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My-Self as My-Other, or How to Become a Self Worth Becoming

by

Edvard Lorkovic

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of *Doctor of Philosophy*

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled **My-Self as My-Other, or How to Become a Self Worth Becoming** submitted by **Edvard Lorkovic** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy**.

Dr. Robert Burch

Dr. Robert B. Gibbs,
University of Toronto

September 29 2003

To my Others (you *know* who you are ... better than I do)

ABSTRACT

This thesis project presents a phenomenology of the self that, in addition to providing an account of what the self is, suggests some ethical ramifications of being a self. As such, the project has two dimensions: an ontology of selfhood and an ethics of being a self. It begins with a justification of the language of selfhood. This is accomplished in two stages. First, it is suggested that all human beings have a sense of their own agency, which I call a sense of self. This sense of self includes four features: self-possession, narrativity, moral situatedness and relations to other like beings. Second, it is shown that the sense of self does not lie exclusively in a sense of *the* self as an inwardly located substance but in a historically located language of self-description. The modern sense of self, however, is articulated in terms of a language of "*the* self" as a substantive locus. Following Charles Taylor's account of the sources of modern selfhood from *Sources of the Self*, the project suggests that the modern language of selfhood, which is the language we have immediately at our disposal in an inquiry of this sort, implies that the self is an inwardly located, self-responsible, particular and committed self. Next, the project demonstrates the inadequacy of this version of the self. I demonstrate that the modern self's self-responsible individuality, particularity and committedness, can be understood better and more consistently if we eliminate the substantive assumption that the self is a thing located inside, and replace this with a relational version of the self as a self-choosing synthesis. The final step in the ontology of selfhood is to determine the sense in which self-making is situated and as such is made possible by others. Invoking Levinas, I argue that self-making occurs by an intrusion of the other person, that the other person comes first (metaphysically)

and so is the source of the self: the self comes to be a self in face of the other person. However, in showing this I add, through a brief consideration of Jean-Luc Nancy's account of the singular plural, that this implies that I am not only related to my others; rather, there is a sense in which *I am my others*: my-self is my-others. Finally, I undertake to provide a brief intimation of the ethical consequences of this version of the self. If the self is its others, then we must reconsider ethics. Three proposals are made. First, it is suggested that ethical questions must change. Instead of evaluating ethical behaviour alone or ethical being alone, we must consider ethical being as a doing; we must ask whether the self has come to be a self worth becoming. Second, we must direct ethics to the other person. I cannot determine my success as a self by rationally examining myself alone. I must direct my inquiry to the other who I am. Third, the usual tropes of ethics must be pushed aside. Rather than concerning ourselves with themes like virtue, duty and utility, we should begin to examine the themes of responsibility and love, because it is in responsibility and love that the self is constituted.

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Kalen Anderson, my life and my love, without whom this thesis would be unintelligible to me.

And, as always, the catholic work ethic and the spirit of socialism.

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INTRODUCTION

The fact remains, however, that the primary meaning of discourse is to be found in that text of experience which it is trying to communicate.
-Maurice Merleau-Ponty

What is a self? Although the following research seeks to answer some form of this question, framed in this specific way it is perhaps the wrong question with which to begin an examination of who and what I am. This is so because it would seem to presuppose that my sense of who and what I am must be articulated in terms of a conception of "*the* self." In this way, by reducing questions like "who am I?", "who are you?" and "what is a human being essentially?" to the singular question, "what is a self?" I set myself the problem of accounting for the self as such. Yet, in spite of this seeming implication of the initial question, it is not clear that "a *self*" is the only, or even the most plausible, way to speak about my identity and my sense of who and what I am. It is not, in other words, self-evident – evident to me – that I am *a* self, even if it is evident that I am myself.

