether 'there [is] a form of permanence in time which can be connected to the question "who?" inasmuch as it is irreducible to any question of "what?"' Is there a form of permanence in time that is a reply to the question, 'Who am I?'[24] In other words, in what sense of 'identity' does the self remain the same if not in the sense of the identity ascribed to a thing?[25]

Ricoeur considers two models of permanence in time, character and keeping one's word. They represent two extremes. Character expresses the complete and mutual overlapping of *ipse* and *idem* identity, whereas in keeping one's word a gap opens up between them.[26] The role of narrative identity is to intervene in the construction of personal identity by acting as a mediator between the poles of character (where *idem* and *ipse* coincide) and keeping one's word (where *ipse* and *idem* are opposed). What is character? And what is it to keep one's word?

Character, Ricoeur writes, 'constitutes the limit point where the problematic of *ipse* becomes indiscernible from that of *idem*'.[27] It is the

[23] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 54.

[24] Ibid., p. 118.

[25] It is worth noting at this point the origin of Ricouer's work in Kantian thought. In the *Paralogisms*, Kant distinguishes his understanding of subjectivity from that of Descartes. Namely he argues that simply because we are aware of the unity of our consciousness it does not follow that we possess the consciousness of a unity. This is because Kant regards the unity of consciousness as a 'formal' unity rather than a unity that results from understanding the self as a mental substance.

[26] Ibid., p. 118.

[27] Ibid., p. 118.

set of acquired dispositions or habits by which a person can be recognised as an individual. Habits are not fixed dispositions. New ones are always in the process of being formed and existing ones are in the process of being altered. Habits or character traits delineate a history and simultaneously drive the individual forward into the future.

Ricoeur deepens the idea of dispositions as becoming embedded and yet being open to change and revision by means of his notions of sedimentation and innovation, initially applied to traditionality in the narrative genre:

> The constitution of a tradition indeed depends on the interaction between two factors, innovation and sedimentation. It is to sedimentation that we ascribe the models that constitute, after the fact, the typology of emplotment which allows us to order the history of literary genres.[28]

It is because of sedimentation that we are able to talk of tragedy and comedy. These genres do not represent 'eternal essences'. Their moment of innovation has been so deeply buried, so deeply sedimented that 'their genesis has been obliterated'.[29]

Innovation prevents a work from being identified as a traditional narrative. It allows the rules of narrative to change but in a slow, gradual manner. It remains however rule-bound since imagination does not spring fully formed from nowhere but remains tied to the tradition from which it emerges. Acts of deviance and rebellion remain connected to the works they challenge just as contemporary works of literature that define themselves as anti-novels are created by breaking the rules of the novel. The rules are the 'object of new experimentation', and so 'the possibility of deviance is included in the relation between sedimentation and innovation which constitutes tradition'.[30]

As with plot and narrative, Ricoeur continues to use this language of sedimentation and innovation when discussing the self in terms of character. As happens with narrative modes, the processes of sedimentation

[28] Ricoeur, 'Life in Quest of Narrative', p. 24.

[29] Ibid., p. 24.

[30] Ibid., p. 25.

tend to conceal the moments of innovation to the point of being abolished. It 'is this sedimentation which confers on character the sort of permanence in time that I am interpreting here as the overlapping of *ipse* by *idem*'.[31] However, such character dispositions, like imagination, do not appear from nowhere. We are embodied beings situated in a particular time and place, the inheritors of a particular culture, no matter how cosmopolitan we think we are. The identity of an individual is made up of shared norms, values, ideals, models and identifications with the heroes of a community in which the individual recognises herself. This entails that 'an element of loyalty is . . . incorporated into character and makes it turn towards fidelity [and] hence toward maintaining the self'.[32]

Character, dispositions or habits, endows the self with stability, which assures sameness and continuity through change. It gives the self permanence in time. Character is the 'what' of the 'who'. Keeping one's word expresses the self-constancy of the self, which highlights the dimension of 'who?'. It also represents a model of permanence since 'keeping one's promise does indeed appear to stand as a challenge to time, a denial of change: even if my desires were to change, even if I were to change my opinion or inclination, "I will hold firm"'.[33] What distinguishes it from the permanence of character is its ethical sense of being responsible for one's word before the other. Whereas *ipse*- and *idem*-identity coincide in the case of character, the permanence suggested by keeping one's word can drive them apart. Narrative identity comes to the fore in this space between character and keeping one's word.[34] Hence, what discloses the nature of our narrative identity is the dialectic of selfhood and sameness. This dialectic represents the major contribution of narrative theory to the constitution of the self.[35]

According to Ricoeur, the identity of the character in a narrative is constructed through its relation with that of the plot. In fact, character is itself a narrative category. Its 'role in narrative involves the same

[31] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 121

[32] Ibid., p. 121.

[33] Ibid., p. 121.

[34] Ibid., p. 124.

[35] Ibid., p. 140.

narrative understanding as the plot itself'. In other words, characters are themselves plots. This correlation is nothing new, as Ricoeur himself acknowledges, as it is developed by Aristotle in the *Poetics*. It is 'in the story recounted, with its qualities of unity, internal structure and completeness conferred through emplotment, that the character preserves an identity correlative to that of the story itself'.[36]

For Ricoeur, then, the processes at work in a narrative plot are the same as the processes at work in our character. The character and *ipse*-identity of an individual is to be understood just as emplotment is understood as the 'synthesis of the heterogeneous' and as involving discordant concordance. An individual derives their sense of being singular from the unity of their life when it is considered as a temporal whole, which is singular and distinct from other lives. This temporal unity and concordance of our character is always threatened, however, as it is in narratives, by discordance in the form of unforeseen and indeed unforeseeable events, which may require us to respond in new and imaginative ways. A concordant discordance is achieved when the contingency of these events is transfigured into the history of a life—when chance, in other words, is transmuted into fate.[37]

This account of narrative identity is, I believe, highly persuasive. It presents an understanding of the self that is not tied to a fixed or immutable structure but that is mobile and fluid, responsive to contingency and chance, and yet endowed with a cohesive temporal permanence. It is subject to discordance, 'decentredness', and also to accordance. It remains to be seen whether it can support an account of autonomy or agency.

7.4 Autonomy

I suggested in the first part of this chapter that the post-structuralist critique of the subject has shown that we can no longer understand ourselves as possessing a 'true' or 'inner' self. The concern this has raised

[36] Ibid., p. 143.

[37] Ibid., p. 147.

among some feminist authors is that this rules out the possibility of autonomy. To this end, I started with an overview of Ricoeur's narrative account of the self which accommodates moments of discordance, chance events and contingency, and which I believe is strong enough to generate an account of autonomy. The question now is what form this account should take.

Feminist authors have long been wary of traditional, mainstream accounts of autonomy, the objection being that such accounts construct autonomy in an irreducibly masculinist way owing to their individualist and rationalist bias. To be autonomous standardly means to exercise your reason on your own, without relying on the authority of others, society, tradition, culture or being swayed by your passions. Accounts of autonomy based on this model fail to acknowledge the social relations necessary to achieve autonomy. What is needed, I would like to suggest, is a relational account of autonomy.

To develop such an account, let me return to Ricoeur. In an article titled 'Autonomy and vulnerability', Ricoeur argues that autonomy stands in a paradoxical relation with vulnerability or fragility. The relation between these two states is not the same as the relation between freedom and determinism, which are antimonies. Instead, they are 'opposed to each other in the same universe of thought'. They stand in a paradoxical relation because 'it is the same human being who is both of these things'. The 'autonomy in question is that of a fragile, vulnerable being'.[38]

Ricoeur illustrates his point by arguing that, at the most basic level, human beings possess certain capacities or potentialities: to speak, to act, to influence, to understand ourselves as the author of our own acts, whilst being at the same time vulnerable. For example, if we are judged to be incapable of speaking well we can find ourselves expelled from the sphere of discourse.[39] Autonomy is likewise an ability for Ricoeur, and it is this, I believe, which sets it apart from the standard model of autonomy.

[38] Ricoeur, 'Autonomy and Vulnerability', p. 73.

[39] Ibid., p. 76.

Ricoeur argues that narrative coherence is a prerequisite for autonomy:

> The handling of one's own life, as a possibly coherent narrative, represents a high level of competence that has to be taken as one of the major components of the autonomy of a subject [of rights]. In this respect, one can speak of education to narrative coherence, of education to narrative identity. One can learn to tell the same story otherwise, learn to let it be told by others than oneself, learn to submit the narrative of one's life to the critique of documentary history. . . . We therefore say that to be autonomous one must be a subject capable of leading one's life. [40]

The immediate concern that is raised by this account of autonomy and narrative is, as Joan McCarthy argues, the fact that 'not all human lives follow the trajectory of the kind that Ricoeur has in mind'.[41] I am particularly interested in McCarthy's claim that Ricoeur does not pay enough attention to the effects of power relations upon our narrative self-understandings. McCarthy suggests that this omission is the result of Ricoeur wishing to be able to deliver a particular account of (autonomous) moral agency, which leads him to 'focus on those aspects of literature and psychoanalysis that lend support to his claims that the self can be stabilised through narrative coherence, and that one should ignore those aspects of . . . discourse that undermine that very stability'.[42]

This may be a valid criticism of Ricoeur's earlier works. But I think there is evidence that he was aware of these issues which he started to address in some of his later publications, which McCarthy herself appears to concede later on.[43] Thus Ricoeur says in 'Autonomy and vulnerability':

> The incapacities that humans inflict upon one another, on the occasion of multiple interactions, get added to those brought about by illness, old age, and infirmities, in short by the way the world is. They imply a specific form of power, a power-over that consists in an initial dissymmetric

[40] Ibid., p. 80.

[41] McCarthy *Dennet and Ricoeur on the Narrative Self*, p. 230.

[42] Ibid., p. 232

[43] Ibid., p. 239.

> relation between the agent and the receiver of the agent's action. In turn, this dissymmetry opens the way to all the forms of intimidation. . . . Here we need to take into consideration the kinds of unequal distribution of the ability to act, especially those that result from hierarchies of command and authority in societies . . . People do not simply lack power; they are deprived of it.[44]

Ricoeur is well aware of the social context and power relations that form and influence our ability, our capacity, to be autonomous.

Furthermore, Ricoeur acknowledges that there are instances when it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to narrate ourselves: 'the employment of this capacity [to narrate] does not always happen smoothly, as is indicated by the inability of many survivors to bring their wounded memories to verbal expression in narrative'.[45] Ricoeur thinks here primarily of survivors of concentration camps. Susan Brison, in her article 'Outliving oneself', suggests that this is true of all types of trauma, including victims of rape and soldiers who suffer post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of being in combat.[46] Brison, a survivor of rape herself, writes vividly about how the effects of her ordeal affected her ability to understand who she was and who she had become and points to research on combat trauma:

> Traumatic memory is not narrative. Rather it is experience that re-occurs, either as full sensory replay of traumatic events in dreams or flashbacks, with all things seen, heard, smelled, and felt intact, or as disconnected fragments.[47]

Interestingly both Ricoeur and Brison, while highlighting the difficulty of trauma survivors to construct meaningful narratives, also point to the therapeutic and healing aspects for such survivors to place their experiences within new understandings and new narratives. In constructing a

[44] Ricoeur, 'Autonomy and Vulnerability', p. 77.

[45] McCarthy, p. 238.

[46] Brison, 'Outliving Oneself'

[47] Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, p. 172.

narrative of the traumatic event, and then sharing this narrative with others, the survivor not only begins to integrate that event into her life 'with a before and after'. In doing so, the individual begins to gain control over the occurrence of the flashbacks that characterise post-traumatic stress disorder.[48]

As human beings, we thus have a capacity for being autonomous. But it is a precarious capacity, susceptible to being overridden by various fragilities and vulnerabilities, which can be felt and expressed in a number of ways. If our ability to construct a narrative is impaired, then so too is our capacity to be autonomous.

The question is how this capacity is to be realised, and whether this talk of capacity or potentiality suggests a form of naturalism. The answer to the first question, I would like to suggest, is to adopt a competencies account of autonomy. This seems to be suggested by Ricoeur, who says that 'high levels of competence' are needed for autonomous behaviour. With respect to the second question, Diana Meyers notes that to become competent in an activity does not necessarily presuppose some 'native potentialities' but, rather, that it is not possible to acquire the repertory of skills required to achieve competency outside of a social setting. An individual may have an aptitude for a given activity but it cannot be realised except through instruction or practice.[49] On this account, competencies are strictly neither natural nor social. Rather, 'all people have the inborn potential necessary for autonomy, but [. . .] they learn how to consult their selves through social experience'.[50] What more can be said about this competencies account of autonomy?

Let me start by noting what it is not. Autonomy on a competencies account is not the terminal point of a progress of development, for example, a Kohlbergian account that suggests that autonomy is the final stage of moral development and that is achieved when we adopt Kant's categorical imperative. Kohlberg maintains that this pattern of development is universal and irreversible. Once you have progressed through the

[48] Brison, p. 23.

[49] Meyers, *Self, Society, and Personal Choice*, p. 57.

[50] Ibid., pp. 57–58.

stages of moral development, it is impossible to regress: once you are (morally) autonomous, you remain (morally) autonomous. I think it is clear that such a static understanding of the state of autonomy is insupportable for a number of reasons.

If we are to understand ourselves in a dynamic fashion, as fluid and subject to change, then it stands to reason that our characteristics will also be fluid and subject to change. Autonomy cannot be construed as a static state. It seems better to understand it as something that is achieved in degrees, an achievement that can and does alter over time.

According to Meyers, this achievement is the result of the individual becoming more or less competent at 'a repertory of coordinated skills' that supports autonomous action and agency.[51] In her article, 'Intersectional identity and the authentic self', Meyers suggests that this coordinated set of skills includes but is not limited to introspective, imaginative, memory, communication, analytical and reasoning skills.[52]

At first glance, this list can seem overwhelming. What individual possess all these skills and is sufficiently proficient in all these areas as to be able to count as an autonomous agent? Beate Rössler raises a similar concern in her article 'Problems with autonomy':

> Although the autonomy or freedom of the individual is in itself an acceptable ideal, we simply do not live in a way that corresponds to it, nor could we ever. Everyday life, normal everyday chaos, is always much too involved and complicated to permit us to speak of an autonomous life as being something actually realizable.[53]

Rössler's argument would doubtless be valid if autonomy referred to a static state or an absolute, that is, the idea that you either are or are not autonomous. However, her criticism does not stand against a competencies account inasmuch as the latter entitles us to talk of degrees of autonomy.

[51] Ibid., p. 56.

[52] Meyers, 'Intersectional Identity and the Authentic Self', p. 166.

[53] Rössler, 'Problems with Autonomy', p. 143.

According to Meyers, an individual is not autonomous unless she possesses and successfully uses the required skills. She recognises that such a 'conception of autonomy leaves the impression that autonomous people must make autonomy their major preoccupation in life'.[54] On a competencies account of autonomy, we are not left with this impression.

It might look as if Meyers believes that to be autonomous an individual has to be constantly on her toes, as if she has to be constantly thinking about what she is doing and how she is doing it. But this is clearly not the case. We are good at what we do, we competently exercise our skills, not when we are conscious of what or how we are doing it, but when we do not pay attention to it. It is once we have learnt how to use our skills and they have become habit that we exercise them well. To understand autonomy in this way is, I believe, entirely in keeping with Ricoeur's arguments about innovation and sedimentation in the development of character traits.

However, to say that we do not pay attention to our autonomy skills all of the time is not to suggest that we can just ignore them or that they will take care of themselves. As Meyers argues, 'autonomy cannot be sustained without the exercise of autonomy skills, for these skills atrophy with disuse'.[55] This atrophy may result not only from disuse due to apathy or laziness but also by being actively undermined or destroyed in oppressive and abusive situations. We have seen how suffering from a traumatic event, for example, from a sexual assault, can disrupt an individual's ability to construct a narrative. Long-term abuse and oppression can also radically affect an agent's autonomy. Many women who are the victims of domestic abuse, psychological as well as physical, are actively deprived, over time, of the opportunities to exercise their autonomy skills:

> He was a very dominating person. You did what he said or else. You went to bed when he said, you got up when he said, you ate when he said, you went out when he said and you drank when he said. If you went out at

[54] Meyers, *Self, Society, and Personal Choice*, p. 85.

[55] Ibid., p. 87.

> night with him and you didn't want any more to drink, we'd get into the car and he'd tear down the road and then he'd slam the brakes on so hard, I'd hit my head on the windscreen.[56]

Clearly a woman in this situation cannot be autonomous. However, the benefit of adopting a competency account of autonomy means that such an individual does not have to be understood as completely heteronomous either. There are two possible ways of developing this claim. First, that an abused woman may, for example, be dominated and not autonomous when in proximity to a person dominating her, but that she may well be autonomous in other areas of her life. The other claim would be that as autonomy comes as a matter of degree the abused woman retains it, but only to a low degree. I would argue that it is the first claim that is stronger because viewing autonomy in this manner, as occurring unevenly and within different contexts, allows us to construct accounts of autonomy that are capable of explaining how someone is capable of exercising their autonomy competencies in one area of their life but not in another. By recognising that women who find themselves in abusive situations can still be minimally autonomous, we can explain how they can find ways to resist such behaviour and leave the relationship, or at least attempt to.

7.5 Conclusion

This is certainly not a complete account of autonomy. It also leaves some questions unanswered such as whether this competencies account of autonomy is best understood as a procedural or substantive account—a question to be addressed in another chapter. What I have tried to show is that it is possible to develop a post-identity politics account of the subject, a narrative notion of the self that is strong and coherent enough to support a notion of autonomy and that is also fluid and subject to change over time.

[56] Anonymous respondent quoted in V. Binney, G. Harkell and J. Nixon, *Leaving Violent Men*, p. 4.

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8

Exploring Rape as an Attack on Erotic Goods

Louise du Toit

8.1 Introduction: Sex or Violence?

This chapter aims to conceptualise what is sexual about sexual violence, that is, to say how a sexual attack differs from non-sexual forms of physical attack. While it is understandable that early feminist writing on sexual violence emphasised its violent aspect in order that this form of personal attack might be taken seriously by the law *as* an instance of violence *überhaupt* (Brownmiller, 1975), this does not mean that we finally have to choose between viewing such attacks as *either* violent *or* sexual. This chapter instead grapples with the question of why, how and to what effect certain violent attacks take a sexual form, that is, target a person's body in its sexual and erotic capacities. I thus work to resist the obfuscation of the problematics of sexual violence that happens when it is either viewed simplistically as a sexual or lust crime

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(thereby neglecting its violent nature) or viewed simplistically as a violent crime (thereby neglecting its sexual nature). As can be seen from the history of rape law, the dominant patriarchal symbolic order has to such an extent normalised sexual violence against women and girls in particular[1], that the placement of the liberal notion of 'consent' as the legal cornerstone upholding the distinction between 'normal patriarchal sex' and rape in rape law, where rape is classified as a sexual crime, is completely inadequate in practice (see e.g. Hunter and Cowan, 2007). This is just one of the many problems that arise when sexual violence is simplistically categorised under the rubric of sex and sexual perversion.

By drawing attention to the sexual/erotic dimension of sexual attack, I must nevertheless therefore simultaneously resist the by now outdated yet still widely used patriarchal *sexualised* interpretation of sexual violence which largely views incidents of rape (especially in peace time) as 'normal sex gone wrong' or passion gotten out of hand and which thus privatises the violence as a normal aspect of heterosexual interaction (cf. Judith Herman, 1992: 72) and especially of naturalised male lust, and which thereby tends to erase it *as violence and destruction*. To make myself clear: by claiming that sexual attack has a sexual dimension I do not mean that the victim/survivor[2] derives any sexual pleasure from it. Instead, I wish to draw attention to the injuries that survivors sustain to their bodies-as-selves (viewed here as sources of sensual and erotic energy), while also drawing attention to what possibly entails a better understanding of perpetrator motive.

[1] This chapter acknowledges that sexual violence against boys and men is also widespread, accounting for maybe up to 15% of all reported rapes (Stemple, 2009, pp. 606–607), especially in institutions such as prisons and armies. However, the focus here is on sexual violence perpetrated against women and girls without the implication that the considerations and approaches here have no bearing on the raping of males, the further exploration of which will have to be pursued elsewhere.

[2] I always vacillate between these two terms, recalling that many victims of sexual attack do not in fact survive the attack. While not wanting to freeze rape victims in a victim frame which disallows them other identities, change and transformation beyond victimhood, I am also acutely aware of victims of sexual attack who have physically survived, only to testify that they feel as if they had in fact died during the attack, for example, Susan Brison (2002, pp.37ff, "Outliving Oneself"). In light of inconclusive considerations and for the sake of convenience, I will stick to the term 'victim' in this chapter.

But here one has to be very careful: because of the problematic symbolic placement of women within the dominant symbolic order, women's bodies and beings are normally exaggeratedly sexualised, and thus typically regarded as *particularly* fleshy, sensual, sexual and erotic (Battersby, 1998, p. 39). Precisely to the extent that this happens, female bodies are marked as inferior or object-like in contrast with non-marked or 'neutral' male bodies. Relegated to immanence, women are thus framed as without any claim to subject status and transcendence to begin with; disqualified as full subjects, and inessential (De Beauvoir, 1997, p. 16). In fact, the 'feminine' in patriarchy positions women as a salient part of that natural order which the male subject has to overcome on his way towards becoming a subject (Irigaray, 1985, "Plato's *Hystera*", pp. 243ff and Caldwell, 2002, p. 18). This symbolic positioning works to frame women as complicit in the hostile act whenever they become the targets of sexual violence—which largely explains the problematic legacy of viewing rape as a sexual rather than a violent crime. Hence, the anomalous demand that rape complainants *disprove the supposition of their consent*. This is why it is important, while insisting on the human good of the erotic and its rehabilitation after or beyond patriarchy, that one has to also consistently reject the patriarchal gendered distribution of transcendence and immanence, activity and passivity, so that male and female bodies appear as simultaneously equally erotic *and* equally invested in an always ambivalent striving towards transcendence and subject status.

8.2 New Developments Around War Rape

During the Rwandan and former Yugoslavian internal wars in the 1990s, the world witnessed the systematic, yet by no means novel, wide-scale utilisation of rape in war. No doubt the Fourth UN World Conference on Women in September 1995 in Beijing, and the hard work of some women's groups both before and after the Conference, played a role in creating for the first time an acute political consciousness on this issue, leading to the two watershed verdicts on war rape—the *Akayesu* trial in the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) in 1998 and the

Kunarac trial in the International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in 2001[3]. For the first time in human history, war rape was punished as a war crime, a crime of genocide, as well as a crime against humanity, with the different war rape verdicts departing to varying degrees from retaining the centrality of consent to traditional rape law (see the in-depth discussion in MacKinnon, 2006, p. 942).

While I share the enthusiasm of some feminist authors, notably Debra Bergoffen (cf. 2009; 2012), about these high-level developments in international law, there is also the danger lurking in some of the feminist response that war rape gets treated as exceptional, and when linked with genocide (ethnic hostility), moreover treated as an exotic (i.e. 'non-Western') crime. The potential reification of war rape may in fact make it harder rather than easier to transfer the new-found urgency around the matter to contexts other than war and genocidal conflict. Moreover, seen from the perspective of many sexual violence victims and potential victims, the formal distinction between war and peace may be murky indeed on the ground. While an understanding of particular military strategies that deliberately employ sexual violence is important, one key aspect of a feminist approach would be to draw out the implications of these international criminal condemnations of war rape for more quotidian peace-time instances of rape and sexual violence (see *inter alia* Code, 2009). In this regard, Bergoffen has done important work, employing phenomenological analysis to explain what is morally wrong with sexual attack, whenever and wherever it occurs.