As such, in order to formulate properly and then to answer the question posed at the outset – which is the central question of this project – I have to establish first that the notion of "the self" is worth explicating, rather than simply presupposing its salience as an answer to the question, "who and what am I?", or as the concept to which we should appeal in a discussion of human being, agency or personhood. It is my contention that the notion of "the self" does not, in the contemporary context, constitute a completely adequate account of human agency and sense of self.[1] Nonetheless, I argue that the language of *self*hood is the language we have at our immediate disposal for making sense of who and what we are in so far as we are heirs

to a tradition that has employed, developed and defended this particular language, which in turn has come to inform the actual effective sense we have, *here and now*, of who and what we are. Who and what I am here and now *is* "a self," but not because this is what I am in virtue of human nature or a universal human essence. Rather, I *am* a self in a relation of mutual dependence with the context of meanings that I have at my disposal for providing a meaningful account of myself. Consequently, and given our particular historical situatedness, the question "what is a self?" is to begin with the appropriate question to ask, even if in the asking and answering, the question itself and hence my own sense of self are transformed.

This thesis project is intended as a phenomenology of the self, from which some ethical ramifications of being a self are adduced. As such, it has both an ontological and an ethical dimension. However, the apparent priority of ontology over ethics implied by this phenomenological approach will have to be re-interpreted by the end of the thesis in the light of what the phenomenology itself shows about the ethical constitution of self-being. As we will see, ethics is not extracted from ontology. Rather, ontology is already ethical in nature. Nonetheless, the thesis begins with a justification of the language of selfhood, wherein I demonstrate that considering the question of "the self", properly construed, can be philosophically and ethically fruitful. This is accomplished in two stages. In the first chapter, I examine some general features of a human being's self-being. I argue that all humans who live meaningfully have, what I call, a sense of self, a sense of their own agency in the world. However, the sense of self is not necessarily a sense of oneself as "*a* self" or inner substance, and so not in all cases or all times is it a sense of *the* self as a self-

"thing" or "entity". In this part, I focus on four formal aspects of the sense of self: self-possession, narrativity, moral situatedness and the necessary presence of other like beings. I show that "having a sense of self", which is essential to full and well functioning human being, entails that persons can locate certain experiences as their own, can tell a story about who they are, can have a meaningful sense of their agency as it is placed in a moral context and in relation to goals and goods, and are always situated among other like beings (other self-possessive, narrative and moral agents). Any being who does not meet these requirements cannot have a full sense of self, whether the being is ostensibly human or not.[2]

In the second chapter, I examine the historical dimension of the modern sense of self. With the help of Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self*, I examine the historical roots of the language of selfhood, distinguishing it both from pre-modern talk of personhood and physiological/materialist talk of agency. As Taylor shows, the modern sense of self is articulated in terms of "*the* self" as a substantive locus. Following Taylor's account, I suggest that the modern language of selfhood, which is the language we have at the present time most immediately at our disposal, since it is the language in which first and foremost we talk about ourselves, implies that the self is an inwardly located, self-responsible, particular and committed self. However, I show that "*the* self " that is defined in this talk is not something that persists at all times. Rather, we have inherited this language from our historical tradition and thus our own modern sense of self is informed *and formed* by this concept.

The next step in the project is to demonstrate the inadequacy of this version of the self. While this is the language we have most immediately at our disposal, it is

important to appropriate from it the most consistent version we can of a language of self-description. As such, my project is neither a defense of the self per se nor an attempt at a radical transformation of the language of selfhood. Rather, it reconsiders and reforms the language of selfhood at work in the modern context in order to refine the modern version of selfhood, rendering it more consistent and, if possible, more ethically responsible. In the hope of doing this, I demonstrate, in the third chapter, that the modern self's self-responsible individuality, particularity and committedness can be understood more consistently if we eliminate the substantive assumption that the self is a thing located inside us as the given basis of who and what we are, and replace this with talk of a relational version of the self as a self-positing, or more precisely, as a self-choosing synthesis. Beginning with Fichte, I sketch the doctrine of the self as self-positing, and then with a view to Kierkegaard and existential philosophy generally, I show that the more consistent version of this sense of self is as a situated self-choosing.

The final step in the phenomenology of selfhood is to determine more precisely the sense in which self-making is situated and, as such, is made possible by others. Invoking Levinas, I argue, in the fourth chapter, that self-making occurs by an intrusion of the other person, that the other person comes first (metaphysically) and so is the source of the self: the self comes to be a self in face of the other person, and, more specifically, in and through the face to face with an other person. However, showing this I add, through a brief consideration of Jean-Luc Nancy's account of the singular plural, that this implies that I am not only related to and situated by my

others. Rather, there is an important sense in which *I am my others*; my-self *is* my-others.

In the final chapter, I undertake to provide a brief intimation of the ethical consequences of this version of the self. If the self is its others, then we must reconsider ethics. Three proposals are made. First, I suggest that ethical questions must change. Instead of evaluating ethical behaviour and ethical *doings* or simply ethical *being*, we must consider and evaluate ethical *being as a doing* and ethical *doing as a being*; we must ask whether the self is being a self adequately as a mode of self-doing, not only whether the self acts appropriately or is ethical. Second, we must direct ethics to the other person. I cannot determine my success as a self by rationally examining myself alone. Because I am my other, who nonetheless remains separate and other, I must direct my inquiry to the other who I am. In order to determine whether or not I am *being* adequately, I must ask those others who I am. Third, the usual tropes of ethics must be pushed aside. Rather than concerning ourselves with themes like virtue, duty and utility, we should begin to examine the themes of responsibility and love, because it is in responsibility and love that the self is constituted. This is not to say that the former themes ought to be supplanted entirely. Rather, any consideration of virtue, duty or utility should take place as a consideration of the more original ethical concerns of responsibility and love.

On Method: Why Phenomenology?

Before beginning my actual analyses, I need to say something about the method I adopt in this project. Broadly speaking, the project is a phenomenology of selfhood: it is an attempt to describe the experience of being a self and what it means to live in the world as a self. I provide an account of the 'logic' (*logos*) of this experience, with attention to the ethical ramifications of this logic. In effect, I am seeking to provide an account of the *essence* of selfhood. However, whereas phenomenology seeks the essences of experience and presents itself as transcendental philosophy, it must be noted that the essences sought in the phenomenological tradition in general are essences *as they are lived.* The experience phenomenologists are concerned with is not formal or theoretical; it is not the abstracted experience of some Cartesian ego or pure transcendental subject. Rather, the experiences, the essences of which phenomenology seeks to uncover, are lived-experiences, experiences as they occur in the concrete, in the actual and situated historical world of the everyday. Merleau-Ponty has put this nicely in the preface to the *Phenomenology of Perception* where he writes:

> Phenomenology is the study of essences; and according to it, all problems amount to finding definitions of essences: the essence of perception, or the essence of consciousness, [perhaps the essence of selfhood?] for example. But phenomenology is also a philosophy which puts essences back into existence, and does not expect to arrive at an understanding of man and the

> world from any starting point other than that of their 'facticity'. It is a transcendental philosophy which places in abeyance the assertions arising out of the natural attitude, the better to understand them; but it is also a philosophy for which *the world is always 'already there'* before reflection begins ... it also offers an account of space, time and the world *as we 'live' them. It tries to give a direct description of our experience as it is* (Merleau-Ponty 1962, vii; my insertion, emphasis added).

The essences phenomenology tries to uncover are thus not essences in the traditional sense. The phenomenologist does not look for the *whatness* of something independently of actual manifestations of that thing. In other words, these essences are not eternal and perfect universals that make possible the presence of imperfect particular instances. Rather, the essence the phenomenologist is after is what something is in the situation in which we find it; phenomenology attempts to describe 'whatever appears *in the manner in which it appears*' (Moran 2000, 4; emphasis added). For example, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, the essence of a rose must first be understood verbally as its concrete "being-rose" in the world of perception or lived-experience, and hence not as an general idea of a kind or species of thing that we abstract from experience. Essence in this sense is the immediate concrete meaningful presence of the rose, its actually being a rose in a situation for someone. Understood in these concrete temporal terms, the essence of the rose is 'la roséité s'étendant tout à travers la rose [the roseness that extends itself throughout the rose]' in its meaningful presence for us (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 228). As such, its essence cannot be

determined independently of its actually being-rose in the situation in which it is appears for us as a rose. This suggests the root sense of the phenomenological approach as transcendental philosophy, that is, it considers the essences of things not in terms of abstract ideas of things in themselves but in terms of how things come meaningfully to be for us in the first place in our concrete historical situated experience.