In Bergoffen's (2012, pp. 22–28) reading of these two tribunals' verdicts on war rape in *Contesting the Politics of Genocidal Rape: Affirming the Dignity of the Vulnerable Body*, she understands the convictions for war rape as a crime against humanity to signal that the court here radically redefines the very notion of the human. Instead of the typical approach to rape charges which looks for clear proof of dissent, the ICTY at least in the *Kunarac* trial unambiguously recognised that the war context's coercive circumstances rendered the

[3] No doubt the geopolitical contexts of these armed conflicts (understood as 'non-Western') played an important role in bringing the perpetrators to justice. In this regard, see *Double Standards: International Criminal Law and the West* published by Wolfgang Kaleck in May 2015, available at https://www.legal-tools.org/uploads/tx_ltpdb/FICHL_PS_26_web.pdf.

consent definition of rape invalid because of the way in which that context had definitively *removed the conditions for effective dissent*. By acknowledging that under coercive circumstances women's sexual integrity might be violated through sexual penetration *even without physically wounding them*, and in the absence of physical resistance from their side, the court for Bergoffen took the violation of women's specific form of sexual vulnerability to constitute a crime against *human* dignity (2012, p. 23). This is clearly a milestone in the recognition of women as fully human, especially given the symbolic order which locates women's sub-humanity precisely in their sexual difference from men, as I have indicated. She reads this then as a reinterpretation which at the same time acknowledges embodiment and sexual specificity as markers of the human as such (Bergoffen, 2012, p. 24) and suggests that protection of the vulnerabilities that flow from these traits (whether sexually specific or sexually shared) lies at the heart of what human rights instruments should do.

Thus the court, atypically, refrained from disqualifying these systematic war rapes as human rights violations on the basis that (1) they targeted the sexuality (2) of women, or on the basis that (3) they did not entail excessive physical pain or wounding. Instead, the court insisted that such rapes are one of the ways in which women's basic human rights may be violated in a sex-specific way. This verdict signals for Bergoffen a richly promising re-description of what it means to be human, against a long tradition of male bias built into the ostensibly gender-neutral term. In brief, it means a dramatic shift away from attributing dignity only to the heroic, the impossibly invulnerable, fantastic, enclosed, *sovereign* male-sexed body (Bergoffen, 2012, p. 74), and constitutes a shift towards attributing dignity to the vulnerable, exposed, partially or particularly sexed (male or female or ambiguous) body with its sex-specific characteristics, capabilities, as well as vulnerabilities. Bergoffen sees in this condemnation of war rape as a crime against humanity the breaking through of a new insight into the nuances of our universally human, embodied vulnerability as *ambiguously embodied* beings—an insight that will also benefit the multiplicity of lived masculinities even as it helps to dismantle patriarchy.

8.3 A Phenomenological Comparison of Rape, Slavery and Torture

For Bergoffen, through this verdict, with its recognition of (war) rape as a crime against humanity, rape has been placed on the same level as slavery and torture (Bergoffen, 2012, p. 29)—two crimes with a longer and much more secure status as human rights violations than rape (cf. Sellers, 2002). She then proceeds to show how the placing of these three phenomena on the same level of seriousness can be understood and justified through a phenomenological lens. She takes as her starting point how Merleau-Ponty (1962) has shown that a deep ambiguity characterises the human condition (Bergoffen, 2012, p. 30). Every person exists at the same time as both subject (a person who looks at others and the world, and who has a world and a perspective) and as object (appearing as material object in the gaze and the world of others, and also at times in one's own experience). Human existence (described 'from the perspective of an immanent ontology of the lived body that operates universally' p. 30) is played out in a dynamic movement between these two positions as we constantly look at others and are looked at by them in turn (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 167). Every human person lives this ambivalence from moment to moment. How this dynamic tension plays out in the world is closely tied up with one's sense of self, dignity and self-respect (and conversely, shame). For instance, one's dignity is affected by whether one is often treated as mere, passive object or instrument in the lived world of others, a world from which oneself is largely excluded, or whether one is instead routinely respected by others as an active subject, that is, as a source of value and meaning, as the subjective origin of one's own meaningful world. Although the subjectivity of another person cannot be completely destroyed short of killing him or her, what slavery, torture and rape have in common is the attempt to violently erase the subjective aspects of the lived body of another with the aim to somehow appropriate its objective aspects as exploitable material, as symbolic resource or as property. This means that the world-making capacities of the body ('modes of world engagement', as expressions of our dignity, Bergoffen calls it—p. 31) get appropriated through these forms of violence in the service of the world of another.

The physical violence of slavery, rape and torture usually but not always stops short of killing the target. Nevertheless, it activates, and then works within the horizon of the target's imminent death. It aims to evoke in the victim a sense of the fragility, vulnerability and mortality of their existence, the singular material basis which carries their human existence. It foregrounds their body as an object exposed and vulnerable to the arbitrary violence of another whose world it is made to serve. Deliberate, inflicted violence endured places a heightened emphasis on the body experienced from the inside as an object at the expense of the body as it is lived subjectively: 'My world is transformed from a place of corporeal joy into a space of crushing agony' (Bergoffen, 2012, p. 31). This dynamic is also described in Drew Leder's *The Absent Body*, where he shows phenomenologically how the well-functioning, healthy and largely unthreatened body disappears almost completely as the assumed background which makes possible my subjective projections and projects in the world. For example, I do not normally focus on my arm as I reach towards my drink on the table next to me. I experience the distance between my bed and my table as completely unproblematic and reaching across it as an obvious part of my range of physical capacities and as an aspect of the world's possibilities for me. Thus I experience the drink on the table next to my bed as facilitating rather than hampering my subjective existence in the world, my meaningful world, where my body reliably and in a largely unthematised way supports my projects. It is especially at the moment when my normally largely absent body breaks down, for example, when I become ill or suddenly break a limb, that the body's immanence and materiality return to my lived experience (get consciously thematised) and, depending on the amount of pain and discomfort, become conspicuous and can fill my whole world for the duration (Leder, 1990, pp. 70ff)[4]. When the body breaks down like

[4] Thank you to Lindsay Kelland from Rhodes University for rightly pointing out to me that Leder's 'normal' body should be criticised for its neglect of gender scripts and performances. Think, for example, of Iris Marion Young's descriptions of feminine body comportment in her essay "Throwing Like a Girl" (2005): patriarchal scripts of femininity ensure that young girls already experience their bodies as restricted in their mobility and in their 'legitimate' use of the space around their bodies. Nevertheless, I would want to hold on to the idea that also for women and girls there is the ever-present possibility of prolonged periods when the healthy body is

this, it typically eclipses my 'normal' world (as experienced by a healthy subjectivity)—gone and completely forgotten are the everyday projects pursued by a healthy body, while the body's pain demands that I focus wholly on its needs. In a protracted illness, my world may even shrink to the size of my sickbed as I struggle to focus on or maintain interest in anything outside the small circle dominated by my demanding body[5].

One could say that rape, slavery and torture logically aim to place my lived body in a situation of perpetual precarity, where the fragility and objective materiality of my body may never recede from my consciousness, thereby effectively thwarting my capacity to transcend my body in an intentional directedness towards the world. Bergoffen (2012, p. 31) argues that the abstract concept of dignity is thereby translated into 'the concrete dignities of the "I can" body, the sensate body and the sensual body'. It has often been claimed that the Nazi concentration camps were factories for the creation of non-humans, the so-called Musselmänner, who had through a systematic process of dehumanisation lost their sense of self, became a mere shell of a person. The violence of slavery, torture and rape follows a similar logic and structure, but arguably pursues a narrower, more instrumental project of dehumanisation. But Bergoffen goes further to propose a useful schema for also *distinguishing* between the different forms of violence relating to slavery, torture and rape. Slavery, she claims, targets the subjective aspects of the lived 'I can' body, torture targets the subjective aspects of the sensate and speaking body, and rape targets the subjective aspects of the sensual body. I will first focus on what is distinctive about slavery.

8.3.1 Slavery

Bergoffen sees the system of slavery as targeting the 'I can'/instrumental, working body with the aim to destroy or erase the subjective experience of the working body as 'one's own', that is, in order to appropriate its

experienced as largely absent in its successful functioning, serving as a mere enabling background to a woman's projects in the world.

[5] A medical practitioner inspired by phenomenological insights should be able to appreciate the extent to which, by helping to heal my body, s/he assists me to recover my subjectivity in the world (cf. Du Toit, 2004).

objectively given, material capacities and energies for projects serving in various ways the meaningful worlds of others. If we are subjects in particular in as much as as we bring meaning and value to the world, in slavery we are being alienated from our subjective 'I can' body insofar as that body is pressed into work which serves the meanings and values of others in worlds that exclude us as subjects. Most authentically, in contrast, my working body 'engage[s] the world by transforming the raw materials of the earth into a place I call home' (p. 31).

Compare also Hannah Arendt's (1998) three-tiered division of the *vita activa*: I *labour* on a first level of activity in order to sustain my material life; secondly, I *work* in order to create an enduring *world*, and together, labour and work only make sense if they serve the life of *action*, the third and highest (most typically human) function of moral and political action. It is through these latter kinds of action that humans most forcefully express their values and meanings in the shared, public, world. Slavery not only cuts the slave off completely from the third and most human expression of meaning and value, but it also ensures that the slave is forced to live a diminished subjectivity when it comes to both labour and work. She is thus also deprived of all pleasure we would normally derive from work, framed as sustenance of self and others, and world-making. Physical, emotional and other kinds of violence exerted on the slave are meant to demonstrate to her that there is no link between her subjectively held meanings and values and the world-creating and world-sustaining work and labour in which she engages. Slaves, as Bergoffen puts it, are 'alienate[d] . . . from their expressive corporeal horizons' (2012, p. 31). She emphasises, implicitly echoing Arendt's insights, that we cannot reduce the violence and abuse of slavery, torture or rape to their physical dimension. Rather, the physical pain and humiliation aim at something else, namely to fully appropriate certain bodily aspects of the victim, and for that to be successful, the victim is to be as fully as possible alienated 'from the dignity of their world-making freedom':

> As my dignity resides in the fact that I bring meaning to the world, it is as the one who brings meaning to the world that I am vulnerable to seeing these meanings destroyed. As my dignity resides in the fact that I embody

certain values, it is as the embodiment of certain values that I am targeted for bodily abuse. (Bergoffen, 2012, pp. 31–32)

8.3.2 Torture

In torture, it is the sensate body that is targeted for de-subjectification, as Bergoffen explains with the help of Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain*: the torturer appropriates the tortured body's meaning-making powers, an appropriation that culminates in the confession, when the victim speaks the truth of the perpetrator's world. Scarry (1985, p. 36) speaks dramatically of the 'unfurling of world maps' in which the disappearance of the articulable world of the torture victim is the prerequisite for the emergence (the 'making up and making real') of the opposing world of the perpetrator and his truth. For her, in torture 'one person's body [is] translated into another person's voice . . . real human pain [is] converted into a regime's fiction of power' (1985, p. 18).

Although Bergoffen does not make this explicit, the subjective experience of shame seems to lie at the heart of *all* forms of de-subjectification. She does briefly refer to Helen Merrell Lynd's understanding of shame as 'a wound to one's self esteem, a painful feeling or sense of degradation excited by the consciousness of having done something unworthy of one's previous idea of one's own excellence' (Lynd, 1961, p. 24, quoted in Bergoffen, 2012, p. 38). Lynd further specifies shame as a feeling closely associated with nakedness; moreover, it affects the whole self and it is experienced as isolating (1961, p. 49). Shame is the embodied experience of oneself as less than fully human in the inescapable gaze of others who judge one thus. To be stripped naked means that one appears as mere or raw immanent flesh to oneself through the actual or potential eyes of others, with no space for asserting one's humanity as transcendent subjectivity. It is thus no wonder that forced nakedness is often used in the violations of slavery, torture and of course rape. In Jean Améry's well-known description of being tortured, the sense of nakedness is pervasive, even in the absence of literal nakedness. Here it is the face that is naked, exposed as *mere flesh*, vulnerably exposed and available for violation. He says,

> They are permitted to punch me in the face, the victim feels in numb surprise and concludes in just as numb certainty: they will do with me what they want (p. 27). . . . At the first blow, however, this trust in the world breaks down . . . [He] forces his own corporeality on me with the first blow. He is on me and thereby destroys me. It is like rape . . . (p. 28). Whoever has succumbed to torture can no longer feel at home in the world. The shame of destruction cannot be erased. (Améry, 1980, p. 40)

A structural element of shame is the gaze of another who sees and affirms one's subhumanity, causing the loss of one's world. The experience of actually *being* (shown to be) unworthy, degraded, unlovable, inferior and disgusting (Gilbert, 1998, pp. 4, 18) and to be exposed as such shows why the experience of shame is so closely tied up with the experience of nakedness.

The naked body 'symbolizes our defenceless state as objects' in contrast with being clothed, which to some extent hides or covers over one's status as an object. The clothed body in the everyday speaks to an intact ambiguity as both subject and object—I choose how to dress, what to hide and what to show, and thus my clothed body is read as an expression of my own meanings and values in and to the world. In contrast, my naked body under the gaze of clothed and deriding others announces my status as 'helplessly vulnerable and defenceless object' (Bergoffen, 2012, p. 39) in contrast with those others who are (equally untenably or falsely) precisely rendered pure or enhanced subjects by their witnessing of the humiliation. Drawing on Sartre's analysis of the Look (1956, pp. 340—400), Bergoffen sees the subjective experience of shame as being tied to the

> shame of not being able to return from the position of being an object in another's world to being a subject in one's own world. It is the shame of being transformed from an ambiguous vulnerable subject into a defenceless victim object. (Bergoffen, 2012, p. 39)

Judith Butler's distinction is helpful here: the vulnerability of the ambiguous subject–object existence is equally shared by all humans and is given with our ontological situation (our precariousness), but under certain manipulated/political conditions, some humans are painfully and shamefully stripped of

their (our) always tentative, fragile subjectivity and reduced to unambiguous object-status and thus to precarity (turned into defenceless objects) (cf. Butler, 2006, pp. 30–32).

8.3.3 Rape

How does Bergoffen understand the de-subjectification that happens in rape, in distinction from, and in comparison with, slavery and torture? In rape, she says, it is the sensual powers, the erotic energies and capacities of the lived body that are stripped from their subject. They are ripped away from their being naturally the victim's 'own-most' powers, energies and capacities, for experiencing and expressing one's sensual existence in the world and amongst others. One's sensuality has to do with the capacity to find meaning, joy, intimacy and connection in and with the material world and in one's carnal condition, to play with the ambiguities of being simultaneously immanent and transcending, being 'both an object for others and a subject for myself . . . an opportunity . . . of acquainting oneself with the human lot in its most general aspects of autonomy and dependence' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 167). The sensual or erotic capacities of the body allow me to experience my concrete existence as joyful, because shared with and linked to other concrete lives, flesh or living matter in a material world. Viewed thus, the sensual body emerges in a wide range of human activity, and the erotic is not strictly limitable to the sexual encounter.

The violence of rape, however much or little actual physical violence is exerted in the process, aims to destroy the ambiguous subjective–objective experience of one's own sensuality as the natural background to one's subjective experiences of and actions in the world. Rape victims, like torture victims, report that their basic trust and affective relationships with their own bodies, with other people and with the world in general, are shattered by rape (cf. Du Toit, 2009, pp. 92–100). In rape, it is the sexual-sensual lived body whose subjectivity is killed or destroyed: the victim experiences her sexual body as no longer the enabler of her own affective projects in the world. Instead, her body is stripped of its subjectivity and shamefully revealed as 'a hyper visible [spectacular and deeply shameful] pleasure object' available for the use of others and subject to their power (Bergoffen, 2012, p. 41).

Throughout Bergoffen's oeuvre, starting with her earlier work on Beauvoir, she struggles against patriarchy's gendered (binary and hierarchical) distribution of transcendence versus immanence, subject versus object, autonomy versus dependency—entailing clear distortions of the fundamental ambiguities that for Merleau-Ponty constitute the human condition as such. Transcendence, subjectivity and autonomy are human desires and ambitions, not exclusively male ones. Equally, immanence, objectivity (materiality) and dependency are universally human, not exclusively female traits. Yet, as Beauvoir also argues, in patriarchy women get disqualified from the first set of human goods right from the start, their desire for transcendence perverted into a one-sided ideal of being-for-others[6] (Bergoffen, 1997, pp. 194–195). Through rape, however, women are rendered 'inessential others,' that is, non-subjects, because they are not even permitted to enter the competition for subjective recognition through transcendence (1997, pp. 157ff). The patriarchal imperative that women be 'for others' is placed in opposition to their desire for transcendence, and they are removed from access to violence which under patriarchy is incorrectly and immorally offered as the only route to transcendence and subject status. Similarly, materiality, immanence and dependency get split off from the impossible masculine ideal of the subject and exaggeratedly and one-sidedly projected onto women's embodied existence.

8.4 Patriarchy and Sexual Violence

Looking at theatres of war and other forms of armed conflict, one must be struck by the relentless predictability with which women get attacked in their sexual being. There is a real temptation to conclude that men are

[6] Important to note, however, is that Bergoffen later returns to this theme and argues that even in Beauvoir's thinking there is more to women's being-for-others than mere bad faith and the patriarchal myth of femininity. She states that a remembrance and an honouring of the original bond, the original Mit-Sein of our human condition, at least partly explains why women *choose* not to demand recognition (see discussion in Bergoffen, 1997, pp. 163–167). Women can thus be seen as the guardians of the authentic meaning of the erotic, as an honouring of original bonds between people.

natural sexual predators that are only kept in check through effective law enforcement coupled with intense education and training (as developed, e.g. by Thornhill and Palmer, 2000, in their evolutionary argument). Yet, when considering the force and logic of patriarchal symbolic orders, one sees that the widespread occurrence of sexual violence against women is in fact *symbolically overdetermined*, so that we do not in fact need a theory of biological determination or propensity to make sense of the facts[7]. The patriarchal construction of human sexuality and sexual difference according to Beauvoir (1) equates (reduces) transcendence with (to) risk and (2) equates (reduces) risk with (to) violence; (3) it forgets and erases the inescapable ambiguity (subject–object) of every human body by attributing subjectivity to men and objectivity to women; and (4) it equates masculinity and maleness with being human, and relegates the feminine to the position of the subhuman (see Bergoffen, 1997, p. 158). 'Becoming a man', 'being a real man' and 'acting like a man' are exhortations to overcome or transcend every shared human attribute patriarchy associates with the feminine: emotion, vulnerability, attachment, care, bodily constraints, immanence and the body in all its possibilities for alienation and abjection (cf. Caldwell, 2002).

Since these are all intrinsic aspects of human existence, the 'man project' is to deny and destroy central aspects of the humanity of men and boys. Projected onto women's world and bodies, reappropriating those aspects or reimmersing oneself in a world one has violently renounced, must thus appear as a constant temptation: maleness lived as lack and femaleness sensed as abundance. Yet, paradoxically, the patriarchal script dictates that to become or to be a man is to be a real human, and thus a full subject. In this task, sexual violence exerted on the female body seems to be, symbolically speaking, an excellent short-cut to proving oneself a man amongst men. *Performing* the abjection of female sexuality (cf. Diken and Laustsen, 2005) bestows on the perpetrator at once a social position as far as possible removed from becoming abject and feminine himself, and the power of

[7] To essentialise male sexuality as violent would moreover be to merely reverse and thereby repeat some of the worst aspects of patriarchal distortion.

having transformed another into a non-subject, to have reaffirmed his identity as purified from all feminine values. Conversely, to fail to become a man is to risk falling back, or down, into the feminine realm, which is the position of the non-subject and which is the place where everybody (and every body) initially comes from. No wonder the struggle of and for masculine identity so closely resembles a flight, and is generally filled with so much fear and anxiety. Clearly, much is at stake. An impossible, futile flight from the human condition (like the unrealistic repression of women to a subhuman status) can only be attempted through constant repetition, hard work and much violence.

As explained, Bergoffen emphasises that we all live the burdens, potentialities and pleasures of embodiment. Yet, in the tradition of Western metaphysics, it has been the body as flesh, as vulnerable to the forces of nature and fate, the body as objectified in the gaze of the other, and the body as perceived source of mortality, that were mainly thematised in opposition to the 'real self', essentially disembodied. Not only was the body one-sidedly negatively framed, but its potential for self-alienation and shame has also been one-sidedly attributed to or projected onto female bodies. In truth, however, all bodies as selves and selves as bodies have to at the same time embrace and transcend these aspects of embodiment (Bergoffen, 1997, p. 158). Understood in this way, what does transcendence mean? Bergoffen puts it very well: it means that as a subject one moves beyond 'the givenness of the world' and one resists 'the domination of the look'. The task of transcendence is really the same for women and men: 'They must affirm the subjectivity of their bodies by challenging its appearance as an object in the world' (158). This means that transcendence and the libido, the sphere of the erotic, cannot finally be understood in separation.

Tapping into this strong, *libidinal* desire of every person to appear in the world as a subject who brings meaning and value into the world and who creates her own (version of the) shared world, patriarchy nevertheless offers an impoverished way to transcendence. Patriarchy equates subjectivity with pure, or full transcendence (erasing the materiality and immanence of the subject), transcendence with risk and risk with violence (forgetting or denying that risk may take many forms) (159), and thereby effectively blocks women's path to transcendence, especially

by sexualising or eroticising violence through pervasive sexual violence. Let us take a few steps back to see where patriarchy closes down alternative pathways to transcendence. Bergoffen says that risk is indeed crucial for subjectivity because we cannot move beyond the given or resist the dominating gaze without risking our existence. Taking no risks means that one does not take a stance in the world as a subject, but rather acquiesces in being an object. 'Risk is crucial to subjectivity because it affirms the spontaneities and anxieties of intentionality/freedom' (159), but the risk of subject affirmation is surely not limited to violent or heroic acts.

> [Those spontaneities and anxieties of freedom] can be lived through the violence that destroys the given or the challenge that transforms it. They can be lived in the act that marks the world with my meaning or by the gift that lets reality be. Nothing in the meaning of risk justifies establishing violence as the only route to subjectivity. Sports, adventures, erotic love, [birthing and raising a child], are also routes to subjectivity. Like violence they humanize the body. Unlike violence they . . . do not validate the objectification or subjugation of the other. (Bergoffen, 1997, p. 159)

To live as a subject in the world with others means to 'bring meaning and value to the world' (Bergoffen, 2012, p. 30) and to interpretatively inhabit 'the world' as 'my world'. To live as a subject in the world with others does not necessarily require a denial of my ambiguous embodiment or the violation of another. In Bergoffen's reading, Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* repeats some of the patriarchal understandings, for example, of transcendence as necessarily accomplished through violence, because she has not yet fully worked through the implications of thinking of the body itself as inherently ambiguous (Bergoffen, 1997, pp. 160ff). By gradually insisting more on the body's ambivalence, on immanence and transcendence as both bodily modes of the human being, De Beauvoir starts to bestow more and more positive valence on the flesh. This means that the phenomenological body is simultaneously that which potentially hinders, blocks or limits our subjective projects in the world *and of course* the very ground or given that makes subjective projects even conceivable. The idea therefore that 'my' task of becoming a subject is in the first and last

instance to 'overcome' 'my body' and flesh is a gross distortion fed by patriarchal mystifications and metaphysical fantasies. In conclusion, let us briefly consider the possibilities of erotic transcendence.