In the light of this brief description, what the present project seeks to accomplish as a phenomenology of selfhood is to display the essence of selfhood *as it is lived*, to show what the concrete and lived experience of being a self is. To show this, however, makes a turn to history unavoidable. For the essence of the self *is* its being-self, and its being-self *is* historical. This approach should not be confused, then, with an 'explanation' of selfhood. I am not seeking to show *why* humans are or have selves, *why* humans appeal to the language of selfhood or *why* selfhood manifests itself in the particular way it does. It must be stressed that any phenomenological account is always *descriptive/interpretive* and not *explanatory* (see, e.g., Merleau-Ponty 1962, viii; Rauch and Sherman 1999, 55). However, such description/interpretation has 'the "*a priori*" as its theme, rather than "empirical facts" as such' (Heidegger, 1996, 210). It does not iterate the properties of some phenomenon, but seeks to account for the possibility of that phenomenon and its apparent properties as such, to lay out its *a priori* structure through a description/interpretation of the phenomenon as it is meaningfully present in the world in and for lived-experience. We must note, however, that this *a priori* is always a factical, historical *a priori*, an *a priori* that is embedded in and interrelated with the

a posteriori; in short, it is the necessity of the worldly. Again, Merleau-Ponty puts it well. It is:

> [T]he formal expression of a fundamental contingency: the fact that we are in the world – the diversity of the senses, which was regarded as given *a posteriori*, including the concrete form that it assumes in the human subject, appears as necessary to this world, to the only world which we can think of consequentially; it therefore becomes an *a priori* truth (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 221).

The reason for adopting this method rather than some other philosophical or scientific method is that an account of the essence of the self cannot be rendered independently of the experience of selfhood. Any such account invariably presupposes the self who provides the account. I cannot stand outside my own experience as a self in order to say what the self *really* and *truly* is. Nor is there even a meaningful sense of the 'really' and 'truly' in this regard outside my historical self-experience. I always only stand in the world as that which I am: a self. As such, an account of the self that is foreign to the terms of the experience itself will inevitably miss something important about the self, namely, the experience of selfhood. In order to provide an account of the essence (verbal) of selfhood as it is lived, we can only look at the experience that is lived in the world, in the particular historical situation and context of meanings in which that experience occurs. This means that if we want to provide an account of the self that seeks to lay out its structure and essence, as I do

here, we will need to adopt some form of phenomenology in order to describe it adequately.

However, by looking at the experience of selfhood, we discover that neither this experience nor its terms are universal. The self occurs in an historical situation, in the *here and now* of the present as it has come to be out of the trajectory of a particular history. As such, it is important to provide a sketch of that historical trajectory, the better to understand the current experience of selfhood. Standing *here and now* implies that we stand in a particular context of meanings to which we appeal in order to understand who and what we are. Adopting an historical approach to the description/interpretation of the self, I show in the first two chapters that the experience of being "*a* self" is a particularly modern one.

Charles Taylor has taken a similar approach in *Sources of the Self.* Taylor begins with precise criteria for meaningful human agency, and follows this with historical analyses meant to both show the contingency of our particular sense of agency and locate the (historical) sources of *our* moral stance. The role these sources play is important for Taylor, and serves as a guiding intuition for this research. The idea is that, by looking at canonic figures in an historical tradition, we can understand the most important features of the self-understandings of that historical tradition. Whereas these sources may disagree on some important issues, the interpreter of even a selection of these sources can uncover something essential about the tradition in question. By looking at canonic texts in *Sources of the Self*, Taylor shows that, however general certain aspects of human agency may be, they take up different content as they develop historically. For instance, while all human agents are self-

interpreting, moral and dialogical[3], not all human agents conceive of themselves as being or having *a self* as an inwardly located and essential substance. Implicit in Taylor's approach is the view that, by paying close attention to the contemporary experience of being who and what we are as historically located and informed persons, we can both uncover the formal structures of agency and describe in detail the conceptual features of a particular and situated version of agency. We can do this by providing what is, in effect, a phenomenological description/interpretation of the historically located phenomenon of selfhood. Building on Taylor's work rather than simply starting from scratch, I attempt to fulfill this task in the first two chapters of this project.

The goal of this approach is to retrieve and refine the tradition of self-talk in which we presently find ourselves and the sense of self we have and will adopt from it. This retrieval is a work of appropriation, taking over possibilities from the tradition in which we find ourselves in order to refine that tradition and forge new ways of talking and being. The point is to *articulate* anew who we are (our selves) from where we find ourselves, rather than preserving unreflectively old ways of talking and being that may be inconsistent and have proven dangerous or inventing a completely different and unrooted way of being. Doing so assumes that there is no essential dichotomy between self-talk and self-being, that the way we talk about ourselves forms the way we are and that the way we are forms the way we talk about ourselves. Such work is not senselessly intellectual, but deeply moral. As Taylor puts it: 'articulacy here has a moral point, not just in correcting what may be wrong views but also in making the force of an ideal that people are already living by more

palpable, more vivid for them; and by making it more vivid, empowering them to live up to it in a fuller and more integral fashion' (Taylor 1991, 22). Furthermore, retrieval, refinement and articulation need not be thought of as conservative, since the point is not to conserve the present sense of self or defend current ethical and political institutions, but to make more clear the strengths and/or weaknesses of the tradition within which we are engaged ethically, appropriating creatively from that tradition possibilities for a more coherent and responsible way of talking and being.

In this sense, the phenomenological method I adopt itself changes as the account of the self I propose comes to diverge somewhat from the account of the self I describe/interpret. By uncovering the implied logos of the experience of self-being we can (and if we do so effectively, we *should*) do more than simply describe/interpret. We can notice what it is about the logos that is inconsistent, what it is about the logos that is not sufficiently articulate and what it is about the logos that has been forgotten. What the phenomenology allows us to do, therefore, is more than simply describe or interpret. It allows us to transform the experience, refining it on the basis of its own terms, which means, of course, that we can refine and transform only on the basis of the description/interpretation.

I admit that there is a great deal of hope inherent in this attempt, the hope that the tradition is at the end of the day a source of more good than bad. In any case, coming to terms with that tradition enables us to come to terms with who we "really" are here and now and to make that more articulate. This is precisely what my project hopes to accomplish: I hope to locate the meaning of our traditional sense of self in

order to propose a more consistent and ethically more compelling way of relating to others and to myself.

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[1] This is different than saying that the notion of the self is not "true" in the sense of not corresponding to an assumed 'reality in itself' that an account of the self is supposed to get right.

[2] The implication of this claim is that a biologically defined human being may not have a sense of self, while a being that is not human might, in principle, have a sense of self. Human being is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition of having a sense of self. It just so happens that human beings who happen to get along meaningfully in the world have a sense of self.

[3] For an overview of Taylor's position, see Abbey 2000, pp. 55-100.

1

THE SENSE OF SELF: THE ONTOLOGICAL DIMENSION OF HUMAN AGENCY

'I can't explain myself, *I'm afraid, Sir,' said Alice, 'because I'm not myself, you see.'*
-Lewis Carroll

In this chapter I lay out four formal features of what I call the "sense of self", the sense humans have of their own agency. Whereas there is a sense in which this fourfold structure comes last in a phenomenology of selfhood, since it is from the description/interpretation of the historical roots of selfhood and the further elaboration of the self that follows in later chapters that we can extract these features, for expository reasons I begin with these features themselves, and then proceed to the description/interpretation. This allows me to show directly that the contingency of the modern self that I explore in the next chapter does not preclude other meaningful and plausible interpretations of agency (as I undertake in the second chapter) or a critical reconsideration of the modern self (as I undertake in the third chapter). What is more, it is my contention that any reader of this chapter will, by attending to her own phenomenological intuitions, be able to understand and recognize that these features are essential to her own sense of who she is. In other words, the plausibility of the present description lies in its familiarity with respect to the actual lived experience of possible readers.