8.5 Conclusion: The Risks and Joys of Erotic Transcendence

The body is the ambiguous material that makes the fundamental ambiguity of human existence possible. One way to conceive of this fundamental ambiguity is to consider the concrete skin. The skin both demarcates each one of us as a separate being and simultaneously, 'its pores are openings to [the] touch [of another]' (Bergoffen, 2012, p. 30). It would thus be a mistake to view the body as *actually* self-enclosed, autonomous, independent and active (an overemphasis on the traditionally valorised, and ultimately impossible, masculinised body), and to ignore or erase those aspects of lived embodiment that render us inherently exposed, fragile objects, deeply interdependent and relational (traditionally framed as the inferior, feminised body). But so would be the inverse—if we were to view the body as mainly or only an obstacle to transcendence. The openness of my bodily organism to the world, its capacity to feel hunger, pain and cold, is precisely the prerequisite for me to also experience connection, warmth, comfort and pleasure. The dimension of material, objective existence means that I never belong fully to myself (as subject), but rather, I am partly constituted by the material world and the ambiguous others in the world to which I also belong.

A thorough and ongoing revaluation of the materiality and immanence of embodiment as central to the flourishing life of any subject is thus a core task for feminist philosophy. The development of feminist erotics by way of addressing and disrupting the logic of sexual violence should form an important part of this project. Bergoffen is excited by this prospect: 'Once the definition of the subject as ambiguous is put into play, it is the erotic, ambiguous body, not the violent, transcending one that becomes the privileged site of subjectivity' (1997, p. 160). Once the ambiguity of the human body is acknowledged, transcendence becomes just one mode of subjectivity, and the subject *also* gets manifested and 'expressed in its

immanence' (160), with the result that immanence does not necessarily equal alienation and abjection. Subjectivity now becomes much more fluid and dynamic, and acquires at least two faces: that of active intentionality (pursuing projects in the world) and that of 'passive' intentionality such as disclosure, listening, paying attention, providing care, paying respect, nourishing and letting be. Just as subjectivity can no longer be equated only with transcendence, objectivity and flesh can also no longer be equated only with the threat of objectification, suffocation and alienation (Bergoffen, 1997, p. 161).

In attending to the body-subject as deeply ambiguous, Beauvoir and Bergoffen show how the risk of erotic love is in fact more dangerous, because it is more revelatory, than the risk of violence (161). Why is this?

> As your lover I risk my subjectivity, not by daring you to kill or dominate me, but by asking you to accept the gift of my vulnerability as you recognize me as your other. Unlike the subject who pursues the risks of violence, the subject who assumes the risks of the erotic does not sacrifice the value/meaning of recognition to the demands of domination. (Bergoffen, 1997, p. 161)

The erotic risk is the risk of rejection, the vulnerability inherent in the invitation. It entails the vulnerability of being other in front of another, and it entails the risk of having one's gift rejected. The risk of the erotic is moreover always an encounter with both birth and with mortality: the event of sexual excitement and release, of interpenetration and its aftermath, cannot but recall both our individual births and deaths. The body as simultaneously the vigorous enabler and the final limit of our most profound appearances as subjects in the world provides the horizon for the erotic encounter. This is why Bergoffen sees emancipatory potential in the happy erotic encounter. Both parties must embrace their own 'carnal condition' and that of the other even as they 'ask to be received as free subjects' (162). Beauvoir says that although the erotic encounter often fails because of various attempts at the foreclosing or circumvention of risk through domination or bad faith, when it succeeds, what the encounter does is to bring about a

much needed and deeply satisfying reconciliation of oneself with your ambiguous, embodied existence, an affirmation of oneself as fleshy subject:

> The erotic experience is one that most poignantly discloses to human beings the ambiguity of their condition; in it, they are aware of themselves as flesh and as spirit; as the other and as the subject. (Beauvoir, *The Second Sex,* p. 449)

For Bergoffen, the feminist or happy erotic encounter cannot be adequately thought without the dimension of generosity. Becoming double, both flesh and spirit, and being affirmed as a unified whole, even though ambiguously so, in the erotic moment, means for her also that as active, subjective intentionality, I gift myself as other (to you and to myself) for you. In the embrace, in the loving touch of the other, the contours, textures and unique shape of my material existence are all traced, celebrated and affirmed as an inalienable aspect of the meaning and value that we both bring into the world. At the same time, I am as immanence and flesh, the gift itself given over to your touch. It is in the nature of the erotic moment that I give myself without losing myself. But because both give and are given receive the gifts, the boundaries between the giver and recipient fade, and the possibility of contract and calculation is nullified. The emphasis on eros as a form of generosity is also found in Beauvoir, who says that by giving themselves as a voluntary gift, men and women in eros 'live out in their several fashions the strange ambiguity of existence made body' (*Second Sex*, p. 499). My sensual, erotic body brings meaning and value into the world by rebirthing our world. It/she does this through revealing our ambiguous existence in joyful, attentive proximity, and through affirming for each through the other the irreplaceable meaning and value of our carnal existence as the bases of our beings-in-the-world.

Whereas instrumental action could be said to be central to the 'I can' body's subjectivity, yielding its own pleasures when not alienated, and language and its attendant pleasures could be said to be central to the sensate body, both instrumental action and language seem alien to the sphere of the sensual body. Here, it is rather touch that is central. In his 1968 book, *De Tederheid*, Dutch philosopher Ton Lemaire analyses the tenderness that we normally associate with the happy erotic encounter. If we consider the risk associated with the erotic viewed as an even greater

danger than the risk of violence, then it makes sense that the gift of another's vulnerable and risky embodiment should be received first and foremost with careful attentiveness, even protectiveness. To avoid turning the body of the other in the erotic encounter into a naked as in exposed and defenceless surface as Amery described his torture scene, the first requirement for a happy erotic encounter is a certain 'covering over' of the beloved's material vulnerability. This protectiveness has nothing to do however with modesty or coyness in a prudish sense. Fully naked in the literal sense, the vulnerabilities and risks of intensified exposure to the other need nevertheless to be metaphorically covered over in the sense of being clothed in dignity. Lemaire would thus fully agree with Beauvoir's and Bergoffen's insights that the erotic entails a serious risk. In the happy erotic encounter, the risk pays off when I receive my beloved's vulnerable materiality in my own flesh.

For Lemaire, the tenderness of mother towards infant[8] can teach us about erotic tenderness. Recall also that it is the sphere of radical dependency on the mother from whence all humans emerge and which is so decisively 'overcome', or at least fled from, by the patriarch's man. For Lemaire, what is especially telling about the concrete tenderness with which the mother responds to the infant is its transformative power. He says:

> . . . her tenderness is so great, that she succeeds in pulling the baby out of its vegetative existence and to bring it into the human community's circle of light. (1968, p. 20)[9]

Important to note is that this tenderness is fully carnal, embodied and concrete. Abstract feelings of love the mother may harbour towards her child will not have any transformative effect. It is through tender, both protective and evocative touching, first and foremost, that the mother pulls the subjectivity of the baby into the shared human world. She coaxes it to emerge, to risk entering the world as a subject, through skin

[8] Following Sarah Ruddick, one need not only consider female mothers here, but also male mothers, performing the typical maternal tasks (Ruddick, 1989).

[9] All direct translations from Lemaire are the author's own—from the original Dutch.

on skin communication—stroking, kissing, washing, rocking and hugging—all largely preverbal forms of communication. Tender words typically also appear in the communication of tender feelings, but the physical touch seems the more original, less ambiguous form of communication, and often it is the sound and tone (the material qualities) of the voice rather than the meaning of the words that play the greater role in tenderness conveyed. Furthermore, both Lemaire and Bergoffen notice that attentive tenderness as carnal response to the vulnerability of another is experienced by the lover in a bodily way. For Lemaire, it is the softness and fragility observed in another embodied existence which evokes softness in me, leaving me to almost involuntarily expand my circle of deepest interest and concern beyond myself. The vulnerability of the beloved renders the lover woundable.

Because the stroking is a coaxing, a calling forth, a conjuring, an appeal to the at least partially hidden (since this is what ordinary life requires) subjectivity of the beloved to make a full appearance, she must first of all be made secure in her instinctively and deeply lived fragility. 'It is safe; you may come out now!' is first and foremost the appeal made by the tenderly stroking hand in the erotic encounter. The nakedness of the body is thus only the first appearance of the beloved other; the second and more pertinent appearance is when her naked body also fully incarnates her subjective self. As lover, I call the beloved other forth from his inside to the appearance on his own outside as I systematically move closer and focus more intensely on the parts of his skin that are most permeable—first the eyes and ears, then the mouth (skin turned inside out, strongly suggesting itself as a privileged place for more intense interaction, communication, contact between inner and outer domains) and the genitalia (those especially sensitive places of skin turned inside out). As Lemaire puts it: 'it is after all precisely the meaning of authentic love-making, *not* to render the other "body", i.e. a composition of inside and outside, but to meet her as a unit'. Because of the great risk involved in lovemaking, one must ask why anyone would take the risk, why we would not all flee from this danger and use violence and domination as a means to gain access to another's objective sensual body properties. In other words, why is violence not the default way to obtain sex, given the high risk involved in a true encounter?

Without discussing it in much detail, I will tentatively claim that it is the promise of rebirth (of both partners and of their shared world) that entices us into making ourselves so radically vulnerable in gifting our being to another, trusting that we will be caught and covered over with affirmative tenderness. Recall that it is as subjects that we 'bring meaning and value to the world' (Bergoffen, 2012, p. 30), that we interpretatively inhabit the world as our 'own', shared world. In the happy erotic encounter, I trust the other with my bodily existence because I need and trust his or her capacity to affirm my subjective sense of self and my place in the world. In retracing my body and affirming and celebrating its sensual presence and energies, the sensual body of the beloved covers over my subjective vulnerabilities and houses my body within a shared world. Such is the capacity of the erotic body of my lover. He wordlessly, through his touch, writes and tells my life story in a way that I cannot do it myself. The subjective affirmation carried by this encounter is deeply desired (Cavarero, 2000, pp. 1–4). In the words of Alain Badiou, '[t]he ritual of bodies is then the material expression of the word, it communicates the idea that the promise to re-invent life will be fulfilled' (2012, p. 37). Such is the vision of dangerous, yet potentially restoring, rebirthing, erotic transcendence that feminists should explore in our continued and vigilant resistance to the logic of rapist violence.

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9

Making Mischief: Thinking Through Women's Solidarity and Sexuate Difference with Luce Irigaray and Gayatri Spivak

Laura Roberts

9.1 Introduction

Luce Irigaray's thinking through of intersubjectivity in terms of the relations between two sexuate subjects raises the question, as Gail Schwab suggests, of thinking through sexuate difference as a global model for ethics.[1] In this chapter, I turn to Gayatri Spivak's work in order to meditate further on the possibility of thinking through an Irigarayan-inspired ethics of sexuate difference in our contemporary global contexts. How can we articulate a *universal* ethics of sexuate difference? What issues does this raise for structuring relations between and among women? How do we communicate cross-culturally between traditions in a way that, as I argue elsewhere, Luce Irigaray attempts to

[1] Schwab, 'Sexual Difference as a Model'. For a thorough explanation of Irigaray's notion of sexuate difference, see Jones, 'Irigaray', p. 4.

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do in *Between East and West*?[2] With these questions in mind, this chapter examines how Spivak mobilises Irigaray's work on sexuate difference to address women's solidarity and what this suggests about the possibility of cross-cultural communication between and among women.[3] In particular, this chapter considers the way Spivak engages with—and goes beyond—Irigaray's thinking of sexuate difference in two articles: 'French feminism in an international frame' (1981) and 'French feminism revisited' (1993).

In Spivak's 1981 article 'French feminism in an international frame', she uncovers the way mainstream US feminist discourse (in the late 1970s) failed to recognise the problematic way in which it structured relations between women, including (and especially) women in what Spivak loosely terms the Third World.[4] Spivak recognises the value of Irigaray's 'productively conflictual' symptomatic reading and suggests that Irigaray's writing simultaneously works 'against sexism and for feminism, with the lines forever shifting'.[5] Spivak demonstrates how Irigaray's call for positive and autonomous representations of femininity is intimately connected to Irigaray's refiguration of feminine desire. Interestingly, Spivak argues that 'paradoxically enough' she finds in this 'seemingly esoteric area of concern' (of female desire in Irigaray's reimagining of feminine subjectivity) 'a way of reaffirming the historically discontinuous yet common "object-ification" of the sexed subject as woman'.[6] In other words, on my reading, Spivak finds in Irigaray's positive articulation of feminine desire as double—that refuses phallocentric logic and the categorising of woman as sex or reproductive object—ways in which we can connect women across the globe. I turn to Spivak's work because she argues that some of the most valuable lessons we

[2] Roberts, *Cultivating Difference*, pp. 58–76.

[3] I use Ofelia Schutte's phrase 'cross-cultural communication' to indicate non-hierarchical continuously negotiated relations of cultural difference. Schutte, 'Cultural Alterity', p. 53.

[4] Spivak goes on in later work to critique and problematise the use of this phrase. For more on this point, see Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, p. 55.

[5] Spivak, 'French Feminism', p. 80.

[6] Spivak, 'French Feminism', p. 180.

can learn from Irigaray's philosophy are how to negotiate the structures of violence that effect women's situations on both sides of imperialism.

Spivak's work in these papers explores non-appropriative structures for imagining relations between and among women in a global context that demonstrate an alternative to the Western liberal notion of 'multiculturalism' that I will argue is founded upon phallocentric logic. She suggests that the first step towards organising women's solidarity consists in acknowledging the contradictions and paradoxes that structure relations between and among women. In doing so, Spivak's work undermines the phallocentric logic that is founded upon the principles of non-contradiction. In Spivak's 1981 paper, she founds the non-appropriative structures of women's global solidarity on a refiguring of female desire. Intimately linked to this line of thought, she goes on to suggest in her 1993 paper 'French feminism revisited' that we can structure relations between postcolonial and metropolitan feminists using the model of a radically uncertain relation. I suggest that both these aspects of Spivak's work, the focus on refiguring female pleasure and notions of radical uncertainty, resonate with Irigaray's understanding of feminine subjectivity, women-to-women sociality and mother–daughter relationships. As I go on to illustrate, we can see the way in which Spivak's reworking of female pleasure is inspired by Irigaray's work, and at the same time, how it takes Irigaray's work forward in different directions. Spivak's notion of radical uncertainty links to Irigaray's writings on knowledge and the questions of what it means 'to know' that Irigaray explores in her reading of Diotima and throughout *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*. Interestingly, these notions also link to more recent writings of Irigaray's on listening and teacher–student relationships.[7] For Irigaray, 'to know' an other is to silence and appropriate the other. It is through the work of the negative in the relation of sexuate difference that sexuate subjectivity comes to recognise the limits to subjectivity. As a result, for Irigaray, sexuate subjects come into Being-Two through the realisation that they can never completely know the

[7] Irigaray, *Teaching*, p. 231.

other; the sexuate other is the limit to subjectivity. Consequently, in this relation of sexuate difference and the founding of sexuate subjectivity, there will always be an excess; whether we call this excess desire or love, this third space is the uncontainable place that allows the two sexuate subjectivities to be in relation with neither appropriating the other.[8]

Spivak's writings highlight how in Irigaray's work the two sexuate subjectivities of sexuate difference not only focus on maintaining the limit, and space, between each other; they also refigure the relations *within feminine subjectivity* and within masculine subjectivity. In other words, we must imagine the two sexuate subjectivities of sexuate difference as providing two spaces, a framework or matrix, within which singular subjects can learn to differentiate from one another using their relation to the double sexuate universal. In doing so, we can learn to become human in a radically different way. Each sexuate subject will realise subjectivity through a relation with a double sexuate universal that is both at once similar and different, self and other, to themselves. We must also remember that the relations between the double sexuate universal are fluid, the relations within the framework and matrix continually move and are ultimately unstable. This fluidity or rhythmic becoming located at the foundation of subjectivity and ontology completely undermines phallocentric logic. If we read Spivak's articulation of the radically uncertain relationship that she argues can refigure women's solidarity alongside Irigaray's work, it enables us to appreciate how Irigaray's project refounds ontology using the universal non-appropriative relation between two sexuate irreducible subjectivities.[9] Spivak's work brings to light the way in which, within this refigured sexuate ontology, our lived differences are not measured hierarchically against a single universal that will always inevitably define any difference as an

[8] See Malabou and Ziarek, 'Negativity', and Roberts, 'A Revolution of Love', for more on how Irigaray's reworking of the Hegelian dialectic enables a refiguring of sexuate subjectivity as necessarily limited and always in relation with the sexuate other.

[9] While Irigaray's work has been criticised for privileging sexuate over other differences, this chapter highlights how Spivak's reading that links women together via a complex matrix of radical uncertainty demonstrates how an Irigarayan conception of sexuate difference can be mobilised in ways that do not hierarchise differences of skin colour, class, religion, age, disability, sexuality.

'imperfect copy'. Instead, within the non-hierarchical and relational logic of sexuate difference, these differences are positively realised in the universal relation of sexuate difference.

9.2 French Feminism in an International Frame (1981)

Spivak begins the 1981 paper with reference to a Sudanese colleague who has written 'a structural functionalist dissertation on female circumcision in the Sudan' and frames her reaction using a playful mimicry that evokes the ambiguity of Spivak's own position as a postcolonial Indian academic feminist recently situated in the USA.[10] Throughout this paper, Spivak performs an astute awareness of the ambiguity of her own subjectivity. This performance is crucial to Spivak's argument in the essay. The mimicry (and ambiguity) is subtle; Spivak moves seamlessly between the silent voice(s) of an 'other' (postcolonial? Indian? Third World?) woman that underlies mainstream US feminist discourse (of the late 1970s), and, in the same breath, inhabits her speaking subject position as a critical academic feminist in the US academic system.[11] Spivak writes:

> I was ready to forgive the sexist term 'female circumcision'. We have learned to say 'clitoridectomy' because others more acute than we have pointed out our mistake. But Structural Functionalism? Where 'integration' is 'social control [which] defines and *enforces* . . . a degree of *solidarity*'?[12]

Using mimicry, Spivak elucidates the ambiguity (and awareness of the conflict) of her own position(s) and immediately unsettles the belief that there can be a single 'all-encompassing' feminist voice. While Spivak is

[10] Spivak, 'French Feminism', p. 154.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.

initially troubled at her colleague's use of Structural Functionalism, she notes that in her colleague's research she finds an allegory of what she calls her 'own ideological victimage'.[13] This notion of ideological victimage evokes, I think, an awareness that the ability to articulate the relation between her own fractured subjectivity and her own research has been necessarily silenced by the mainstream US feminist discourse with which Spivak attempts to engage. Writing in 1981, Spivak notes that as her career in the USA progressed she discovered an area of feminist scholarship called 'International Feminism: the arena usually defined as feminism in England, France, West Germany, Italy, and that part of the Third World most easily accessible to American interests: Latin America'.[14] However, when Spivak attempts to engage with this field and tries to think of 'so-called Third World women in a broader scope' she finds that she too is 'caught and held by Structural Functionalism, in a web of information retrieval inspired' by the following statement: 'what can I do *for* them?'.[15] Realising that the very framing of this question 'what can I do *for* them?' is 'part of the problem', Spivak sets about to refigure this problematic.[16] She notes:

> I sensed obscurely that this articulation [what can I do *for* them?] was part of the problem. I re-articulated the question: What is the constituency of an international feminism? The following fragmentary and anecdotal pages approach the question.[17]

In doing so, Spivak brings to light the silencing of her own fractured subjectivity, an embodied subjectivity that inhabits a space somewhere between the binary categories of 'East' and 'West', alongside 'First' and 'Third' World(s). Spivak finds her destabilising subjectivity has no place in the dominant discourse; it is unacknowledged, silenced and ultimately

[13] Spivak explains that her concern with structural functionalism is that it 'takes a '"disinterested" stance on society as functioning structure. Its implicit interest is to applaud a system—in this case sexual—because it functions' (Spivak, 'French Feminism', pp. 154–155).
[14] Spivak, 'French Feminism', p. 155.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid.

objectified. Is Spivak (and 'others' that do not fit the stereotypes) the symbolic 'scapegoat' that takes on the unwanted ideological projections of mainstream US feminist discourse (of the late 1970s)? In other words, in seeking to create an alternative discourse to the one she encounters, Spivak recognises that her fractured subject position, her 'inbetweeness', has been silenced and objectified in the unwanted projections from a well-meaning feminist discourse. It is these dangers of well-meaning feminist discourse(s) that Spivak wishes to highlight in this paper. In doing so, she uses Irigaray's work to deconstruct the meaning of the (narcissistic and masculine) subject that governs Western discourse(s), as well as this notion of a generalised 'other' that covers over the unacknowledged heterogeneity of women's perspectives around the globe.

Near the start of the chapter, Spivak recalls a childhood memory of walking alone on her grandfather's estate in India and overhearing the conversation of two washerwomen talking on the banks of a river. She does this, I think, in order to demonstrate the multiple locations of subjectivity that are involved in thinking through our negotiations with the binary categories of self/other. Spivak acknowledges the divide between her situation and that of the washerwomen—which would not have been seen from the perspective of the mainstream US discourse.[18] Inspired by this memory, and not forgetting her (somewhat privileged) location within it, Spivak asks:

> How, then, can one learn from and speak to the millions of illiterate rural and urban Indian women who live 'in the pores of' capitalism, inaccessible to the capitalist dynamics that allow us our shared channels of communication, the definition of common enemies?[19]

[18] Understood within phallocentric logic, these three Indian women would have been constructed as an all-encompassing single 'other' when in fact there are multiple sites of difference between them, including, for example, class, religion and caste.

[19] Spivak, 'French Feminism', p. 156. In terms of these 'shared channels of communication', we might argue that much has changed since 1981 in terms of Internet access across the globe. Indeed, the fourth wave of feminism is commonly linked to global Internet activism and consciousness-raising. However, for those in the 'pores of capitalism' how much has actually changed? People living in the 'pores' do not have access to clean drinking water and food, never mind the Internet.

Aware of how this claim is often taken up by patriarchal nationalists in recently decolonised countries, Spivak explains how her point differs. She continues:

> This is not the tired nationalist claim that only a native can know the scene. The point I am trying to make is that, in order to learn enough about Third World women and to develop a different readership, the immense heterogeneity of the field must be appreciated, and the First World Feminist must learn to stop feeling privileged *as a woman.*[20]

The 'First World Feminist' must recognise the almost unlimited varying perspectives of women who have no access to 'speak' within the 'channels of communication' that a global capitalism allows. In order to recognise these silent others, the 'First World Feminist' must stop asking what she can do *for* the other as this question remains in the hierarchal binary self/other logic. This is why Spivak says the 'First World Feminist' must stop feeling privileged *as a woman.* This is an important claim and I believe it is linked to a more sophisticated critique of the underlying patriarchal phallocentric logic at work in the discourse Spivak is criticising. In asking what she 'can do *for* the other', there is no possibility of a non-hierarchal recognition between and among the women, and thus no possibility of any ethical dialogue between them.