The Sense of Self

Galen Strawson has claimed that 'there is undoubtedly such a thing as the *sense* of the self, even if there is no such thing as the self. I believe that we have to analyse the sense of the self before we can take on the question whether the self exists' (Strawson 1999, 127). I agree with Strawson that we must begin with an analysis of the sense of self (as I do in this chapter) before we can determine whether and in what sense *the* self exists. However, even though Strawson admits that a self *may* not exist, I believe he makes a mistake by implying that the *sense* human beings have of their own agency is 'undoubtedly' and so necessarily a sense of *the* self. As I will show in the next chapter, the sense one has of one's personhood is not in all cases a sense of *the* self as an inwardly located mental substance in the sense of something *about* which we think and *to* which our thoughts of self seemingly point. A sense of *the* self is just one variant of the sense humans have of their own agency, that is to say, a particular way people talk about their sense of self, and not the only way to conceive of the sense of self as agency. Indeed, the view that the self is some*thing* that can be located "within" and is the essence of the human being is a particularly modern presumption. Instead, I will begin by borrowing the intuition that all well-functioning humans have a sense of self[1] as a sense of their agency or personhood. It is this sense that Karl Jaspers, for instance, gestures towards when he refers to *Existenz* (the human way of being in the world) as 'not of this world' and so not objectively determinable. Because *Existenz* is not an object in the world it cannot be

conceptually grasped or empirically determined as objects are, but can only be elucidated from out of its own way of being (Jaspers in Solomon 1974, 135).

In the rest of this chapter I describe four dimensions of this sense of self: self-possession, narrativity, moral situatedness and relatedness with others.

The Dimensions of Agency: A. Self-possession

A sense of self begins with an agent's sense that she occupies a privileged experiential perspective. This aspect of the *sense* of self matches up with the *senses* of the human being. Humans have a sense of self because each person is a locus of sense perceptions that are her own; she experiences her life as her own and can refer to her experiences as her own. There is a *sense* in which the agent owns or possesses her experiences, which are provided to her by her *senses*. For example, the sensations I feel as I type these words on my computer are mine, they belong to me, not another. Although others can observe what it is I am doing and understand the actions they see and even imagine what the feeling would be like, this particular act of typing is not theirs, they cannot feel the keys as I do and at the precise instant I do. While not reducible to sense experience and to the possession of those experiences, the sense of self includes this sense experiential perspective. Any being who is not situated in the world as the locus of sense experience cannot have a sense of self, let alone a sense of themselves as *a* self.

This sense of privileged perspective entails both a spatial and a temporal dimension. An agent with a sense of self is an agent who is located spatially in such a

way that only she can occupy that space, and so, only she can witness the world from her perspective. The space she fills up and the experiences that are hers are something that belong to her only. In addition, the agent has a sense of her agency through time. She both has a sense of the passing of time and an awareness that it is she, the agent (the same, self-identical, agent), who passes. As we will see, this latter aspect ties in with the second dimension of the sense of self, narrativity, although the sense of self in narrativity is more complicated than the mere sense of self as persisting through time. In terms of self-possession, the important point to notice is that agents who have a sense that they are somehow in possession of certain experiences are in possession of those experiences through time, and at all times (at least at all the times when they are aware of themselves as agents). The person who has somehow lost the sense of possession of her experience has in some important way lost a sense of who she is, or has lost an important part of her sense of self, which, importantly, leads to a weakening or even a total loss of the sense of self.

The case of an Alzheimer's patient is a good one here. The Alzheimer's patient does not merely suffer from an inability to remember or to form new memories; he suffers from a loss or weakening of the sense of self. For example, a particular patient I had once worked with would wander the halls of the nursing home pleading – yelling! – for help. When asked what kind of help he needed, he was very clear that he needed help finding his way because he was lost. How could he be lost in the nursing home where he had been living for years? Due to his illness, the patient could not recognize his environment, however "familiar" it was. The walls and doors he passed by, perhaps even the outfit he wore, were unrecognizable to him.