In light of her critical analysis, Spivak argues that Luce Irigaray's and Sarah Kofman's work gives us 'politicized and critical examples of "Symptomatic reading'" that does not always follow 'the reversal-displacement technique of a deconstructive reading'.[21] 'Symptomatic reading', according to Spivak, thus becomes 'productively conflictual when used to expose the ruling discourse'.[22] For Spivak, Irigaray's and Kofman's work, rather than simply deconstructing, produces something new and is thus useful when trying to refigure fragmented

[20] Ibid., pp. 156–157.
[21] Ibid., p. 177.
[22] Ibid.

postcolonial subjectivity from a feminist perspective. It is this, I think, that Spivak learns from Irigaray.[23]

While Spivak acknowledges the positive and productive aspects of Irigaray's and Kofman's work, she is, nevertheless, acutely aware of the dangers of this type of 'academic feminism'.[24] Because of this, Spivak suggests that we must always recognise the discontinuity between women living in different situations around the world. We can work at this discontinuity using the structures that she finds in the productively conflictual readings of Irigaray and Kofman. In doing so, we begin to refigure the relations between women across the globe. Spivak writes:

> However unfeasible and inefficient it may sound, I see no way to avoid insisting that there has to be a simultaneous other focus: not merely who am I? but who is the other woman? How am I naming her? How does she name me? Is this part of the problematic I discuss? Indeed, it is the absence of such unfeasible but crucial questions that makes the 'colonized woman' as 'subject' see the investigators as sweet and sympathetic creatures from another planet who are free to come and go [. . .] My point has been that there is something . . . wrong in our most sophisticated research, our most benevolent impulses.[25]

[23] Spivak goes on, in future work, to argue that it is not enough (or that simple) to reverse power relations between colonial/postcolonial. Rather, we must recognise these binary relations cannot 'simply' be reversed because there are not two separate 'pure' 'cultures' or 'subjects'. Spivak argues we must destabilise these problematic relationships of colonial power in order to demonstrate how imperialism constructs the idea of a 'pure native' or 'native hegemony' and vice versa, how this (false) idea of 'native hegemony' constructs the 'colonial subject'. I believe Spivak takes this central point in her philosophy from her early engagements with Irigaray (and Kofman) in these works that I explore here. For more on Irigaray's use of mimesis as a reading strategy, see Grosz (1989), Whitford (1991) and Jones (2011). See Gedalof (1999) for an interesting perspective on constructions of purity, colonial subjectivity and 'French Feminist' thought.

[24] Spivak writes:

> As soon as one steps out of the classroom, if indeed a 'teacher' ever fully can, the dangers rather than the benefits of academic feminism, French or otherwise, become more insistent. Institutional changes against sexism here or in France may mean nothing or indirectly, further harm for women in the Third World. *This discontinuity ought to be recognized and worked at. Otherwise, the focus remains defined by the investigator as subject.* (Spivak, 'French Feminism', p. 179, my emphasis)

[25] Spivak, 'French Feminism', p. 179.

I think we can heed Spivak's lesson here. It is crucial to remind ourselves that if we are thinking through sexual difference as a universal feminist ethics, and even if we refigure intersubjectivity in terms of two sexuate subjects, we must also always recognise the destabilising relations at work between and among women (within feminine subjectivity). We must always ask the questions Spivak asks. To do so, she situates the 'First World Feminist' in relation to *other* women's perspectives. Asking these questions fundamentally destabilises the self/other relation of phallocentric logic that always situates self as the single universal. In drawing our attention, yet again, to this constant need for a 'simultaneous other focus' Spivak suggests that she finds that the focus on women's pleasure in the French feminists texts might provide some sort of way to theorise the common yet history-specific solidarity between women across the globe.[26]

> It is here, in the descriptions of women's pleasure, that Spivak identifies what she calls the best of French feminism. She says, 'the best of French feminism encourages us to think of a double effect (against *sexism* and for *feminism*, with the lines forever shifting . . . '.[27] She suggests this common thread might be found in recognising the excess of women's pleasure. Spivak notes that in the objectification of woman, it is the clitoris as the signifier of the sexed subject that is effaced. All historical and theoretical investigation into the definition of woman as legal object—in or out of marriage; or as politico-economic passageway for property and legitimacy would fall within the investigation of the varieties of the effacement of the clitoris.[28]

Most helpful, however, is the double vision Spivak finds in Irigaray's work. Working *against* sexism (e.g. identifying the silencing of the feminine within the Western culture of narcissism) and *for* feminism

[26] Ibid., p. 180.

[27] Spivak, 'French Feminism', p. 180.

[28] Ibid., p. 181. Spivak quotes Irigaray here:

> In order for woman to arrive at the point where she can enjoy her pleasure as a woman, a long detour by the analysis of the various systems of oppression which affect her is certainly necessary. By claiming to resort to pleasure alone as the solution to her problem, she runs the risk of missing the reconsideration of a social practice upon which *her* pleasure depends. (Irigaray cited in Spivak, 'French Feminism', p. 105)

(creatively imagining a potentially autonomous feminine subjectivity), while at the same time continuously blurring the lines between these important themes. And, it is here, in Spivak's work (following Irigaray), that we find the beginnings of an alternative discourse.[29] Spivak suggests that we must recognise the irreducible relationship between the excess of women's pleasure (via the clitoris) and what she refers to as the 'reproductive definition'.[30] Thinking through this irreducible relationship becomes an alternative way in which to positively symbolise autonomous feminine subjectivity. It is this connection between refiguring women's pleasure and autonomous feminine subjectivity that I think Spivak finds in Irigaray's work.[31] Irigaray points out how the silencing of sexual difference, and consequently the silencing of an autonomous feminine imaginary, works to repress the positive symbolisations of the plurality of women's pleasure. For Irigaray, to rethink women's pleasure as autonomous and plural also works to undermine this phallocentric logic that only ever defines women's pleasure (and subjectivity) as dependent on the man's penis (Phallus). I think these aspects of Irigaray's work on feminine desire inspire Spivak's argument and provide important context to the links that Spivak makes between the

[29] Spivak notes that in Irigaray's *Speculum* we find: '. . . the analysis brilliantly deploys the deconstructive themes of indeterminacy, critique of identity, and the absence of a totalizable analytic foothold, from a feminist point of view' (ibid., p. 177).

[30] Ibid., p. 183.

[31] See, for example, Irigaray's *This Sex Which is Not One*, where she writes:

> Perhaps it is time to return to that repressed entity, the female imaginary. So woman does not have a sex organ? She has at least two of them, but they are not identifiable as ones. Indeed, she has many more. Her sexuality, always at least double, goes even further: it is *plural*. Is this the way culture is seeking to characterize itself now? Is this the way texts write themselves/are written now? Without quite knowing what censorship they are evading? Indeed, women's pleasure does not have to choose between clitoral activity and vaginal passivity, for example. The pleasure of the vaginal caress does not have to be substituted for that of the clitoral caress. They each contribute, irreplaceably, to women's pleasure. Among other caresses . . . Fondling the breasts, touching the vulva, spreading the lips, stroking the posterior wall of the vagina, brushing against the mouth of the uterus, and so on. To evoke only a few of the most specifically female pleasures. Pleasures which are somewhat misunderstood in sexual difference as it is imagined—or not imagined, the other sex being only the indispensible complement to the only sex. (Irigaray, *This Sex*, p. 28)

objectification of women around the globe and the effacement of the 'clitoris as signifier of the sexed subject'.[32] Spivak writes:

> The double vision is not merely to work against sexism and for feminism. It is also to recognize that, even as we reclaim the excess of the clitoris, we cannot fully escape the symmetry of the reproductive definition. One cannot write off what may be called a uterine social organization (the arrangement of the world in terms of the reproduction of future generations, where the uterus is the chief agent and means of production) in *favour* of a clitoral. The uterine social organization should, rather, be 'situated' through the understanding that it has so far been established by excluding a clitoral social organization.[33]

In other words, we must not remain within the binary phallocentric logic of Western metaphysics that makes us choose between pleasure and reproduction. I think Spivak is clearly inspired by Irigaray's work when Irigaray acknowledges that, for Freud, 'female sexuality has always been conceptualized on the basis of masculine parameters'.[34] Within phallocentric logic, the plurality of women's pleasure is silenced by reducing women's bodies to the reproductive function. The only way a little girl can emerge as a subject in phallocentric culture is as mother. In response to this problem, Irigaray (and Spivak) point out that there is an irreducible relation that occurs within feminine pleasure and desire that cannot be reduced to the single reproductive function. Rather, we can imagine women's pleasure as double, as plural, as multiple, as fluid; based on the labial logic that disturbs the phallocentric logic of sameness which requires any difference to be subsumed and appropriated into the whole, the phallocentric 'One'. Again, on this point, I turn to Irigaray to contextualise. She writes:

> Woman's desire would not be expected to speak the same language as man's: woman's desire has doubtless been submerged by the logic that has dominated the West since the times of the Greeks.[35]

[32] Spivak, 'French Feminism', p. 181.
[33] Ibid., p. 183.
[34] Irigaray, *This Sex,* p. 23.
[35] Ibid., p. 25.

Irigaray notes that this masculine logic privileges the visual and as a result woman's sexuality and pleasure is represented as a lack, literally 'as a hole'. She notes:

> This organ which has nothing to show for itself also lacks a form of its own. And if woman takes pleasure precisely from this incompleteness of form which allows her organ to touch itself over and over again, indefinitely, by itself, that pleasure is denied by a civilization that privileges phallomorphism. The value granted to the only definable form excludes the one that is in play in female autoeroticism. The *one* of form, of the individual, of the (male) sexual organ, of the proper name, of the proper meaning . . . supplants, while separating and dividing, that contact of *at least two* (lips) which keeps woman in touch with herself, but without any possibility of distinguishing what is touching and what is touched.
>
> Whence the mystery that woman represents in a culture claiming to count everything, to number everything by units, to inventory everything as individualities. *She is neither one nor two* [. . .] She resists all adequate definition. Further, she has no 'proper' name. And her sexual organ, which is not one organ, is counted as *none*. The negative, the underside, the reverse of the only visible and morphological designatable organ (even if the passage from erection to detumescence does pose some problems): the penis.[36]

Within this refiguration of women's pleasure as founded upon an irreducible relation between the reproductive function and the clitoral social organisation, Spivak suggests that this reimagining of women's pleasure as double enables the links between women to emerge. We can think of this in relation to Irigaray's notions of feminine subjectivity and the image of the 'two lips', women-to-woman sociality and the positive representations of mother–daughter relations in which neither feminine subject is reduced to a reproductive function. Spivak suggests that within this doubly dynamic discontinuous discourse that moves between pleasure and reproductive function we can find a common

[36] Ibid., p. 26.

thread at work that links young girls facing the real threat of clitoridectomy, wealthy women in advanced capitalist countries and those women living 'in the pores' of the global capitalist system.[37] Spivak notes that we find here the link between women's objectivity (whether as sex or as reproductive object) and the repression of women's pleasure. She writes:

> At the moment, the fact that the entire complex network of advanced capitalist economy hinges on home-buying, and the philosophy of home-ownership is intimately linked to the sanctity of the nuclear family, shows how encompassingly the uterine norm of womanhood supports the phallic norm of capitalism. At the other end of the spectrum, it is this ideological-material repression of the clitoris as the signifier of the sexed subject that operates the specific oppression of women, as the lowest level of the cheap labor that the multi-national corporations employ by remote control in the extraction of absolute surplus-value in the less developed countries. [. . .] whether the family is a place of the production of socialization or the constitution of the subject of ideology; what such a heterogeneous sex-analysis would disclose is that the repression of the clitoris in the general or the narrow sense (the difference cannot be absolute) is presupposed by both patriarchy and family.[38]

It seems clear to me that Spivak's analysis intends to recognise and explore the connections between women that in no way covers over the differences between them. Rather, in constantly calling attention to her own politics of location and her own place of enunciation, Spivak makes clear she is not speaking for all women.[39] In so doing, she constantly works to create dialogue, while simultaneously recognising that this is not always possible. Spivak shows us that despite the problems we must nonetheless try, and I think this is the crucial lesson. In

[37] Spivak, 'French Feminism', p. 156.

[38] Ibid., pp. 183–184.

[39] See Adrienne Rich's *Blood, Bread and Poetry* (1987) and Rosi Braidotti's development of Rich's phrase 'politics of location' in her work *Nomadic Subjects* (2011) and 'Embodiment, Sexual Difference, and the Nomadic Subject' (1993).

our efforts to communicate, we can work towards alternative ways that do not silence the other. Spivak writes:

> I emphasize discontinuity, heterogeneity, and typology as I speak of such a sex-analysis, because this work cannot by itself obliterate the problems of race and class. It will not necessarily escape the inbuilt colonialism of First World feminism toward the Third. *It might, one hopes, promote a sense of our common yet history-specific lot.* It ties together the terrified child held down by her grandmother as the blood runs down her groin and the 'liberated' heterosexual woman who, in spite of Mary Jane Sherfey and the famous page 53 of *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, in bed with a casual lover—engaged, in other words, in the 'freest' of 'free' activities—confronts, at worst, the 'shame' of admitting to the 'abnormality' of her orgasm; at best, the acceptance of such a 'special' need; and the radical feminist who, setting herself apart from the circle of reproduction, systematically discloses the beauty of the lesbian body; the dowried bride—a body for burning—and the female wage-slave—a body for maximum exploitation. There can be other lists; and each one will straddle and undo the ideological-material opposition. For me it is the best gift of French feminism, that it cannot itself fully acknowledge, and that we must work at. . . .[40]

Spivak's constant attention to the discontinuity between the situation(s) of women via the self-reflective attention she draws from her own lived experiences enables her to perform a critical analysis of the phallocentric logic that silences any recognition of sexual difference, and consequently any non-hierarchical non-sacrificial relations between and among women. Using Irigaray's work along with her own astute analysis, Spivak not only displaces the phallocentric logic that underlies the ideological-material opposition she seeks to disrupt but begins to make space for alternative imaginings of autonomous feminine subjectivity. Spivak has successfully demonstrated the ambiguity of a potential universal (and yet heterogeneous) feminine subjectivity that both straddles and displaces the phallocentric split between female pleasure and the uterine female reproductive function, as well as the phallocentric split between the situations of oppression of women in rural Third World situations and their counterparts in the 'First World'.

[40] Spivak, 'French Feminism', p. 184 my emphasis.

9.3 French Feminism Revisited (1993)

In 1993, Spivak published 'French feminism revisited' in which she returns to the themes I have explored earlier. In particular, she notes that this new essay feels like 'a second take on "International Frame"'.[41] Spivak reflects on the development of her work and teases out some insightful perspectives on relations between 'French feminist' thought and so called postcolonial 'Other(s)'. In this essay, Spivak positions texts by Simone de Beauvoir, Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray alongside a text by the Algerian writer Marie-Aimée Hélie-Lucas. She writes:

> My question has sharpened: How does the postcolonial feminist negotiate with the metropolitan feminist? I have placed three classic texts of French feminism before an activist text of Algerian feminism that speaks of negotiation. I imagine a sympathy with Marie-Aimée Hélie-Lucas's subject-position because hers too is perhaps fractured and I help to crack it further, for use. She too is revising an earlier position. As she does so, she speaks *of* solidarity with Islamic women around the world. She speaks *to* a British interviewer. And I, a non-Islamic Indian postcolonial, use her to revise my reading of French feminism.[42]

Spivak reflects on the development of her research since writing the 1981 article 'French feminism in an international frame'. She notes:

> . . . my original argument, that the face of 'global' feminism is turned outward and must be welcomed and respected as such, rather than

[41] Spivak, 'French Feminism Revisited', p. 144.

[42] Spivak, 'French Feminism Revisited', p. 145. While I have no desire to reduce either 'feminist' to a definition, for the purposes of the problematic Spivak is attempting to unravel, I point to very general meanings of these terms; postcolonial as 'occurring or existing after the end of colonial rule' and metropolitan as 'belonging to, forming or forming part of, a mother country as distinct from its colonies etc. (*metropolitan France*)' (The Australian Oxford Dictionary, 4th ed). This suggests to me that Spivak is specifically acknowledging that this particular essay is working within this French postcolonial setting. Moreover, this paragraph illustrates that relation(s) between a metropolitan and postcolonial feminist are not reducible to the (patriarchal) coloniser/colonised relationship that the canonical texts of postcolonial theory have attempted to unravel.

> fetishized as the figure of the Other, gains confirmation from my first research visit to [postcolonial] Algeria.[43]

Spivak continues:

> Further research will, I hope, flesh out the domestic space in such a way that this postcolonial feminist will no longer need to revisit French feminism *as a way in* [. . .] The way in through French feminism defines the third world as Other. Not to need that way in is, paradoxically, to recognize that indigenous global feminism must still reckon with the bitter legacy of imperialism transformed in decolonization.[44]

What I think Spivak is demonstrating here, as she did in 1981, is the recognition that we cannot simply split the West from all that is 'not-the-west'. She suggests that, on the one hand, if you use French feminism as a frame (as a way in) you inevitably 'define the Third World as Other', while, on the other hand, to not need this frame renders indigenous global feminism unintelligible (to academic discourse). To unpack this worrying paradox, we must, according to Spivak, recognise that feminist thinkers on both sides of imperialism need to grapple with its bitter legacy.[45] In response to this problem, Spivak refers to Chafika Marouf's suggestion that contemporary feminist research in Algeria and the Maghreb ought to be evaluated with a 'retrospective view' that recognises the 'paradigms of academic intelligibility of feminism in Algeria and in the Maghreb have been, for the large part, modulated in the intellectual configurations of Western thought'.[46] In doing so, Spivak provides an alternative lens with

[43] Spivak, 'French Feminism Revisited', p. 141.

[44] Ibid., my emphasis.

[45] Ibid.

[46] In order to make her point, Spivak quotes a passage from Chafika Marouf (1988) and I cite this here in order to provide context for Spivak's further comments:

> Current research on the family in Algeria and in the Maghreb cannot be evaluated without a retrospective view, however brief, of the movement of ideas that have emerged in Europe, and in Anglo-Saxon and transatlantic countries . . . The paradigms of academic intelligibility of feminism in Algeria and the Maghreb have been, for the large part, modulated in the

which to view the problem of framing that she reveals to us in her 1993 work. With reference to Marouf's point, Spivak writes: 'this intelligent passage defines my charge: to see that the view is retrospective, and that the requirements are of academic intelligibility'.[47] For Spivak, there is always going to be a 'framing' of the postcolonial situation, and if we do not acknowledge that this 'frame' is itself contested and constructed by the colonial and postcolonial situation(s), then we have not escaped the patriarchal phallocentric logic that underlies imperialism. This situation can be likened to the manner in which Spivak articulates the 'what can I do *for* you?' logic in her earlier work. If there is no attempt to locate the need for both a retrospective view and the frame of 'French feminism', then the latter will become the central (unacknowledged) signifier against which 'others' are judged (always as 'imperfect copies') with no acknowledgement of its own location in the hierarchies of power. This silencing covers over any potential space for possible non-hierarchal dialogue between differing perspectives and welcoming of the multiple 'faces' of global feminisms. For Spivak, this sets up a contradiction; it is paradoxical because to fail to acknowledge Spivak's necessary way in (using *her* own engagement with French feminism) would be to submit herself to the binary categorical logic that underlies cultural imperialism. However, because Spivak acknowledges 'her way in' through French feminism, this does not silence the 'other'; instead, we might say that Spivak uses this 1993 chapter 'French feminism revisited' as a way to retrospectively reflect on her earlier writings. In this sense then, I suggest that Spivak's 'way in' works and performs, it destabilises, it reverses and reinforces the asymmetrical bridges between *her* own fluid, fractured, sexuate, postcolonial subjectivity and her European philosophical genealogy.

Spivak's writing performs contradiction(s); it is neither one thing nor the other. We are not submitted to the phallocentric logic of imperialism here. This is why we must always acknowledge this relationship between postcolonial and metropolitan thought when engaging with what we

intellectual configurations of Western thought: They have offered the frame and the genesis. . . . ' (Marouf cited in Spivak, 'French Feminism Revisited', p. 142)

[47] Ibid.

might call 'global' feminism(s), no matter how problematic this may be. To fail to acknowledge this relationship would be to assume that it does not exist and this would allow phallocentric logic to continue to repress the other(s). Recall that within phallocentric logic there is one universal, there is one singular narcissistic (masculine) subject, against which all others are compared. Thus, if we attempt to speak of differences between women without destabilising this underlying logical structure, it will continue to repress any possibility of non-appropriative or non-hierarchal communication between two. This silencing of the other through the structure of the underlying phallocentric logic is what I think Spivak means when she refers to the 'structures of violence' that Irigaray's work helps us to negotiate. Acknowledging the paradoxical relationship between postcolonial and metropolitan feminist thought is crucial because if it is not acknowledged and continually negotiated by both perspectives then there will be no possibility for a non-hierarchical dialogue between them. To acknowledge this relationship makes it available to problematise, destabilise and refigure.

Spivak's emphasis on the importance of acknowledging the dynamic and contradictory relationship between postcolonial and metropolitan feminist thought can be understood in relation to questions of knowledge. What is it to know? What does it mean to know the other? Can we ever know the other? Spivak illustrates the links between her thoughts on the relations between women and her ideas on the relationships that occur between teacher and student. She imagines these ideally non-appropriative relationships to be structured in similar ways. Spivak suggests we can understand the relationships between teacher and student as a kind of *radically uncertain* relation that she proposes we may imagine to be underlying women's solidarity. This relationship of radical uncertainty, which Spivak suggests occurs in a teaching environment, is reimagined as a mischievous relationship between women, which occurs on both sides of imperialism. Evoking mischief to describe the relations between and among women on both sides of imperialism refers back to Spivak's earlier work on women's solidarity. Acknowledging that relations between/among women are radical and uncertain emphasises two main points in Spivak's analysis. The term 'mischief' highlights the way in which these relations are heterogeneous and discontinuous and, secondly, it calls attention to the importance that Spivak places on these

relations to trouble and disturb the violent logic of imperialism. In suggesting that relations between women are mischievous, Spivak gestures towards a unique way of challenging and displacing the violence of imperialism rather than attempting to 'simply' reverse it. Spivak explains that in the position of teacher one never actually 'knows' what occurs in the attempt at the transmission of 'knowledge' to the student(s), and because of this she suggests this relationship between teacher and student is dynamic, unstable and risky. This risky relationship is founded upon the recognition of the limits to what we can know about an other and it demonstrates the ways in which Spivak begins to imagine how we might structure relations between women. She writes:

> This, then, might be the moment to remember that, even when—in class, in a lecture room—the other seems a collection of selves and nothing seems displaced or cracked, what 'really happens' *remains radically uncertain*, the risky detail of our craft[48] [. . .] *Can it be imagined how this mischief conducts traffic between women's solidarity across two sides of imperialism?*[49]

This idea links to the refigured relation between what we might call a metropolitan feminist and a postcolonial feminist. They are both, in different ways, situated as silenced 'other' to the masculine subject of either colonial or postcolonial discourse. I think that Spivak's remarks point to a creative imagining of conversations that can take place when we acknowledge these space(s) of radical uncertainty. The 'other' is always inaccessible to us and yet in the double moment of recognising our embodied (fractured) self and an (embodied) other in this relationship of radical uncertainty, the moment we let go of 'knowing' or 'appropriating' the 'other', it is there that we may find a potential common ground, *a common mischief.*[50]

[48] This refers back to a point Spivak made earlier where she notes: 'Assuming that classes and audiences are collections of selves ignores the details of their intimate and inaccessible alterity' ('French Feminism Revisited', p. 142).

[49] Spivak 'French Feminism Revisited', p. 146 my emphasis.

[50] Recall, again, how the labial logic of the two lips is 'always touching, always open', confusing the binary of self/other logic? This notion of mischief can also be thought of in relation to what

Keeping in mind Spivak's overarching question of how to structure relations between women, I turn to the end of Spivak's paper where she focuses on Irigaray's *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*. Spivak points out that what Irigaray means by an ethics of sexual difference is not an argument reducible to biology (or traditional western ontology). Spivak also recognises that what Irigaray has to say cannot be reduced to a claim concerning a normative heterosexuality. It is clear from the following passage that Spivak appreciates Irigaray's metaphysical challenge to the single universal of phallocentric logic, the risk that she takes in positing two universals, and, consequently, the potential restructuring of subjectivity as sexuate. Spivak writes:

> This is no separatist politics, but a full-blown plan for an ethics where sexual difference, far from being located in a decisive biological fact, is posited as the undecidable in the face of which the now displaced 'normal' must risk ethicopolitical decisions. An ethical position must entail universalization of the singular. One can wish not to be excluded from the universal. But if there is one universal, it cannot be inclusive of difference. We must therefore take the risk of positing two universals, one radically other to the other in one crucial respect and keep the 'real universal' on the other side of *différance*. If Derrida had dared to think of minimal idealization, Irigaray dares minimal

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Michelle Boulous Walker calls labial logic. Boulous Walker (1998) links Irigarayan labial logic with Derrida's play of differance, noting that:

> It is deconstructive because it shifts 'language' away from an oppositional logic of reference versus metaphor toward something much closer to the play of *difference* . . . The singularity of the labia is always *double,* never one. This labial logic confounds oppositional thinking. It displaces oppositions such as inside and outside, self and other, reference and metaphor. (Boulous Walker, *Philosophy and the Maternal Body*, p. 157)

Consequently, we might think of this 'common mischief' in terms of Derrida's notion of differance and play as disruptive to binary logic that he explores in his 1968 lecture 'Differance' ('Difference', p. 282). Furthermore, Irigaray's early remarks on women laughing in *This Sex Which Is Not One* evoke this notion of playful mischievousness to challenge the notion that sexual difference is a simple reversal of binary positions. Irigaray writes:

> Isn't laughter the first form of liberation from a secular oppression? *Isn't the phallic tantamount to the seriousness of meaning?* Perhaps women, and the sexual relation, transcend it 'first' in laughter? Besides, women among themselves begin by laughing. To escape from a pure and simple reversal of the masculine position means in any case not to forget to laugh. (Irigaray, *This Sex,* p. 163)

> alterity. Each is a same-sexed ethical universal, operating in a social cooperation that must conventionally assume others to be collectives of othered selves. This is to provide the (im)possible ethical base for rewriting gendering in the social sphere.[51]

Reading Irigaray's ethics of sexual difference alongside Derrida's notion of *différance,* Spivak opens up an interesting moment between these two philosophers.[52] If we think of the play of Derrida's *différance* as resonating with an Irigarayan labial logic, we can see why Spivak might bring *différance* into dialogue with Irigaray's project of sexual difference. Both Irigaray and Derrida seek to challenge the traditional either-or logic of Western metaphysics, and the writings of both these two philosophers ought to be appreciated with this challenge in mind. Consequently, when Spivak writes that we must risk positing two universals and we ought to keep the '"real universal" on the other side of *différance'* she is suggesting that Irigaray's double sexuate universal ought to be appreciated within the labial logic and play of *différance* that cannot be reduced to the binary either-or logic of Western metaphysics. In suggesting the double sexuate universals' move to the side of *différance,* Spivak is reminding us of the excess between the two, the interval that Irigaray suggests we need in order for the two universals to exist (and meet in difference). We can think of

[51] Spivak, 'French Feminism Revisited', p. 165.

[52] Derrida writes:

> Differance is not simply active (any more than it is a subjective accomplishment); it rather indicates the middle voice, it precedes and sets up the opposition between passivity and activity. With its *a*, differance more properly refers to what in classical language would be called the origin or production of difference and the differences between differences, the *play* [*jue*] of differences. *Differance* is neither a *word* nor a *concept.* In it, however, we shall see the juncture—rather than the summation—of what has been most decisively inscribed in the thought of what is conveniently called our 'epoch': the difference of forces in Nietzsche, Saussure's principle of semiological difference, differing as the possibility of [neurone] facilitation, impression and delayed effect in Freud, difference as the irreducibility of the trace of the other in Levinas, and the ontic-ontological difference in Heidegger. (Derrida, 'Differance', 279)

I think we can add Luce Irigaray's ontology of sexuate difference to the 'juncture' of our 'epoch' that Derrida describes earlier.

this as the refigured dialectical relation of desire or love between two. It is the excess, it is the sensible transcendental, and it is in this way that we can understand sexuate difference as universal.[53]

I believe that Spivak's understanding of sexual difference as a double universal allows her to productively read Irigaray's work as she goes on to focus on the last chapter of *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, the 'The fecundity of the caress: a reading of Levinas, totality and infinity, "Phenomenology of Eros"'. In what follows, I turn to Spivak's engagement with Irigaray's reading of Levinas in depth in order to consider this double sexuate universal, radical alterity and the caress, and bring these notions into dialogue with Spivak's motif of radical uncertainty. As we will see, Spivak writes that the double sexuate universal provides 'the impossible differed/deferred grounding of the ethics of sexual difference in the fecund caress . . . '.[54] I thus suggest that Spivak's reading of Irigaray's appropriation of the (fecund) caress and the notion of a double sexuate universal enables Spivak to explore notions of radical alterity between and among women in novel ways.

Spivak notes that the 'empirical scene of sexual congress behind Levinas's "Phenomenology of Eros" is almost comically patriarchal, so generally so that the bourgeois male colonial subject from various parts of the world can be fitted into the slot of "the lover"'.[55] Spivak suggests that she finds 'it difficult to take this prurient heterosexist, male-identified ethics seriously', but Irigaray, on the other hand, 'is more generous'.[56] Tina Chanter writes that 'no matter how problematic Levinas' depiction of the feminine is in other respects, it challenges the logic of metaphysics with a radicality hitherto unprecedented'.[57] Levinas describes the face-to-face relation as one in which beings face one another and yet are

[53] Importantly, Irigaray sets out this labial logic in her earliest works and so we can recognise that Irigaray's call for a double sexuate universal must be understood as part of her overall ontological challenge to the very notion of traditional conceptions of ontology and metaphysics in Western philosophy.

[54] Spivak, 'French Feminism Revisited', pp. 170–171.

[55] Ibid., p. 166.

[56] Ibid., p. 167.

[57] Chanter, *Ethics of Eros*, p. 209.

asymmetrical with regard to one another. He notes, '[T]he being that presents himself in the face comes from a dimension of height, a dimension of transcendence whereby he can present himself as a stranger without opposing me as obstacle or enemy'.[58] Instead of positing the subject as a rational and individual subject, Levinas thinks of the subject as always in this face-to-face relation. The subject in the face-to-face differs from the rational and individual subject because it is always in relation to another subject; it is never, even primordially, an isolated individual.

Spivak (1993) suggests that because Irigaray degenders the 'active–passive' division and identifies both the 'lover' and 'beloved' as both feminine and masculine this is not a reduction to some heteronormative sexual ethics. She writes, 'The most noticeable thing about Irigaray's "Fecundity of the Caress" is the practical crispness of its tone. It is obviously a text that assumes that both partners do things, and are not inevitably heterosexual'.[59] As Spivak suggests, this is a 'full-blown plan for ethics' with the refiguring of a double sexuate universal.[60] Importantly, it is within this degendering of the active–passive division that we can begin to see the emergence of two autonomous sexuate subjectivities that are always in relation, and not necessarily heterosexual. This is what I think Irigaray means when she writes that in the fecundity of the caress 'the abyss is circumscribed by the unavoidable alterity of the other. Its absolute singularity'.[61] Recall that recognising the limit to sexuate subjectivity is crucial for bringing about the recognition of a non-hierarchal and non-binary ontology of sexuate difference because it means that the narcissistic masculine subject cannot silence the maternal body (and the sexuate other) via projections of illusionary omnipotence.[62] This is arguably a staging of the

[58] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 215.

[59] Spivak, 'French Feminism Revisited', p. 167.

[60] Ibid., p. 165.

[61] Irigaray, *An Ethics,* p. 204.

[62] To bring both the maternal and erotic into relation is to go beyond Levinas. As Tina Chanter writes:

> Plenty could be said about the stereotypical restrictions on sex roles in play in Levinas' texts. Levinas limits the appearance of the feminine figure either to the realm of the erotic (where, in one respect, it turns out to be a poor imitation of the ethical), or to the elevated heights of

sensible transcendental in the sense that the scene of sexuality brings together in a fecund caress a spiritual excess that is beyond the reproductive function or outcome in a child, and at the same time is situated in the present of the touching and caressing of lived-in-bodies.[63] Spivak points out that for Irigaray it is through the loving and fecund caress that a refigured feminine subjectivity emerges.

Irigaray writes:

> Bringing me back to life more intimately than any regenerative nourishment, the other's hands, these palms with which he approaches without going through me, give me back the borders of my body and call me to the remembrance of the most profound intimacy. As he caresses me, he bids me neither to disappear nor to forget but rather to remember the place where, for me, the most intimate life is held in reserve. Searching for what has not yet come into being for himself, he invites me to become what I have not yet become. To realize a birth that is still in the future. Plunging me back into the maternal womb and beyond that conception, awakening me to another birth—as a loving woman.[64]

Irigaray continues here, suggesting that this birth as a loving, desiring woman (as a refigured autonomous feminine subjectivity) has not yet occurred. She argues that we will never move out of the current epoch if we fail to recognise sexuate difference as well as the work of the negative in the emergence of the two sexuate subjects. We need new ontological structures in order for sexuate difference to come about; we have to

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maternity. It is not, perhaps, too extreme to accuse Levinas of expressing the traditional denigration and deification of the feminine in the restricted possibilities he extends to the feminine [. . .] However far it might be from his intentions, it is hard not to find in Levinas' work the opposition between good wife and mother and wayward sex symbol. (Chanter, *Ethics of Eros,* p. 199)

[63] This is why the two subjects are not necessarily heterosexual. The difference is created within the relation to the maternal and to the other. There is no normative sexual function whereby the couple reproduce a child, the relation is in excess of this. It is within this difference that we become sexuate subjects, that we are born as a 'loving woman' that is beyond the reproductive function.

[64] Spivak then quotes Irigaray from a 1986 translation of the text. I quote the 1993 *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* translation as I think it evokes the point being made here more clearly than the earlier translation (Irigaray, *An Ethics,* p. 187).

construct and refigure love (and space and time and desire). Irigaray's thinking through of the fecund caress, radical alterity and the emergence of autonomous feminine subjectivity links, I suggest, to Spivak's explorations of radical uncertainty and women's solidarity. Irigaray continues:

> A birth that has never taken place, unless one remains at the stage of substitution for the father and the mother, which gestures toward an act that is radically unethical. Lacking respect for the one who gave me my body and enthusiasm for the one who gives it back to me in his amorous awakening.
>
> When the lovers, male or female, substitute for, occupy, or possess the site of those who conceived them, they founder in the unethical, in profanation. They neither construct nor inhabit their love. Remaining in the no longer or the not yet. Sacrilegious sleepers, murderous dreamers—of the one and of the other in an unconscious state that might be the site of sensual pleasure? Sterile, if it were not for the child.[65]

The impossible threshold of ethics is thus evoked in the refigured fecundity of the caress of the two sexuate subjects (intimately linked to the two universals of sexuate difference) as an impossible memory that shapes each one of us, as mother's sons and as mother's daughters, in relation to the intimate relation to the maternal body.

So what is it, Spivak asks, that is 'born in the sexual embrace?' She responds: 'The possibility of two spaces, un-universalizable with each other'.[66] As Spivak suggests, the two universals are not reducible to one another and neither can appropriate the other. Rather, it is the universal relation of the two sexuate subjectivities (and the fecund relation of the two involved in the caress) themselves that becomes the universal. In this sense, again, can we imagine an ontology of sexuate difference?[67] Thinking through this ethical universal relation of sexual difference, Spivak writes:

[65] Irigaray, *An Ethics,* p. 187.
[66] Spivak, 'French Feminism Revisited', p. 168.
[67] Ibid., p. 169.

> The ethics of sexual difference are persistent and to come. *In all patriarchal cultures, all classes, it is an immense move for the wife to become the fecund agent of the caress* [. . .] How much more immense to inscribe the agency of the fecund caress in 'woman' collectively, rather than in site and situation-specific exceptions. In fact, it is not excessive to say that this ethical charge illuminates every immediate practical undertaking for women's liberation . . . [68]

Spivak is suggesting here that perhaps the lesson we must learn from 'learning the agency of the caress' is that to be human is to recognise the unknowable sexuate other. That the recognition of the two universals of an ontology of sexuate difference will allow us to appreciate the space(s) required for the openness, fluidity and radical uncertainty that is our humanity; 'the unavoidable alterity of the other'.[69] Spivak acknowledges that this is the most important lesson we learn from Irigaray when trying to think through difference in our postcolonial/neocolonial globalised environment. She writes:

> The discourse of the clitoris in the mucous of the lips still remains important in Irigaray's work. Trying to think the international from within a metropolized ethnic minority, I had given this discourse a general structural value a decade ago. Much talk, flying, and falling, from known and unknown women, has shown me that that evaluation runs no more than the usual risks of intelligibility. It is just that the generalization of a *bicameral*, or even two universals, to provide the impossible differed/deferred grounding of the ethics of sexual difference in the fecund caress seems to respond to the call of the larger critique of humanism with which postcoloniality must negotiate, even as it negotiates daily with the political and cultural legacy of the European Enlightenment.[70]

What is Spivak suggesting here? She notes that the themes of the clitoris, lips and mucous that she explored in 1981 remain important in Irigaray's

[68] Ibid., pp. 169–170, my emphasis.
[69] Irigaray, *An Ethics,* p. 204.
[70] Spivak, 'French Feminism Revisited', pp. 170–171.

work, for all the criticisms it may have endured. Accordingly, Spivak admits that her own evaluation is not without its risks and, as I have demonstrated, she recognises this may be true of all of her work. However, it is in the moments of (productively conflictual) radical uncertainty that Spivak evokes in her writing that we can begin to think through a global women's solidarity that is universal and historically specific. Recall, it is in this risk of radical uncertainty that we begin to learn, that we glimpse another way of being. It is here, in recognising the radical uncertainty of the two universals of an ethics of sexual difference, that we can imagine '*how this mischief conducts traffic between women's solidarity across two sides of imperialism?*'[71] Spivak's analysis demonstrates, and goes beyond, the valuable lessons that Irigaray's work teaches us. Not only must we, as women, challenge Western metaphysics, but also the phallocentric logic underlying the masters of the crises of metaphysics; for example, Heidegger, Levinas and Fanon. Continually moving between these two patriarchal structures, Spivak and Irigaray bring about a heterogeneous sex analysis that is radically confronting. Spivak continues and returns to her original question. She asks again, 'How does the postcolonial feminist negotiate with the metropolitan feminist?'.[72] Must we assume that the postcolonial feminist has no use for the metropolitan feminist? The answer is not straightforward. Spivak writes:

> What of the Irigaray who rereads Plato and Levinas? Can Hélie-Lucas have no use for her?
>
> On the contrary. Here again we revert to the task of decolonizing the mind through negotiating with the structures of violence.[73]

Spivak continues and suggests that Irigaray's work may have relevance to a feminist citizen of a recently decolonised nation. She notes:

> . . . there will be someone who is in that particular subject position—a feminist citizen of a recently decolonized nation concerned with its

[71] Spivak, 'French Feminism Revisited', p. 146, my emphasis.
[72] Ibid., p. 145.
[73] Ibid., pp. 170–171.

> domestic/international political claims, not merely its ethnocultural agenda. To such a person I would say—whenever the teleological talk turns into unacknowledged, often travestied, articulations of the Plato of the *Republic* or *Laws*; or, indeed to the rights of the self-consolidating other, Irigaray's readings must be recalled in detail. If such a person—I must assume her without alterity—holds a reproduction of this page, she will know, alas that such occasions will not be infrequent. But how can I be certain? And what is it to know, or be sure that a knowing has been learned? To theorize the political, to politicize the theoretical, are such vast aggregative asymmetrical undertakings; the hardest lesson is the *impossible intimacy of the ethical*.[74]

Again, Spivak refers to the radical uncertainty, what is it to know? To know the other, as Spivak and as Irigaray teach us, is to silence, to appropriate. However, to speak 'for' the other is also to silence the other. The only way out is to refigure the relationship between binary oppositions of ignorance and knowledge, as Irigaray does in Diotima's dialectic, that is, to refigure love. To acknowledge that there is always a 'contested' frame, and that there is always an 'other' voice, a different narrative. This happens in Irigaray's refiguring of the two sexuate subjects. Here, Spivak writes, lies the 'impossible intimacy of the ethical'. The hardest lesson is to recognise the limit of the other, the recognition that there is a limit to our knowledge of the other. We cannot appropriate the other by knowing her or him, and within the intimacy of the fecund caress that brings together the carnal and spiritual—in that realm of refigured desire—is the universal ethics of sexual difference. What I hope to have demonstrated in this chapter is that in thinking through a universal ethics of sexual difference we must take seriously Spivak's notions of women's solidarity using the motifs of radical uncertainty, the double sexuate universal and the fecund caress, and recall how this enables us, as women, to joyfully participate in the making of mischief on both sides of imperialism. Women's solidarity, conceived in this way, as an Irigarayan-inspired Spivakian heterogeneous sex analysis, offers feminist citizens around the globe

[74] Spivak, 'French Feminism Revisited', p. 171, my emphasis.

alternative ways to fight, together, the increasingly insidious structures of violence that neocolonialism brings.

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Part IV

Race and the Postcolonial

10

The 'Africanness' of White South Africans?

Sharli Paphitis and Lindsay-Ann Kelland

10.1 Defining the Parameters

Over the past decade, South African philosophers have begun to pay particular attention to whiteness, 'whiteliness' and the role of white South Africans in political processes and transformation in South Africa. This work has sparked much debate within the South African philosophical community and in public discourse more broadly, but often leaves white South Africans confused about how they should experience their white South African *identity*. Confusion about one's identity, however, is not particular to white South Africans. In a recent conversation, a young black South African remarked that he often looks in the mirror and questions whether he is black enough. In order to clarify his statement, he explained that he grew up in rural Kwa-Zulu Natal and during this time never doubted his racial identity, but that his education and experiences of studying at a former 'white' university have left an imprint on his racial identity in such a

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fundamental way that on returning home he began to question his previously taken for granted 'blackness' and his sense of belonging where he previously felt truly at home. Further, he remarked that he doubts that white South Africans have ever had this same experience. While this observation might initially strike us as true, insofar as we do not question whether we are white enough, we, as two young white South Africans, have however experienced a similar kind of doubt—questioning not whether we are white enough but whether we are *African* enough, questioning, that is, our previously taken for granted 'Africanness', our sense of belonging to this African place. It is this phenomenon—the questioning of Africanness on the part of white South Africans, which entails a questioning of belonging and of being truly at home in our South African place—that we intend to explore in this chapter.

In the account we will propose, we will explore the unique situation of young white South Africans in relation to the question of identity formation and will provide an account of the *experience* of white South African youth struggling with this process. We focus particularly on what we believe to be a double tension that arises during this process: a tension that results from exploring one's relationship with one's forefathers and one's relationship with one's fellow black South Africans. On the one hand, white South African youth seem unable to escape being viewed as outsiders who are responsible for, or at least complicit in, the postcolonial African problem, and, on the other, cannot help but see themselves as anything less than truly at home in their African place and thus as part of the solution to this very problem. This struggle to reconcile within oneself one's identity *as African* is further complicated by the fact that white South African youth are seldom acknowledged as African by black South Africans.

Before we go on to provide this account, however, it is important that we discuss how this project intersects with and differs from some of the more influential papers written by white South African philosophers in this area.

In Samantha Vice's influential and controversial paper 'How do I live in this strange place?' she asks how white people—who are 'thoroughly

saturated by histories of oppression [and] privilege'[1]—can *be* and *live* in South Africa given the legacy of Apartheid. According to Vice, white South Africans ought to see themselves as a problem and need to acknowledge the fact that they are morally damaged as persons in virtue of their past, white privilege, whitely habits, and the 'invisibility' of whiteness.[2] She goes on to say that:

> If *we* are a problem, we should perhaps concentrate on recovering and rehabilitating our selves . . . because of peculiarities of the South African situation, this personal inward-directed project should be cultivated with humility and in (a certain kind of) silence.[3]

In spelling out her position, Vice explores the moral damage that she sees as infecting the very selves of white people in South Africa and argues that, given this damage, white South Africans should retreat from public forums about the transformation of South Africa, at least until they have undergone significant transformation themselves, since whitely habits could, ultimately, cause further harm in these spaces. She writes:

> . . . recognizing their damaging presence, whites would try, in a significantly different way to the normal workings of whiteliness, to make

[1] Vice, "How Do I Live in This Strange Place, p. 323.

[2] Vice draws on Paul Taylor's understanding of whiteliness saying:'it is by now standard, for instance, to think of whiteness as consisting in the occupation of "a social location of structural privilege in the right kind of racialized society," as well as the occupation of the *epistemic* position of seeing the world "whitely" (Vice, p. 324, our emphasis). Further, drawing on Marilyn Frye and, again, Taylor, Matthews claims that whiteliness involves

> 'deeply ingrained ways of being in the world' which while being common to many white people, are only contingently related to having white skin (1992, p. 151). Having white skin makes it more likely that one behaves in a whitely manner, but people with white skin are not essentially whitely nor are whitely characteristics only and always held by white people (1992, pp. 149–52). (Matthews, 2012, p. 174)

Some examples she cites include not seeing oneself as privileged in virtue of one's whiteness, seeing whiteness as the norm and the concomitant invisibility of whiteness, an assumption of responsibility and authority, and what has come to be called 'ontological expansiveness'.

[3] Ibid., p. 324.

> themselves invisible and unheard, concentrating rather on those damaged selves. Making pronouncements about a situation in which one is so deeply implicated seems a moral mistake . . . One would live as quietly and decently as possible, refraining from airing one's view on the political situation in the public realm, realizing that it is not one's place to offer diagnoses and analyses, that blacks must be left to remake the country in their own way.[4]

In her extensive work on the topic, Sally Matthews defends contra Vice the appropriateness of white involvement in anti-racist struggles in South Africa, although she does express that caution must be taken when engaging in these efforts for similar reasons provided by Vice. She claims:

> Surely, being willing and able to contribute where one can (and in one's own problematic and flawed way) is better than refusing to contribute to anti-racist struggles out of a concern that one can find no 'pure' way of being involved . . . recognition of whiteliness need not mean that white people ought to retreat out of fear of 'contaminating' any struggle with the taint of white privilege. Through involvement in the lives and struggles of black people, on the latter's terms, white people are more likely to undo their whiteliness than they would be on their own.[5]

Although Vice and Matthews primarily focus on the role that white South Africans can play in politics and transformation, they provide insights that are useful when proposing an account of white South African identity formation. In arguing that white South Africans experience (and ought to experience) guilt and shame, Vice goes some way towards providing us with a picture of what it is like to *be* a white South African today. The moral emotions of guilt and shame, she argues, are appropriate responses to recognising and coming to understand one's privileged position as a white South African in this country as well as one's whitely habits and assumptions, and how these impact on one's behaviour. In fact, she argues that experiencing these moral emotions,

[4] Ibid., p. 335.

[5] Matthews, "White Anti-Racism in Post-Apartheid South Africa", pp. 185–186.

and so feeling uncomfortable, 'is an ineradicable part of white life'.[6] In providing this account of the emotional experiences of white South Africans, Vice illuminates insights that impact on the identity formation of white South Africans post-Apartheid.

Similarly, Matthews deals explicitly with questions relating to white identity post-Apartheid, and even explores questions of Africanness based on a student forum which was part of a course she ran on Afrocentricity. In 'Becoming African: debating post-apartheid white South African identities',[7] Matthews explores the mixed responses that white South African students claiming to be African receive from black South African students, and claims that:

> Clearly, the scepticism and even outright resistance on the part of many black people to the development of such identities must at the very least invite further critical reflection on this shift in white identity . . . there is something awkward and uncomfortable about holding an identity others deny to you.[8]

The concerns raised by Vice and Matthews—that we ought to experience, for Vice, both guilt and shame in virtue of the privilege bestowed upon us by the past, and that, for Matthews, discomfort is an ineradicable part of white life in South Africa precisely because of the ambiguity inherent in holding an identity that others deny you—shall inform the account that we will provide later.

10.2 The Question of Africanness

After South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994, Nelson Mandela, following Archbishop Desmond Tutu, made a call for South Africans to form a rainbow nation, an image that rouses the notion of a unified South

[6] Vice, "How Do I Live in This Strange Place", p. 326.

[7] Matthews, "Becoming African", pp. 1–17.

[8] Ibid., p. 10.

African identity going forward. Soon after this call to form a rainbow nation, talk of an African Renaissance began to emerge. According to Thabo Mbeki, the call for an African renaissance would centre on a right to create our own definition of Africanness, the parameters of which would not be set in terms of race or historical origin. As Mbeki puts it:

> The constitution whose adoption we celebrate constitutes an unequivocal statement that we refuse to accept that our Africanness shall be defined by our race, colour, gender, or historical origins. It is a firm assertion made by ourselves that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white.[9]

The project of the African Renaissance, then, like that of the rainbow nation strives to find a renewed and unified African identity. There is, then, an intimate relationship between the notion of a unified African identity and the notion of Africanness which underlies it.

For many white people around our age, these calls were made in our formative years. Moreover, many of us went to multiracial schools, and grew up in liberal homes. As a result, many of us were unaware that prior to 1994, and the subsequent calls for a rainbow nation and African Renaissance, there was anything particularly unique about our white South African social situation. Of course, this early recognition was nothing akin to a proper understanding of this situation, but it is at this moment of recognition, a dawning of awareness, that the question of the relationship between whiteness and Africanness begins to enter one's consciousness.

It is important to note, however, as is most often the case, that it is more than possible that this awareness or recognition never reaches what we would want to call a proper understanding of one's social situation as a white person in contemporary South Africa. Indeed, the work of scholars like Vice and Matthews shows just how difficult it is for a young white South African to develop such an understanding. To properly understand one's situation as a young, white South African post-apartheid, one would need to be able to recognise things about oneself that it is

[9] Mbeki, "I am an African".

exceptionally difficult to recognise—features of our lives like white privilege, whiteliness, whitely habits, assumptions and values. Coming to properly understand the role that one's being white plays in how one moves about in and sees the world is a difficult and often harrowing experience that requires some courage.

In order for this consciousness to develop, one must come to understand one's country, continent and world, and very importantly one's history, and then one has to make sense of one's particular place *in all of this.* Statements of identity, such as 'I am a South African' or 'I am an African', are not as unambiguous as they *prima facie* seem. Any statement of identity carries a fair amount of baggage, and a white South African's identity, it seems, needs to make sense of the relationship between whiteness, South Africanness and Africanness. For a young, white South African, the question of this relationship appears particularly harrowing at first glance. Given the history of whites in Africa, how should we, as white South Africans, understand and explain our South Africanness or our Africanness? Given that a renewed and unified African identity—that which is called for by both the African Renaissance and the idea of a rainbow nation—depends on an understanding of our Africanness, how do we as white South Africans come to this understanding?

The African Renaissance project appears to be a broadening of the South African rainbow nation project, the aim of which is to strive for a new identity based on unification through diversity. But what remains are questions surrounding an African identity and the notion of Africanness which seems to underlie this. With the introduction of the term Africanness to explain the unity of identity what seems to be lacking is a description of the path we need to follow in order to get to an understanding of Africanness, and thus a unified African identity.

Mbeki's suggestion, in his official 'African Renaissance Statement', is that the pathway to finding a new unified African identity involves creating our own definition of African identity and that in order to do this we would need to embark on 'a journey of self-discovery'.[10] For him

[10] Mbeki, "The African Renaissance Statement of the Deputy President".

the rebirth of the African continent would require the *rediscovery* of the African soul, which in turn would require our 'acting to banish the shame'[11] of the colonial past in an attempt to achieve a 'restoration of our own self-esteem'.[12]

Perhaps the most controversial question surrounding Mbeki's suggestion has been *who* is most appropriately situated to make this journey of self-discovery in order to define anew what it means to be African, and thus help us to understand Africanness. This question is itself difficult to answer. If the question of the African Renaissance is understood along similar lines to the Black Consciousness Movement, then we might think that it is only appropriate for black Africans to embark on this journey of self-discovery. However, at least one plausible answer to this question—that which was supported by the delegates of the official African Renaissance Conference—is that those who are appropriately situated are those who have a 'consciousness of being African in the world'.[13] This answer implies that there are a number of independently situated people who are equally appropriately situated to make the journey.

However, this raises another question. Namely, given these diverse starting points, would all those who are appropriately situated to make the journey arrive at the same destination? That is, would the Africanness revealed through these subtly different journeys of self-discovery reveal the basis of a *unified* African identity? While this question is indeed relevant, it cannot be answered before any of these distinct journeys of self-discovery have taken place. Almost 20 years after Mbeki's call for the African Renaissance, most of these journeys have yet to be embarked upon.[14] Since Africanness, however, can only be revealed to us while following the path pointed out by Mbeki—the discovery of Africanness is one of the goals of the African renaissance and

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Makgoba, Shope and Mazwai, "Introduction", p. x.

[14] Elucidating the various (and perhaps innumerable social, political, economic, and, at times, even personal) reasons underpinning this failure is beyond the scope or aims of this chapter.

thus cannot be something assumed at the very starting point—the question of congruency between discoveries made of Africanness from various starting points can only be answered once the journeys are already underway.

This chapter, then, is our own attempt to grapple with our consciousness of being African in the world and so to begin the journey of self-discovery suggested by Mbeki as young white South Africans, as Africans, insofar as we see it appropriate to call ourselves Africans at the start of this journey.[15]

10.3 Self-Discovery

> Their ancestral roots in Europe severed or withered, these whites are now locked into Africa, into its cultures, its politics and its moral stances, into its rights and wrongs, its weaknesses and strengths. When the African Union adopts positions, continentally and in the wider world, it does so for all the Africans, white as well as black. Where Africa goes, its whites go too. But they remain uncertain whether they go as compatriots or as unwelcome passengers, whether they are seen to have an equal birthright in Africa.[16]

There are two key relationships that any young white South African needs to consider in an attempt to understand her unique situation and become conscious of her being African in the world: (1) her relationship

[15] While numerous sceptics challenge the very notion of unity in diversity, we think that Mbeki's concept of Africanness can be plausibly understood, and that the project of the African Renaissance—and the journey of self-discovery required to make sense of this project—is still worth undertaking. We believe that this is the case because diversely situated people all feel that Africa is in fact their home, that they belong here, recognise themselves as African and have a stake in the future of our continent. Although the concept of Africanness is fraught with difficulty and tension, we still recognise that it is not an empty notion, and so need to make sense of it in a way that does not make it arbitrary—that does not make our belonging reducible to a passport or racial grouping. For these reasons, we believe that Mbeki's suggestion that we need to forge a renewed and unified African identity makes sense.

[16] L'ange, The White Africans, p. 458.

with her forefathers and (2) her relationship with black South Africans. While both of these relationships are responsible for shaping the white South African's consciousness in a unique way, there is a vital underlying similarity in the way that both come to shape the identity of a young white South African. In both cases, what is important is that we are made acutely aware of a tension within our own consciousness: while unable to escape being viewed as immigrants and outsiders responsible for, or at least complicit in, the postcolonial African problem, we cannot come to view ourselves as anything less than truly at home in our African place and thus as part of the solution to that very problem. Moreover, any attempts to align oneself with Africa or claims to being African are met with mixed responses, or are not recognised at all. We hope to bring this double tension to life in the sections that follow.

10.4 The Relationship Between the Young White South African and Her Forefathers

> Parental expectations, from which every generation must free itself, were nullified by the fact that these parents had failed to measure up during the Third Reich, or after it ended. How could those who had committed Nazi crimes or watched them happen or looked away while they were happening or tolerated the criminals among them after 1945 or even accepted them—how could they have anything to say to their children? But on the other hand, the Nazi past was an issue even for the children who couldn't accuse their parents of anything, *or didn't want to*.[17]

In his novel, *The Reader*, Bernhard Schlink highlights the intergenerational tension in post-holocaust Germany. The main protagonist in *The Reader*, a post-holocaust German youth, struggles with the process of identity formation in a social milieu in which he must grapple with the tension between his love for his parents and his acknowledgement of his parent's guilt, something which he takes to be the fate of his generation.

[17] Schlink, The Reader, p. 167 [our emphasis].

Much like the youth of post-Nazi Germany,[18] as young white South Africans we appear to be faced with the challenge of adopting an identity in which we must actively condemn our father's generation and define ourselves in their opposition, while remembering that our identities are already largely shaped by our association with our parents and their forefathers.

Perhaps the most crucial identity related question for the youth living in a post-atrocity society, then, is the question concerning their relationship with their parents, and indeed all members of their forefathers' generation: both their own understanding of this relationship, and an understanding of the view others take of this relationship, will come to bear on their particular consciousness of being in the world. Ultimately this question is, for that younger generation, a question of how to interpret and evaluate their history and the role this history plays in shaping their identity in the past, present and future.

To study the history of our forefathers, the history of colonialism and closer to home, apartheid, often results in an immediate sense of disassociation with that history. For many young white South Africans, we do not find within ourselves obvious or explicit racist beliefs, desires for separatism or feelings of racialised superiority. But the particular form of disassociation at hand is somewhat more complex than it first appears to be, for *ideological* disassociation is not the same as *total* disassociation. The question that appears most pertinent is whether disassociation from vital elements of a particular history is necessarily the same as disassociation from our forefathers who were intimately bound up in that history. This question seems intimately related to the question that moral philosophers frequently ask about what to make of the loyal Nazi officer who also happens to be a good father. As young white South Africans, we ask this question from the inside—and it turns back on us and asks whether a claim of total dissociation from our past, and from our forefathers, would not be a mere fiction.

[18] We are not here talking about the current German youth, who are faced with numerous socio-economic challenges that make their context vastly dissimilar to the post-Apartheid South African context, but rather to those German youth who lived in the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust.

Our instinctive reaction of dissociation arises largely from a sense of guilt and shame, and this guilt and shame implies the recognition of a connection—it is only in recognising the interconnectedness between our forefathers and ourselves that we feel shame and guilt rather than *mere* outrage or disdain. Importantly, properly understanding this connection reveals to us the fact that the whitely habits, assumptions and beliefs that we hold are, to a large extent, a result of this connection—a result of our upbringing as *white* South Africans during the final years of apartheid.

However, these negative aspects of our identities are not the only thing that we inherit from our relationship with our forefathers, and this is something that is nicely brought out in the quote from *The Reader* cited earlier when the narrator claims that the children of Nazi perpetrators also 'didn't want to' accuse their parents of anything. An important ambiguity is revealed here that may very well be common to youth living in a post-atrocity society. When we look back at our relationships with our parents, and thereby our forefathers, we also inevitably experience feelings of love and acknowledge the positive features of our identities that are also a result of our upbringing. Who I am, that is, is also constituted by positive aspects of my identity that I have gotten from, and love about, my family—such as a love of reading, a love of and respect for animals, or very basic things like enjoying listening to Christmas carols while sitting around the Christmas tree. The point here is that there are things that make me who I am, which I am in virtue of my upbringing, that make it difficult for me to only view these relationships as negative. These positive, and equally inherited, features of my identity make it hard for me to reject wholesale my relationship with my parents and forefathers. Imagine a young white South African paging through a family photo album. On one page she sees a picture of her grandfather holding her as a baby and smiling proudly with love in his eyes. Such a picture is bound to arouse warm, positive feelings towards him. Imagine further, that on the next page of the album I see a picture of my grandfather proudly dressed in his SADF uniform. My response to this image will, I imagine, be entirely at odds with my previous response—here I will not experience warm and positive feelings towards my grandfather, but rather the kind of ideological dissociation

talked about earlier. This is a hard ambiguity to live with—to feel love for one's family and forefathers and, simultaneously, shame about one's intimate connection to their involvement in the apartheid regime. In fact, it is precisely this difficulty, which is based on the ambiguity I experience in being pulled in two directions at once, that can prevent the awareness or recognition of one's situation, spoken about earlier, from developing into a proper understanding of one's place as a white South African in the post-apartheid situation. That is, in order to develop a proper understanding we must be able to face up to the ambiguity inherent in our identities, and this, as mentioned earlier, requires a courage that many people do not possess.[19]

In short, the discoveries we make about our history, which prompt us to immediate disassociation, do not also immediately erase these influences on our identities. Or put differently, total dissociation of the self from one's relationship with one's parents and forefathers would result in an almost complete annihilation of the self. The instinctive reaction of *total* disassociation, then, is perhaps not merely inappropriate in this case, but altogether impossible.

It is perhaps largely because of the impossibility of total disassociation that the contemporary young white South African's identity is tainted by

[19] We should note that this difficulty will vary either in kind or by degree according to the intersecting lines of one's identity. That is, it will make a qualitative difference to this experience and to the difficulty of facing up to the ambiguity in one's identity if one's parents and forefathers were actively involved—that is, perpetrators of the apartheid regime—or if they were bystanders who were not actively involved but who also did not stand up against what was happening. The difficulty may also vary according to one's generation. That is, it seems plausible to imagine that as the generational gap between myself and my forefathers (who lived during apartheid) increases, my sense of connectedness to these forefathers decreases. Indeed, Vice hints at the potential importance of this distance when she says: 'The problem in white South Africa is not just being white but being white South African . . . we have lived here for generations; we identify as South African at least because we "fit" the landscape and have a history here. The fact that some feel the need to assert that they are "African" is an indication of their uncomfortable position, although perhaps younger generations will (appropriately) escape the kind of perplexity I am exploring here' (Vice, "How Do I Live in This Strange Place", pp. 331–332). This may also vary given the different language and situation of Afrikaans- and English-speaking white South Africans. We thank an anonymous reviewer for reminding us to include mention of this distinction; however, we believe that in order to do justice to the distinction we would be pulled too far away from the central aims of this chapter.

association in both our own experience of ourselves and the experience that others have of us. It is here that we encounter the first part of the tension within the young white South African's identity: because of our taint, we cannot help but see ourselves as part of the problem that postcolonial Africa is attempting to overcome; however, in light of our sense of ideological disassociation, and our recognition of the impossibility of total disassociation, we also come to see ourselves as an essential part of the solution to that very problem. That is, in the first step of the contemporary young white South African's journey of self-discovery she finds an ambiguity in her own experience of being African in the world. Moreover, in recognising herself as part of the problem, she also thereby enables herself to recognise herself as part of the solution. Her consciousness of being African in the world is marked by her recognition of this ambiguity in its entirety, and it thus underpins her Africanness. Moreover, since she is indeed equally part of the solution, she is in her very understanding of herself bound up in the restorative project of the African Renaissance.

10.5 The Relationship Between the Young, White South African and Black South Africans

> The definition of a white African, however, remains pretty much a matter of opinion—though, for that matter, the same is true of the definition of an African . . . Some extend it to black people in the diaspora who have never been to Africa, but with whom many resident Africans evidently feel a stronger brotherly bond than they do with the native whites. The question arises: does a white person of five generations of ancestry in South Africa have a stronger or lesser claim to be called African than a black person of seven generations in the United States or Haiti?[20]

With the wounds of colonialism and apartheid still largely open and raw, an understanding of the white South African as tainted—even if just by

[20] L'ange, The White Africans, p. 502.

association—brings into question the possibility of any form of legitimatisation of the contemporary young white South African's truly African identity. Here then we must look at the relationship between the contemporary young white South African and black South Africans. At the heart of this relationship lies the question of whether race in fact still plays a role in our understanding of African identity and the concept of Africanness that underlies it.

As contemporary white South Africans, part of our identity rests on the assumption that because of my race I am in part barred from calling myself an 'indigenous' African. Not only do we find ourselves situated outside what is accepted as truly indigenous African culture (as seen later), we can only understand ourselves as African in relation to the indigenously African: we are not simply African or South African; rather we are *white* South African. We cannot help but see the all too distressing parallels with the kind of identity formation which the Black Consciousness movement sought to overcome in the initial years of the liberation struggle.[21] We cannot recognise our identity as anything but African—indeed, we are not accepted as legitimate citizens anywhere but in Africa. On the other hand, we cannot help but feel that since, in the words of Franz Fanon, 'the other [has] hesitated to recognize me'[22], the authenticity of our African identity has not yet been established in the eyes of the indigenously African. We are then, in a sense, socially locked outside of the African place from which we have no escape, nor would we want one, on the basis of our race.

Recall Matthews' work on racial identity formation and the question of who is legitimately recognised by others as African. In her work, Matthews explores how claims to being African, when made by young white South Africans, are met with mixed but often strongly negative and sometimes angry responses by young black South Africans. It is helpful, for our purposes here, to insert some of the comments she explores later.

[21] Biko, "White Racism and Black Consciousness"; Hountondji, African Philosophy, and perhaps most notably in Fanon, Toward the African Revolution.

[22] Fanon, Black Skin White Masks, p. 115.

Some of her students refer to 'facts' about race in their rejection of white South Africans' claims to being African, saying:[23]

> You may feel African but the fact remains that you are not and will never be.
>
> If you are white, you have European blood—simple, even if you were born and raised in Africa. These are not 'racist' views, it's a fact.

Other students suggested that white South Africans cannot be thought of as African because Africanness refers, in part, to one's speaking an African language and bearing the marks of an African cultural heritage:

> I will echo that being African cannot and will not be based on the fact that one was born here alone. African heritage fused with African culture defines a true African.
>
> You [white students] are not [African] and never will be. As crude as that may sound, you do not know what 'isphandla' is or what it resembles.

Relatedly, some black students referred to shared experiences and histories of oppression and struggle as being crucial to an African identity, which would, again, exclude white South Africans from the category of Africans:

> Only a black man/woman living in Africa can understand the centuries of pain that comes part and parcel of being able to call oneself black.[24]
>
> The slavery of our forefathers, their pain, their torture, whether we'd like to admit it or not, remains a substantial part of who we are. Their blood, their sweat, their tears made us the Africans we are.

These particular responses are akin in sentiment to another group of responses which reveal a suspicion of white South Africans who claim to be African on the basis of continued white privilege in South Africa:

[23] All of these comments can be found in Matthews, "Becoming African", pp. 1–17.

[24] Although it is beyond the scope of the chapter to do justice to these fine distinctions, we should bear in mind that to conflate being black with being African immediately undermines the idea of a renewed and unified African identity.

> The war is definitely not over . . . it's a shame to those who are so naïve and blindfolded. Just because some white people give you that fake smile don't mean shit to me. Go to the farms and rural areas, you'll see what I'm talking about. The black man is still forced to call that fat bastard with hanging stomach 'baas' . . .
>
> My friend this is a debate that is for real and we shouldn't just take it for granted because we have suffered enough as Africans at the hands of the whites and we are still suffering. You may say that we are universally equal but are we really that equal? No, my friend, we are not. If the police come and you are with a white person, who is the first suspect, isn't it the black person, the African? NO, NO, NO, let's be proud of being the true Africans, owners of the land of our forefathers even though they [whites] still own the majority of our land.

On the basis of responses such as these, we can claim that on top of the tension that young white South Africans encounter when thinking about our relationship with our forefathers, we encounter a resistance to the recognition of our Africanness on the part of black South Africans, whose recognition, it seems, is crucial to the formation of our identity as African. Our attempts to understand our Africanness, that is, are often resisted from outside, further problematising the idea of a renewed and *unified* African identity.

How then can the young white South African come to understand her Africanness in a way that would allow her to be recognised as part of the unified African identity? In *Black Skin White Masks,* Fanon claims that within his social milieu an essential part of breaking down a racialised social disjunctive was the destruction of 'the myth of the Negro'[25]. If the indigenously African eyes are at least in part responsible for fixing the authenticity of the white South African's identity, then perhaps what is needed is, similarly, the destruction of the myth of the white South African. As the quotes from Matthews' students show, at least part of this myth consists in the idea of white South Africans' attempts to maintain their unfairly gained economically privileged position in Africa.

[25] Fanon, Black Skin White Masks, p. 117.

As Steve Biko claims in 'White Racism and Black Consciousness' even white liberals actively opposed to apartheid could not expect to enjoy total identification with the black majority because they still enjoyed the privileges gained through the exploitation of black-Africans:

> It is not as if whites are allowed to enjoy privilege only when they declare their solidarity with the ruling party. They are born into privilege and are nourished and nurtured in the system of ruthless exploitation of black energy. For the 20-year-old white liberal to expect to be accepted with open arms is surely to overestimate the powers of forgiveness of the black people. No matter how genuine a liberal's motivations may be, he has to accept that though he did not choose to be born into privilege, the blacks cannot but be suspicious of his motives.[26]

While Biko was saying this at the height of apartheid rule, after more than a decade of democracy the economic inequality in Africa, and perhaps most notably in South Africa, largely remains racially divided into a 'white affluence' and a contrasting 'black poverty'. The slowness with which this racialised economic inequality has been addressed by white South Africans in particular can be seen as perpetuating the myth that white South Africans are intent on maintaining their economic superiority over black South Africans. While the vast canyon of inequality which separates the wealthy from the poor in African society remains racially divided, it seems as though the myth of the white South African will persist until there is evidence that she both wants the gap to be significantly closed and provides evidence to support the claim that she is indeed working towards this goal. Similarly, white South Africans have a further role to play in the destruction of the myth of the white South African, which equally relates to the politics of recognition. That is, while working towards the recognition of their Africanness on the part of the 'indigenously' African, white South Africans need to recognise that part of their situation involves bolstering a system that does not recognise the humanity of black South Africans. Before

[26] Biko, "White Racism and Black Consciousness", p. 66.

the white South African can expect her Africanness to be acknowledged, she needs to acknowledge black South Africans' humanity. What will be involved in breaking down the myth of the white South African, then, will not simply be dependent on black South Africans' coming to a new understanding of the white South African's 'true' identity, for there is substantial work to be done on the white South African's part before this identity can be revealed.

Once again, then, the white South African must accept her unique role in the African Renaissance project: she must come to terms with the fact that she needs to recognise herself as part of the problem *in order* to also recognise herself as equally part of the solution. It is only once she is able to recognise that she has a unique role to play in the solution to the postcolonial African problem, that her consciousness of being African in the world will provide grounds for the legitimatisation of her Africanness on the part of those who are considered indigenously African.

10.6 Conclusion

We are able to summarise the discussion given earlier into what we believe is a double tension—a tension that arises when young white South Africans attempt the journey of self-discovery, a journey that Mbeki suggests is crucial to the development of a unified African identity.

1. On the one hand, through exploring our relationship with our forefathers, young white South Africans cannot help but see themselves as both part of the postcolonial African problem—as complicit in and continuing to privilege from our racialised whiteness in this country—and, in virtue of being truly at home in our African place, and the impossibility of total dissociation, as equally a part of the solution to that problem.
2. On the other hand, our attempts to redefine our identities—in line with the calls for a rainbow nation and African Renaissance, which are both underpinned by the notion of a renewed and unified African identity, of Africanness—are often rejected or at least strongly resisted

> by black South Africans. Moreover, it seems that in order to be recognised as African there is much work that needs to be done on our part to undermine the beliefs upon which the myth of the white South African is built.

These tensions give rise to a double ambiguity that lies at the heart of the white South African youth's process of identity formation. Who exactly are we as young white South Africans? Are we the problem, as Vice suggests? Or are we part of the solution, as suggested by Matthews? Relatedly, should we conduct ourselves with shame and guilt because we are part of the problem? Or should we conduct ourselves with hope and optimism because we are part of the solution? This *internal* ambiguity is further complicated by an external ambiguity—by our being-for-others. When the other looks at me, who am I to him? Again, am I *for him* the problem, am I *for him* part of the solution, will I ever be recognised as African given my white skin and my connection to the perpetrators of apartheid? This double ambiguity is in part difficult to live with precisely because—when it comes to identity—we want stable and concrete identities that allow us to properly negotiate our way through life. Moreover, this ambiguity may help us to make sense of the different conclusions reached by Vice and Matthews—it is hard to reconcile the different aspects of our identity with questions about how we should *be* and *live* precisely because we live in an ambiguous space. Matthews herself comes to the conclusion that the question of the white South African's Africanness is one of becoming. As she puts it:

> The problem of how to develop 'anti-racist forms of whiteness' in post-apartheid South Africa . . . seems insoluble—whites cannot continue to insist that they are not African, but insisting that they are African seems fraught with difficulties too . . . Perhaps the kind of identity required is one that accepts the 'inbetweenness' of white South Africans and involves a commitment by white South Africans to strive to find an appropriate way to belong in Africa and thus to aim at *becoming* African.[27]

[27] Matthews, "Becoming African", p. 12.

Perhaps finding an appropriate way to belong in Africa and becoming African, as Matthews puts it, is part and parcel of the journey of self-discovery suggested by Mbeki. However, this journey is not to be lightly undertaken: on the challenging journey of self-discovery, what is revealed to us is often difficult to come to terms with and wholeheartedly accept. For the young white South African, this journey reveals a complex tension which underlies her own understanding of being African in the world, and certain aspects of this tension may well be more difficult for her to accept than others. Ultimately what is required by this journey is a somewhat arduous shift in her own consciousness: a shift in the consciousness of herself, her history and her relationships with others. It is, however, only through embarking on this journey that we can come to have a complete understanding of what it would mean for the young white South African to have a fully formed consciousness of being African in the world at all. This is of course necessary for an understanding of the young white South African's claim to Africanness, which in turn reveals the vital role that the young white South African has to play in the project of the African Renaissance itself.

All of this, however, is only the beginning. The project of forming a unified African identity will require a further step: it will require the coming together, in a climate of mutual respect and appreciation, of these various newly formed African consciousnesses as well as the recognition on the part of all participating people that these ways of being African in the world—of truly belonging in Africa—converge to form a holistic view of Africanness. This is indeed the real challenge of the African Renaissance. It is not an abstract challenge pitched solely at those responsible for the formation of political policies or at those considered indigenously African. Rather, it is a challenge that faces anyone who acknowledges a consciousness of being African in the world and who is willing to face up to the challenge of embarking on a journey of self-discovery. Perhaps taking up this challenge and embarking on this journey would allow us to answer the question we posed at the outset of this chapter—are we African enough?

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11

Identity, Alterity and Racial Difference in Levinas

Louis Blond

11.1 Introduction

The concept of identity has changed considerably over the past half century as philosophical theories concerning the subject have been transformed by positivism, post-war experience, the collapse of Empire, the rise of multiculturalism, feminism, and the post-structuralist and postcolonial deconstruction of the subject. Emmanuel Levinas is one voice in a large company of theorists who have criticised the claims of Enlightenment reason, the centrality of the Cartesian subject and the category of identity; his critique of Western philosophy has been hugely influential across a broad range of disciplines. In particular, Levinas' description of the self in relation to the Other, a relationship he describes as essentially 'ethical', decentres the Cartesian subject and opens up a positive account of difference that places ethics at the heart of identity and alterity. His thought is also evocative in

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an extra-philosophical sense as the reintroduction of Jewish concepts and narrative into philosophy disrupts the univocality of a tradition that has worked hard to eradicate its theological inheritance. Levinas' ethical descriptions are steeped in biblical and talmudic references that serve as counterpoint to the authority of Greek philosophy. For these reasons, his currency has grown hugely in the field of Jewish thought and post-structuralist philosophy with his reputation as a radical thinker earned on the originality of his thought from the 1930s to the 1970s. However, Levinas' philosophy and personal beliefs have come under attack from post-structuralist, feminist and postcolonial theorists contesting the radicalism of his thought. Dissatisfaction has arisen with the political implications of his work and its failure to respond to contemporary problems concerning the relationship between ethics, politics and cultural difference, in particular.

In recent scholarship, critics have vigorously attacked Levinas' methodology and conceptual framework. Simon Critchley, one of the prominent philosophical interpreters of his work, stated clearly the key points of dispute that cloud the enthusiastic reception of Levinas' ethical philosophy.[1] Disagreement turns on Levinas' endorsement of fraternity, monotheism, androcentrism, filiality, Israel and Zionism, concepts that a radical secular thinker like Critchley finds unacceptable. Likewise, feminists, such as Luce Irigaray, have exposed that with regard to Levinas' account of the constitution of the subject he posits a single undifferentiated other that constitutes ethical subjectivity in general.[2] That other is derived from the single subject and only makes sense in relation to the world that a subject describes. According to Irigaray, that world is masculine through and through and fails to describe radical difference. For Irigaray, 'There can in fact be no real recognition of the other as other unless the feminine subject is recognized as radically other with respect to the masculine

[1] Simon Critchley, "Five Problems in Levinas's View of Politics and the Sketch of a Solution to Them", *Theory*, 32(2) (2004), pp. 172–185.

[2] Cf. Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the other woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985); Tina Chanter, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of Emmanuel Levinas* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001); Stella Sandford, *The Metaphysics of Love: Gender and Transcendence in Levinas* (London: The Athlone Press, 2001).

subject, whatever their secondary resemblances or shared group membership.'[3] What Levinas does not accept is different subjectivities, the masculine and the feminine, that live in different worlds. What develops through this line of argument is the notion that to be a subject is to describe and inhabit a world of subjectivity; difference lies not in distinguishing a single subject from its other but in distinguishing between subjectivities that inhabit different worlds.

> The failure to appreciate the importance of the constitution of a world proper to the subject still entails today a failure to appreciate the importance of the difference between masculine and feminine subject, to the benefit of the difference between us and the foreigner: he or she who lives in a world more visibly outside our own, who belongs to a tradition or culture other than ours.[4]

For Irigaray, the difference between 'self' and 'other' is a refusal of alterity or at best an extension of the singular form of subjectivity into the singularity of non-radical others that only express alterity in terms of the subject. This unearths a problem. The implication of Irigaray's theory is that as subjectivities proliferate so worlds proliferate also, yet the two worlds that are accepted as primary for subjectivity are masculine and feminine worlds. The stranger or foreigner which brings alterity to the subject by way of cultural difference is not considered a radical or primary distinction of difference. The world of cultural difference and racial identity are consigned to secondary significance in Irigaray's account. The problem of cultural and racial difference in Levinas' thought has been raised as a painful blind spot that necessitates the reworking of the very concept of alterity that he describes. A critical thinker such as Gaytri Chakravorty Spivak rejects the heteronormative account of ethical subjectivity in Levinas's work, which she sees as broadening the authority of the sovereign subject.[5] Spivak disagrees with Levinas' approach as, for

[3] Luce Irigaray, "What Other are We Talking About?", *Yale French Studies, 104: Encounters with Levinas* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 68.

[4] Irigaray, "What Other are we Talking About?", p. 69.

[5] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 166–167.

her, ethics and politics cannot be separated into disparate parts. The relegation of cultural and material difference to secondary rank below privileged subjectivities would be an enduring characteristic of colonialism.[6] When postcolonial theorists take up the problem of cultural and racial difference in Levinas' work, a set of questions are raised regarding his personal intentions and his methodological allegiance to phenomenology and the European philosophical tradition. There is dissatisfaction concerning Levinas' use of outmoded categories that litter his earlier works. What stems from these critiques is not simply an attack on Levinas but rather a critique of the tradition that elevates the sovereignty of the Western subject to a universal dimension. Critics question Levinas' support of Western philosophy even as he sought to bring it under radical critique.[7] What is under suspicion is the account of alterity that underpins Levinas' ethical subjectivity and the lack of engagement with material others, 'other others', who claim alterity on the basis of their ethnic and cultural difference.[8] The postcolonial critique disputes the universalism of Levinas' theory of alterity and claims that his transcendental account of subjectivity '*blanches*' the racial identity of others, who cannot be isolated from ethnic and political embodiment.[9] What is thus open to question in Levinas' work is not only the integrity of Levinas' intentions and his ties to Europe and the Western tradition, but a deeper set of questions concerning identity and alterity that place ethics and the integrity of certain philosophical narratives on trial. What is alterity? How do we describe alterity's relation to identity? What is the problem of alterity?

[6] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 271–313.

[7] Robert Bernasconi, "Who Is My Neighbour? Who Is the Other? Questioning "the generosity of Western thought'", *Emmanuel Levinas: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers, Volume IV: Beyond Levinas*, eds. Clare Katz and Lara Trout (Oxford: Routledge, 2005), pp. 5–30.

[8] Simone Drichel, "Face to Face with the Other Other: Levinas versus the Postcolonial", *Levinas Studies*, 7 (2012), pp. 21–42.

[9] John E. Drabinski, *Levinas and the Postcolonial: Race, Nation, Other* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), p. 68.

11.2 The Problem of Alterity

Present criticism of Levinas' thought has been aggravated by Eurocentric and xenophobic remarks that he made know in recorded interviews, such as the now infamous reference to cultures other than Greek and Biblical as 'dance'.[10] This expletive was not an isolated event and is confirmed by Levinas on other occasions:

> Europe, then, is the Bible and the Greeks. It has come closer to the Bible and has come into its own destiny. It takes in everything else in the world. I have no nostalgia for the exotic. For me, Europe is central.[11]
>
> I always say—but under my breath—that the Bible and the Greeks present the only serious issues in human life; everything else is dancing. I think these texts are open to the whole world. There is no racism intended.[12]

His commitment to the conception of Europe as a Hebrew/Greek construct is explicit, including it seems the bigotry and racism attached to a supremacist comprehension of that heritage. Hence, one of the main lines of attack examines Levinas' commitment to Europe and criticises his lack of comprehension of what Europe means to those subjected to European domination.[13] Under discussion is not only the construction of Europe as a project or process historically enacted to enhance the image of European man, but also the theoretical and methodological support of this project by

[10] Raoul Mortley, ed., "Emmanuel Levinas", in *French Philosophers in Conversation* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 18; cf. Howard Caygill, *Levinas and the Political* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 182–194. Caygill has raised questions in relation to Levinas' published essays also.

[11] Emmanuel Levinas, *Is it Righteous to Be?: Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*, ed. Jill Robbins (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), p. 137.

[12] Levinas, *Is it Righteous to Be?*, p. 149.

[13] Cf. Drabinski, *Levinas and the Postcolonial*, pp. x–xvii, 1–16; Oona Eisenstadt, "Eurocentrism and Colorblindness", *Levinas Studies*, 7, (2012), pp. 43–62; Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "Levinas's Hegemonic Identity Politics, Radical Philosophy, and the Unfinished Project of Decolonization", *Levinas Studies*, 7 (2012), pp. 63–94; Robert Eaglestone, "Postcolonial Thought and Levinas's Double Vision", in Peter Atterton and Matthew Calarco (eds.), *Radicalizing Levinas* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 2010), pp. 57–68.

European thinkers.[14] Thus Levinas' commitment to phenomenology as a European science has been questioned; however, anxieties run much deeper than Levinas' thought or phenomenology's influence to fears concerning the use of reason itself and whether or not reason can be freed from the Greek lexicon that has underpinned the European philosophical consciousness. What Enrique Dussel calls the 'underside of modernity' involved the construction of non-rational human beings in direct relation to the European human being raised up from unmindful beginnings by the light of reason.[15] Exposing the material and psychic damage created by the construction of the European self-image is essential to process of decolonisation and motivates the work of postcolonial theory from W.E. B Du Bois to Frantz Fanon and Homi Bhabha. Where reason is positioned and what it means to reason for subjects who were defined by their inability to reason by colonial powers and European philosophy is one of the central questions of contemporary postcolonial and Africana philosophy and failure to account for the impact of European hegemony is not limited to Levinas or to philosophy alone. For Dussel, the conception of modernity as a whole is hopelessly deceptive if it is conceived as a developmental civilising process of European origin.[16] What is pertinent to criticism of European thought in relation to Levinas (beyond a superficial attachment to the European legacy) is how the construction of self and subjectivity is described as an exclusionary logic that creates the desired subjectivity through a confrontation with and exclusion of others. Hence, the question of alterity is brought to the centre of the debate for postcolonial theorists as it is for Levinas. I shall take the question of alterity to be a question of how others become a problem for philosophy and how postcolonial others (the other others) challenge classical phenomenological readings of alterity as the central question of this essay.

[14] Cf. Louis Blond, "Levinas, Europe and Others: The Postcolonial Challenge to Alterity", *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, 48(2) (2016), pp. 260–275.

[15] Enrique Dussel, *The Underside of Modernity: Apel, Ricoeur, Rorty, Taylor, and the Philosophy of Liberation*, ed. Eduardo Mendieta (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1996).

[16] Cf. Dussel, *The Underside of Modernity*, pp. 49–73; Enrique Dussel, "Eurocentrism and Modernity", *boundary 2*, 20(3) (1993), pp. 65–76.

The question of alterity is sustained by the problem it describes and is found connected to a variety philosophical questions such as mind/body dualism, the problem of other minds and the formation of self-consciousness, for example. In Edmund Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations*, the Fifth Meditation addresses other egos in relation to the fear that the transcendental reduction will lapse into solipsism. Other egos are not described as 'synthetic unities of possible verification *in me*' but rather function in relation to the experience of an intersubjective world that exists for everyone, including others. For Husserl, others underwrite a 'transcendental theory of the Objective world'.[17] The experience of an intersubjective world requires the recognition of other *subjects* and not merely other objects; hence, alterity leads to constitutional discoveries that exceed solipsistic divisions. Alterity renders objective experience visible. Conversely, in *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, Husserl describes the paradox of human subjectivity as a phenomenological limit. In the transcendental attitude that reveals the dependency of appearance on the constitutive powers of consciousness, everything experienced is rendered subjective; the world is a phenomenon, a correlate of subjective intention. Subjectivity comprises all experience and appearance. However, how can subjectivity encounter human beings as components of that world and as those responsible for the universal constitution of the world?[18] 'Mankind', and hence world-constitution, appears as a phenomenon to subjectivity; '[t]he subjective part of the world swallows up, so to speak, the world and thus itself too. What an absurdity!'[19] It appears that the methodological reduction that puts existence 'on hold' brackets out the existence of other subjects. The epochē creates a 'unique sort of philosophical solitude' that suspends intersubjective world constitution and renders the individual opaque to itself.[20]

[17] Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorion Cairns (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishing, 1999), pp. 89–92.

[18] Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), p. 179.

[19] Ibid., p. 180.

[20] Ibid., pp. 184–185.

There is no traditional understanding of the 'I' in Husserl's reduction, rather what is disclosed is a 'primal I' in a primordial sphere or horizon that constitutes self and other by way of the 'self-alienation' (*Ent-Fremdung*) of its primal presence.[21] The individual 'I' is the self-objectification of the transcendental 'I', which follows for all human beings. Other human beings remain somewhat enigmatic; they are both subjects and objects of experience. Others are created by the de-presentation of the primal I which is necessary but inaccessible to appearance.

Jean-Paul Sartre describes the problem of the other as follows:

> The philosophy of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries seems to have understood that once myself and the Other are considered as two separate substances, we cannot escape solipsism; any union of these substances must in fact be held to be impossible. That is why the examination of modern theories reveals to us an attempt to seize at the very heart of the consciousness a fundamental, transcending connection with the Other which would be constitutive of each consciousness in its very upsurge. But while this philosophy appears to abandon the postulate of the external negation, it nevertheless preserves its essential consequence; that is, the affirmation that my fundamental connection with the Other is realized through knowledge.[22]

Sartre concludes that in order to refute solipsism, 'my relation to the Other is first and fundamentally a relation of being to being, not of knowledge to knowledge'.[23] Hence the problem of alterity shifts from a question concerning the knowledge of self and other subjects to a question regarding the being of other beings. In Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*, alterity as *Mitsein*, being-with-others, is sunk into the ontological constitution of human being.[24] Dasein is constituted by social relations, relations to the

[21] Ibid., p. 185.

[22] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (London: Methuen, 1958), p. 233.

[23] Ibid., p. 244.

[24] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962) §§25–27, 74.

world and to others. Human Dasein is not reducible to consciousness; it is a being like other beings and hence is already in the world. The essential difference that Dasein nurses is the question of being, that being is a question for beings. Hence, what is the being of beings is also the other's question. When asking identity questions, Dasein cannot answer those questions by rejecting the external world and turning inward towards consciousness. For Heidegger, Dasein's identity is first of all as a being alongside others.[25] In terms of a personal identity, identity is functional and positional; it is arrived at by your concerns, interests and actions. Others are participants in Dasein's concerned world.[26] The 'connectedness' of Dasein with others, its 'unity', is constituted in historical and temporal actions/events: in Dasein's authentic and inauthentic concerns.

Post-structuralist philosophy employs alterity in a number of ways; however, it is frequently raised as an antagonistic or aporetic instrument employed to disturb, leverage or shatter metaphysical or ontological theories that posit foundational notions of self or being. Separation and discontinuity return to the question of alterity as unifying theories are attacked and new theories of difference replace them. Radical alterity, which defends a sharp discontinuity between self and other or between different subjectivities, disputes absolute accounts of metaphysics. Champions of radical alterity, when describing difference, claim to have moved beyond the point of dependence on metaphysical theories of the subject. A paradox restricts the radical edge of such theory. In creating a theory that is sustained by its condemnation of continuity and unity, radical alterity holds itself in relation to the principles it disputes; hence, in what sense is alterity 'radical'? Conversely, if radical difference prevails and reveals non-relational existence or experience between self and other, then in what sense can alterity be called 'other'? Other than what? What meaning does 'difference' convey?

Questions of identity and difference both grasp onto and fragment alterity. How do we approach alterity without making it a privative form of identity? When describing alterity, its relationship with identity is a fundamental matter of concern.

[25] Ibid., §25.

[26] Ibid., §26.

In Levinas' case, it is well documented that his philosophy responds to the violence of twentieth-century Europe.[27] His work attempts to place philosophy on an ethical footing by re-engaging the humanity of the subject in relation to the other human being. Levinas observes within political violence the philosophical preconditions that promote egoism and deny alterity. In the atmosphere of Europe, dominated by Heidegger's fundamental ontology, Levinas speaks of the sterility of ontology in the face a 'good beyond being'.[28] Levinas' account of alterity is employed to not simply contest solipsism but to disrupt the 'totality' of ontology on the basis of 'ethics', which is embedded into his account of alterity. 'Ethics' is described as a pre-original encounter between the primordial subject and the approach of the other human, the Other. The Other opposes traditional conceptions of the transcendental ego and is said to constitute the self's subjectivity and hence the subject's world. What is most 'otherly' in the Other is the face, which gifts the subject with the formation of the 'I', consciousness, discourse and world.

> The other who looks at me is not a phenomenon; a face is invisible, because it cannot be identified as a theme; it is not a noema of an intention . . . The 'epiphany' of a visage cannot become familiar as a piece of my surroundings or as a part of my social context; the other pierces the skin of my world when she or he visits me as an absolute stranger coming from Beyond.[29]

11.3 Without Identity

Levinas opens his essay on identity with an attack on the social sciences of the 1960s. He describes the formalism that had crept into the disciplines that celebrates the destruction of old axioms and death-derived

[27] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority,* trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), pp. 21–30.

[28] Ibid., p. 304.

[29] Peperzak, Adriaan, "From Intentionality To Responsibility", A. B. Dallery and C. E. Scott (eds.), *The Question of the Other* (Albany, NY: S. U. N. Y. Press, 1989), p. 17.

metaphysics. Humanistic ideals are attacked for being blind to the realities of violence and exploitation;[30] and scientific methodology takes priority over the need to demonstrate foundational principles.[31] What concerns Levinas is the shift to a materialist analysis that construes the human being externally as an object, which eliminates the subject 'from the order of reasons'. He laments the disappearance of a philosophy, such as transcendental idealism, that was created to grasp the subject in relation to the world it experiences. He asks if, after the failure of transcendental humanism, there is a place for the transcendental attitude. The identity of the subject is 'ruined by contradictions that tear apart this reasonable world'.[32] However, although past philosophical reflections (specifically Hegel and Marx) could put alienated states to positive use, Levinas suggests that, 'Today's angst is more profound. It comes from seeing revolutions founder under bureaucracy and repression and totalitarian violence passing for revolution.'[33] His experience of 1960s France parallels the anxiety felt in postcolonial societies today; the pathway to disalienation appears to be blocked. There is no glorious reunion of the self with self or self with other. What also concerns Levinas is the convergence of the material and structuralist impulses of the social sciences with the ontological desires of a thinker like Martin Heidegger as both impulses commend post-philosophical, and for Levinas that means post-humanistic, thought. It is not in Levinas' instinct to follow these developments, and instead of attempting to describe the connection with the Other by way of ontology or identity theory that blurs the lines between transcendental and material experience, he attempts to defend the subject while placing it in a distressed relation with the Other where the alienation of identity is fundamental to the constitution of subjectivity.[34]

[30] Emmanuel Levinas, "Without Identity", in Nidra Poller (trans.), *Humanism of the Other* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois), p. 58.

[31] Ibid., p. 59.

[32] Ibid., p. 59.

[33] Ibid., p. 60.

[34] Ibid., pp. 62–65.

> Well, in the approach to others, where others are from the start under my responsibility, 'something' has overflowed my freely made decisions, has slipped into me *unbeknownst to me*, alienating my identity . . . Is it certain that the most humble experience of the one who *puts himself in the other's place*, that is, accuses himself of the other's illness or pain, is not already animated by the most eminent sense in which 'I is another'?[35]

Levinas' method retains elements of transcendental phenomenology; however, he decentres the subject at the very point of constitution undermining an autonomous account of subjectivity.[36] Identity is not equal to itself; it involves external relations that are prior to agency and not reducible to social and political forms of construction. Levinas' account resists a simplistic conflation to all the ills of Western philosophy even as his narrative is far from unproblematic. 'Ethics is the breakup of the originary unity of transcendental apperception, that is, it is the beyond of experience.'[37] And yet as the other precedes my agency, is not the other just another form of social science approaching from an external locale? Is there not a convergence with some of the methodological developments of social science? More simply: what is the other giving me that social science does not?

Levinas gives us an inversion of the relationship between self and other that refuses to reject or appropriate the other on its approach. He makes alienation a positive work in that alienation of the self constitutes the self into its subjectivity. That positivity is understood as an openness to others and to being. Levinas declares that the subject is not 'being' or 'identity' understood as being equal to or coinciding with itself; hence, identity as a claim to be equal to oneself is not Levinas' understanding of the concept. It is rather the disruption of the sameness of identity and of being that he conceives in the phrase, 'the other in me'. In distinction to Heidegger and the social sciences, Levinas claims that human beings are

[35] Ibid., p. 62.

[36] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, pp. 294–298; Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, pp. 5–7, 45ff.

[37] Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence,* trans. Alphonso Lingis. (Dordrecht: Kluwver, 1991), p. 148.

not the object of a science or a herd watched over by a shepherd. There is strangeness and discordance within subjectivity: 'The memory of that gap between the ego and self, the non-coincidence of the identical, is a thorough non-indifference with regard to men.'[38]

11.4 Identity and Postcolonial Alterity

How does Levinas' account of identity and alterity speak to postcolonial theorists?

Simone Drichel has addressed this question by describing alternative accounts of identity and alterity as an encounter between the other and the 'other other', which names a postcolonial alterity that Levinas' phenomenological theory does not pick out.[39] While Levinas develops alterity on the basis of ethical singularity and preontological and ahistorical space, postcolonial alterity is formed on the basis of an excluded group or community which can be ethnic, racial and/or political. In foundational postcolonial theorists, such as Edward Said and Frantz Fanon, otherness is understood as an instrument of control that positions non-Europeans/non-whites in an excluded and subjugated category that does not resemble a philosophical encounter with a sovereign subject and the paradoxical problems that excite that meeting. Alterity, or what Drichel is calling the other other, is an historical, political and psychic exclusion, which leads to the rejection of the binary conception of self and other *in toto*. These insights and experiences necessitate a restructuring of alterity along communal and political lines that challenge the concepts and methods of traditional philosophy, including its phenomenological variants. Drichel notes Levinas' commitment to singularity and the uniqueness of the self-other relation to be a serious obstacle to any dialogue with postcolonial theorists.[40] It is Levinas'

[38] Levinas, "Without Identity", 66.

[39] Simone Drichel, "Face to Face with the Other Other: Levinas versus the Postcolonial", *Levinas Studies*, 7 (2012), pp. 21–42.

[40] Ibid., p. 27.

obsession with the uniqueness and singularity of the other that grounds his rejection of representational forms of the self-other relation. Drichel plays Spivak's account of the two forms of representation against Levinas' rejection of representation to reveal that in rejecting representation as *Darstellung* (portraiture) he also rejects representation as *vertreten* (political proxy) and hence precludes the practice of standing in the place of someone else that founds political representation.[41] Levinas' singular call for responsibility to the singular other does not fit well with the politics of representation. The question becomes, is Levinas' account of alterity valuable or relevant for postcolonial experience?

John Drabinski has located Levinas' errors in his attachment to phenomenology and the European philosophical tradition.[42] The postcolonial critique of Western philosophy and politics now has a long history that is informed by critical theorists such as Léopold Sédar Senghor, Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Gaytri Spivak, Enrique Dussel and Homi Bhabha. Criticism seeks to bring out the historical conditions and metaphysical distinctions that have been employed to delineate and separate phenomena into distinct categories, and rather than describing 'the order of things' critics expose the postcolonial experience as an event of imperial domination supported by the Western philosophical tradition, its language and conceptual frame. Dominion, particularly after Foucault's work, is understood in terms of epistemic regimes that include knowledge and power systems, which in the postcolonial context perpetuate violence against non-European subjects. Categories that were once deemed 'natural' or 'essential' to the being of a thing are said to be culturally and historically constructed and hence relative to a particular context. Drabinski and others have argued that Levinas' thought is closer to some of the toxic ideas that emanate from the Western tradition than he would care to acknowledge. The prejudices that appear in his interviews are, for Drabinski, a product of Levinas' metaphysics. Phenomenology while displaying some variations describes the other as problem for the subject. The other is both subject and object but it approaches from the outside, despite the fact that it shares a world with the

[41] Ibid., pp. 26–28.

[42] Drabinski, *Levinas and the Postcolonial*, p. 3.

subject. However, it is the contradictory ability to both support the Western intellectual heritage in its European context and Levinas' withdrawal from the historical and culturally constituted world into a preontological and ahistorical space that most disturbs Drabinski.[43] Withdrawal into a phenomenological epochē is, for Drabinski, a renouncement of a material conception of alterity which encapsulates Levinas' attitude to colour and race:

> I do not know if one can speak of a 'phenomenology' of the face, since phenomenology describes what appears. So, too, I wonder if one can speak of a look turned toward the face, for the look is knowledge, perception. I think rather that access to the face is straightaway ethical. You turn yourself toward the Other as toward an object when you see a nose, eyes, a forehead, a chin, and you can describe them. The best way of encountering the Other is not even to notice the color of his eyes! When one observes the color of the eyes one is not in social relationship with the Other.[44]

Levinas is making a statement on the priority of the social relation as an immediate ethical relation where the noticing of eyes, nose, forehead, etc., is considered to be an objectification or appropriation of the other. However, for thinkers like Drabinski, Levinas defends a scheme that prioritises the incorporeal over the corporeal and is associated with the metaphysics of European humanism, which understands the essence of humanity to be located in immaterial consciousness and ultimately in rational practice. The ethnic and racial embodiment of the human being is a property of a particularistic irrational subject that is ultimately unfree.

This line of criticism is brought sharply into focus by feminist critique. For Simone de Beauvoir, the subject of universal humanism is a male subject that is marked by its essential difference from the embodied feminine other that lacks the universal transcendent characteristics.[45] As described above, Irigaray extends this critique by suggesting that the feminine gender is

[43] Ibid., pp. 2–13.

[44] Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, trans. Richard A Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985), p. 85.

[45] Cf. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 11.

entirely absent and unrepresented in Levinas' account. The description of universals as extensions of ideological narratives claims that subjectivity stated in neutral language posits (1) non-universal subjects and (2) non-universal others. However, the critique also suffers from blindness. Feminist critique puts the notion of substantive male identity in question before the question of ethnic and racial identity is raised. In works such as Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, the historical and psychic experience of black subjects exposes the universal nature of the humanistic tradition to be seriously flawed. Fanon describes the implicit and explicit racism that relegates black people to a 'zone of non-being'.[46] The fact of blackness describes the configuring of the black body into an object, a product of colonial racism, in which any positive account of alterity is missing: 'My body was given back to me sprawled out, distorted, recolored, clad in mourning in that white day. The Negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is mean.'[47] To what extent is Levinas' account of alterity relevant to identity in the postcolonial context? Can there be a Levinasian account of ethical alterity that speaks to postcolonial others?

Oona Eisenstadt has argued that Levinasian scholarship has already responded to some of these questions, particularly the perceived injustices in Levinas' method.[48] The responses appear to work along two methodological axes that seek to either deny the radical difference between self and other and thereby conflate the phenomenological horizons to empirically charged experience or to retain radical difference but give much greater relevance to empirical versions of alterity. Robert Bernasconi features as an influential thinker who has attempted to think through the limits of Levinas' work, and scholars such as Drabinski, Drichel and Nelson Maldonado-Torres are contemporary examples of how Levinas' thought can be cross-fertilised with postcolonial theory.[49] These thinkers attempt to retain the ineffability of Levinas' ethics but

[46] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markman (London: Pluto Press, 2008), pp. 2–3.

[47] Ibid., p. 86.

[48] Eisenstadt, "Eurocentrism and Colorblindness", pp. 43–62.

[49] Cf. Robert Bernasconi, "The Invisibility of Racial Minorities in the Public Realm of Appearances", in Robert Bernasconi (ed.), *Race* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 284–299; Bernasconi, "Who Is My

supplement or attempt to repair his blindness to historical and cultural alterity. For Bernasconi, Levinas' refusal or inability to see colour and ethnicity exposes an ethnocentrism in addition to the Eurocentrism visible in his texts.[50] In failing to acknowledge the history and cultural context of the other—where he or she is situated—the hospitality that ethical alterity ought to offer the other also fails.[51] Bernasconi hopes to repair the abstract humanism in Levinas by applying his Jewish identity as a cultural particularism, but laments that this too undergoes universalisation in Levinas' thought.[52] Nelson Maldonado-Torres describes how Levinas contributes greatly to identity discourse and the analysis of philosophical violence; however, his formalised approach to ethics and alterity leaves him unable to comment on or apply his thought in a sophisticated manner when approached by concrete examples of violence and discrimination.[53] He finds Levinas incapable of addressing asymmetrical relations in the political arena even as he formulates asymmetrical responsibility between the same and the other in his texts.

Simone Drichel is representative of those who want to stress the relevance of the political in Levinas' account, insisting that the political is present and that it should be possible to oscillate between the singularity of Levinas' ethics and the communal politics that defines postcolonial identity.[54] However, she finds Levinas' reduction of politics and justice to representational forms at best produces a 'reluctant toleration' of representational politics and collective identities.[55] Yet she claims that this 'difficult conversation' between Levinas and postcolonial theory is a conversation worth having in order to benefit from the alternative versions of alterity that each theory provides.[56]

Neighbour?", pp. 5–30; Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "Levinas's Hegemonic Identity Politics, Radical Philosophy, and the Unfinished Project of Decolonization", *Levinas Studies*, 7 (2012), pp. 63–94.

[50] Bernasconi, "Who Is My Neighbour?", p. 17.

[51] Ibid., p. 18.

[52] Ibid., p. 25.

[53] Maldonado-Torres, "Levinas's Hegemonic Identity Politics", pp. 89–91.

[54] Drichel, "Face to Face with the Other Other", p. 39.

[55] Ibid., p. 40.

[56] Ibid., pp. 41–42.

What results from these conversations is that Levinas' commitment to the priority of the pre-original social relation in its uniqueness and singularity marks his understanding of vision and representation as derivative ontological forms. Given this commitment, how can postcolonial theory gain solace from ethical alterity? What conversation is worth having?

11.5 Conclusion

Levinas' work sets out to procure a transcendent metaphysical relation described as alterity or 'ethics' with the intention of securing an ethical voice in opposition to the disorder of politics and history; ethics/morality preserves the right or normative force to criticise and judge culture, politics and history.[57] Levinas' singularity and commitment to some of the central ideas and methods of European philosophy is employed to defend the subject as the one constituted by and responsible for the other. The trans-historical and immutable nature of this claim is attractive to theorists who recognise that the life context given to many millions of people is violently asymmetrical and includes historical and political subjugation that ought not to be the foremost conditions of the life experience; these conditions are not merely unjust but are recognised to be morally and ethically pernicious. Levinas has opened up a narrative in which ethical relations can be thought of as emanating from the primary social relation that one has towards another rather than placing the ethical burden in a deontic rational principle or a virtue ethics marred by hegemonic interests. In later work, particularly *Otherwise than Being*, he attempts to rewrite the transcendent relation in post-metaphysical terms, but remains committed to the basic concepts he sets out in *Totality and Infinity*. That said, the waves of critics that have gathered around Levinas' work have been distressed by his bigotry as well as finding connections between these confessions and his commitment to phenomenology, philosophy, Europe and Judaism. The

[57] Emmanuel Levinas, "Signification and Sense"" [1964] in Nidra Poller (trans.), *Humanism of the Other* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), p. 36.

methodological critique has exposed the binaries and essentialism in his work and sought to demonstrate how those distinctions are the inheritance of a hegemonic system connected to European modernity and classical humanism that claims to speak a universal discourse for all human beings.[58]

Many of these criticisms unsettle or discount Levinas' core philosophy; however, some theorists cited above have engaged with his work and attempted to repair the perceived errors. For example, Drabinski states that 'Levinas's thought is so deeply committed to the idea of Europe that only by breaking him free of that commitment, and exploring the consequences, can we ensure (or begin to ensure) that his work remains relevant into the twenty-first century.'[59] It is Eurocentrism that makes Levinas 'naïvely unworldly' and apt for reconfiguration by placing the other in an historical context.

The commitment to repairing Levinas and working through the implications of non-Eurocentric alterity is ongoing; nonetheless, there are questions to be raised regarding the historicisation of alterity. Asking, what is identity? what is alterity? once more focuses the question on what is going on with the subject, be it ethical, ethnic, gendered and/or racial and cultural.

In terms of identity theory, nothing is very clear. Is identity something we can 'claim' or something society 'constructs', or is it an essential part of our existence?[60] When postcolonial theorists claim that European humanism and Western philosophical systems are hegemonic power structures that discipline non-European subjects, they are claiming that the essentialism and 'truth' of European theory is not simply 'untrue' but is a system that constructs the subject as a universal, incorporeal subject along a *European* axis. As Butler asks in relation to gendered identities, how and where does this construction take place?[61] The postcolonial critique of Levinas associates Levinas with philosophical essentialism in which identity is considered to be an internal feature of a subject such as non-corporeal consciousness, freedom and rational

[58] Drabinski, *Levinas and the Postcolonial*, 7.

[59] Ibid., p. 200.

[60] Cf. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 7.

[61] Ibid., pp. 7–8.

agency, which it then counters with cultural accounts of identity that are historically constructed or appropriated by a subject. As Butler comments, sociological narratives often make use of agency.[62] Postcolonial theories offer a different conceptualisation of fundamental concepts like experience and identity and claim that it is possible to view the world in a different, non-Eurocentric manner that supports the notion of difference along schematic divisions. However, in creating different conceptual or interpretive schemes which can be said to organise experience differently one is assuming that there is a matter on which to impose concepts or historical/cultural narratives. That is, not only is there the potential for retaining the idea of a neutral 'world' or 'subject' or some other passive entity which receives the conceptual framing, but the distinctions between active and passive, sense and concept, etc., remain as a fundamental part of our theory. Butler finds this tendency to be explicit in some feminist theorists' description of the body 'a passive medium on which cultural meanings are ascribed or as the instrument through which an appropriative or interpretative will determines a cultural meaning for itself'.[63] It is either a passive canvas for cultural inscription or the passive instrument in the hands of the active agent. This retention of metaphysical forms occurs along racial categories also, Butler notes:

> The normative ideal of the body as both a 'situation' and an 'instrumentality' is embraced by both Beauvoir with respect to gender and Frantz Fanon with respect to race. Fanon concludes his analysis of colonization through recourse to the body as an instrument of freedom, where freedom is, in Cartesian fashion, equated with a consciousness capable of doubt: 'O my body, make of me always a man who questions!'[64]

Metaphysical assumptions concerning the body as an entity inscribed by history are fundamental to some influential postcolonial accounts of

[62] Ibid., p. 16.

[63] Ibid., p. 8.

[64] Ibid., p. 12n20.

alterity and yet not recognised as problematic reconstructions of metaphysical categories.[65] This implies that postcolonial discourse also requires deconstruction or decolonisation. Much of our theory is based on a variety of traditions and inheritances and although many of Levinas' ideas and concepts draw on Greek and Jewish sources and require reformulation, Levinas retains a deep belief in the social relation as an ethical relation that precedes agency and interprets passivity not as a neutral term or neutral entity but as something that is already interpreted or tasked with responsiveness outside of personal agency or self-interest. That version of alterity has been put under question by the contemporary debate and requires more inquiry and principled response to ascertain the applicability of this theory for the historically and culturally engaged theorist. The debate has been widened by way of a materialist critique; historical experience is said to be consistent with the natural experience of the subject, and yet the broadening movement also works to close down phenomenological alterity while relying on alterity to access questions of justice, suffering and difference. It is questionable whether setting up an opposition between phenomenology as 'old world metaphysics' and materialism in the form of historical and cultural difference liberates us from either metaphysical categories or the problem of hegemony and prejudicial normativity. The relationship between transcendental and material experience can indeed be inverted whereby phenomenological alterity no longer discloses the conditions of experience or the site of ethical responsibility but rather evinces common or garden hegemony and racial prejudice, which it subsequently perfects as a transcendental command. However, a conversation worth having is how, under a materialist interpretation of the norms of experience, are we to understand and to overcome the legacy of racism and gendered exclusion? Can phenomenological questions can be shut down and materialism be left to explain the formation of the subject/intersubjectivity, while simultaneously recognising the need to transcend the very history that codifies racial identity?

[65] Cf. Drabinski, *Levinas and the Postcolonial,* pp. 37–48, 200. Drabinski inherits his account from Maurice Merleau-Ponty and describes the new inscriptions on the body as 'incarnate historiography' where incarnate traditionally would be describing the mind or the word made flesh.

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Index

A

Actor-Network-Theory, 147
Africanness, 235–255
African Renaissance, 240–243, 248, 253, 255
Agency, 16, 89, 105–112, 114, 115, 118, 120–126, 158, 160–161, 166, 168, 171, 227, 270, 278, 279
Agent(s), 124–126, 138, 158, 159, 169, 171, 172, 212, 227, 278
Alterity, 222–224, 226, 227, 229, 259–279
Anatta, 7
Animal, 105–108, 110, 113, 114, 117–124, 131, 132, 246, 274
Anti-realist, 55
Apartheid, 237, 239, 240, 245–248, 252, 254
Aquinas, Thomas, 8
Aristotle, 131, 132, 166
Authentic (and 'authenticity'), 89–100, 102–104, 125–126, 160, 171, 185, 187, 189, 197, 249, 251, 267
Autonomy (and 'autonomous'), 20–21, 109, 118, 123–125, 155–156, 160, 161, 166–173, 188, 189
Ayer, A. J., 4, 9–10

B

Beauvoir, Simone de, 179, 189, 190, 192, 194–196, 216, 273, 278
Biko, Steve, 249, 252
Black Consciousness Movement, 242
Blackness, 236, 274

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DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-40427-1

C
Cogito, 8, 81, 161
Cogito ergo sum, 8
Cognition, 5–6, 11, 146
Constitutionalism, 13

D
Dasein, 15, 29, 140, 266–267
Deleuze, Gilles, 129, 142–143, 146
Derrida, Jacques, 102, 136, 157, 221, 222
Différance, 157, 221, 222
Difference, 21, 41, 50, 67, 68, 89–104, 117, 122–124, 129, 139, 142, 143, 145, 146, 156, 157, 162, 181, 190, 201–230, 247, 259–279
Dualism, 265

E
Ego, 7, 8, 11, 12, 14, 15, 18–21, 23, 24–25, 65, 90, 98–102, 109, 114, 116, 117, 119, 157, 165, 170, 178, 265, 268, 271
Egocentric, 50, 114, 116, 117, 119
Eliminative materialism, 4, 13, 144, 145
Embodied, 4, 5–6, 14, 17, 18, 73, 137, 144–146, 160, 165, 181, 186, 189, 191, 195, 196–197, 206, 220, 273
Engels, Friedrich, 145

F
Fanon, Franz, 228, 249, 251, 264, 271, 272, 274, 278
Feminism (and 'feminist'), 155–160, 167, 177, 180, 193, 195, 198, 202, 203, 205–230, 259–261, 273–274, 278
Formalism, 20, 122, 268
Free will, 4, 8
Freud, Sigmund, 58, 65–67, 69, 83, 141, 158, 212, 222

G
Gadamer, Hans-Georg, 6, 13

H
Hegel, G. W. F., 17, 204, 269
Heidegger, Martin, 11, 14–16, 21, 22, 28, 83, 85, 140, 147, 222, 228, 266–270
Hobbes, Thomas, 95, 131, 132
Hume, David, 9–11, 15, 100, 142
Husserl, Edmund, 12–28, 265–266

I
Id, 65
Identification, phenomenon of, 90, 100, 102, 103, 109, 116, 119, 125, 126
Identity, 4, 6, 8–10, 17, 26, 37–41, 47–53, 74, 75, 82–84, 89–104, 108–110, 157–166, 168, 171, 191, 235, 239–251, 255, 259–279
See also Personal identity

Identity politics, 156, 157, 160, 173, 263, 274, 275
Inauthenticity (inauthentic), 90, 100, 267
Intelligibility drive, 111
Intentionality, 22, 42, 192, 194, 195

K
Kant, Immanuel, 10–12, 20, 29, 122, 123

L
Levinas, Emmanuel, 137, 222–225, 228, 259–279
Liberalism, 129–148
Locke, John, 4, 8, 9, 37
Logical positivism, 4

M
Marxism, 262
Marx, Karl, 136, 145, 269
Metacognition, 114–116
Metarepresentation, 6
Mimesis, 161, 163, 209

N
Narrative, 6, 13, 27–29, 37–58, 61, 111, 112, 114, 116, 118, 119, 126, 155, 156, 161–170, 172, 173, 229, 260, 270, 276
Narrative identity, 47, 50, 161–166, 168
Narrativity, 28, 38, 39, 44, 46, 50–51, 53, 54, 110–112, 114, 126
Non-self-identity, 74, 75, 83

P
Permissive theory of agency, 122–126
Person(s), 3–17, 19–29, 37, 58, 64–66, 79, 100, 106, 112–114, 116, 117, 119–120, 125, 131–134, 138, 139, 144, 145, 147, 148, 163, 164, 172, 173, 182, 184, 191, 229, 237, 240, 248, 251
Personal identity, 4, 6, 9, 37–41, 47–52, 61, 89, 97, 102, 158, 163, 267
Personality, 10, 11, 23–26
Personhood, 4–6, 8, 13, 14, 16, 19, 20, 22, 24, 26, 29, 51, 133, 134
Phallocentric logic, 202–204, 207, 208, 210, 212, 215, 218, 219, 221, 228
Phenomenological tradition, 3–29
Phenomenology, 3–29, 69, 72, 79, 83, 85, 161, 180, 182–184, 192, 223, 262, 264–266, 270–274, 276
Plato, 7, 131, 179, 228, 229
Political anthropology, 129–148
Post-Apartheid, 238–240, 245, 247
Postcolonial, 203, 205, 209, 216–220, 227, 228, 236, 244, 248, 253, 259–264, 269, 271–279
Post-structuralist, 155, 158–161, 166, 259–260, 267
Practical identity, 107, 108–110, 113, 116, 118, 122, 125, 126

R
Race, 7, 8, 15, 140, 156, 194, 195, 215, 222, 226, 240, 249, 250, 262, 273, 274, 278

Racial, 235–237, 240, 243, 245, 249, 251–253, 259–279
Racism, 238, 249, 252, 263, 274
Rape, 169, 177–198
Realism, 55, 92
Reflective endorsement, 105–126
Res cogitans, 8
Ricoeur, Paul, 13, 27, 44, 50, 56, 155, 161–164, 167–170, 172, 264

S
Sartre, Jean-Paul, 28, 63–85
Self-awareness, 4, 6, 19, 112, 114, 116, 118–120
Self-deception, 63–85
Self-governance, 106–109, 112, 114, 122–124
Selfhood, 4, 6, 13, 16, 28, 64, 65, 79, 84, 89–95, 98, 100, 102–104, 107, 108, 111, 114, 116–118, 163, 165
Selfhood thesis, two levels of, 107, 111, 114, 116, 117
Self-knowledge, 7, 18, 54, 90, 93, 94, 99, 103, 111
Self-narrative, 107, 114
Self-representation, 12, 112, 114, 116–120
Sexual violence, 177–180, 189–193
Sexuate difference, 201–230
Slavery, 182–188, 250
Social narrativity, 51
Social science, 268–270
Space, 13, 25, 82, 102, 165, 183, 186, 204, 206, 215, 217, 218, 220, 226, 227, 237, 254, 271, 273
See also Space and time
Space and time, 13, 226
See also Space; Time
Spinoza, Benedict de, 131, 143
Structuralist, 39, 155, 158–161, 166, 187, 206, 227, 237, 259, 260, 269
Subjectivity, 5, 107, 112, 114, 142, 158, 159–160, 163, 182, 184, 185, 188–197, 201–207, 209–211, 213, 215, 218, 221, 224–226, 260–262, 264, 265, 268–271

T
Time, 6, 9, 11, 13, 15, 22, 26, 27, 48, 53, 63, 65, 70–71, 75, 83, 94, 99, 121, 122, 134, 135, 140, 159, 161, 162–163, 165, 167, 171–173, 178–182, 191, 195, 203, 211, 225, 226, 235, 242
Torture, 182–188, 196, 250
Trauma, 169

V
Violence, 103, 138, 159, 177–180, 182–185, 188–194, 196–198, 203, 219, 220, 228, 230, 268, 269, 272, 275
see also Sexual violence

W
Whiteness, 235, 237, 240, 241, 253, 254