He was, in effect, disoriented. However, his panic cannot be accounted for by this kind of disorientation. Rather, in addition to being disoriented, the man was detached from his experiences and their continuity, which means that he could not notice his own locatedness in the world, either spatially or temporally; his experiences were in some important sense not his. The walls and doors he saw were not just strange or different; they were no longer meaningful to him because he could not make sense of them *as part of his experience*. It is not insignificant to note that this particular patient also often forgot his own name, further suggesting that his sense of being a self was weakened by his condition, to the point where he would at times, literally, loose himself (his sense of self).

This aspect of the sense of self is both the source and solution to the problem of self-identity. It is because the agent, *qua* agent, is always already self-identical, not because of some constant empirical properties but because of her locatedness in space and time as an agent, and has a sense of her continuity in space and time that she can have doubts about her own continuity and identity when faced with challenges to that identity through radical change (to her empirical properties). Because she passes through time and undergoes changes, the agent may find herself unable to account for the continuity of her experience and so have a tenuous sense of who she is at a particular place and time, or who she was before. This is the problem of Lewis Carroll's Alice, who cannot meet the Caterpillar's demand to account for herself. Because she has changed physically many times during the day, she finds it difficult to account for her continuity, thus failing to answer the seemingly simple question, 'who are *you*?' (see Carroll 1971, 40ff). Nonetheless, the trouble in

accounting for change shows merely a difficulty in articulating that continuity, not a lack of continuity altogether. Alice, unable to really say who she is, remains Alice, the person who has undergone the various changes and is at least capable of saying that she has undergone these changes, which have *here and now* made it so difficult for her to answer the Caterpillar's question. Alice faces a problem of self-identity precisely because she is already self-identical, and she is already self-identical not because she has properties that persist through time and space but because her very experience involves the temporal and spatial *self*-constitution of her self-identity. While the temporal flow the agent experiences and the possible changes brought about by the flow can make self-articulation difficult, the flow is experienced by the agent as her flowing, and so signals the agent's continuity in spite of itself. The problem of self-identity is solved when the agent passing through time recognizes both her own passing and herself as the locus of the flow of experience. The agent is temporal and spatial; thus the seeming problem of identity signals the agency of the agent, not its demise.

This first dimension of the sense of self is rather banal, and seemingly uncontroversial, and is what we might commonly refer to as "consciousness". Consciousness in this banal and thin sense is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition of one's sense of self. A being which is not aware of its experiences as somehow belonging to it is not a being with a sense of its own agency; it is not self-aware or self-conscious. What's more, to have experiences means that the experiencing being is self-identical and has a sense of self. However, this most basic sense of reflexivity can end up dominating accounts of agency. Take the term 'agency' itself. This

implies a being acting on the world, aware of its acting. However, if this is all that agency means, then it is not a sufficiently robust notion of what humans are, and so, any account that makes too much of this dimension misses something important about human being. Humans do not just act on the world, consciously recognizing their actions as their own. Rather, humans do so in a particularly human, and meaningful, way. It is quite conceivable and likely that certain animals (higher apes for instance) act more or less consciously, recognizing their own agency; however, this does not alone show that they have a sense of self in the way humans tend to have[2], which, as we will see, is more complex than mere consciousness. Therefore, we need to supplement this dimension with, at least, the next three. This move has in good part been neglected in certain philosophical traditions. For instance a full sense of self as I am proposing should not be confused with the more politically minded notions of self-ownership or self-possession found in the Empiricist/Liberal tradition, which takes human agents as acting atoms, essentially separate from the rest of the human world, but contracting with the rest of the human world in order to preserve their own advantage as atoms. We should not conflate the very thin notion of self-possession I am invoking and the more politically loaded versions of Locke and his brethren. Although there is an important similarity in the basic intuition about self-possession (i.e., that a person is the locus of experience), these latter accounts make too much of this aspect. For this reason, we need to refine this version of agency with the following aspects.

The Dimensions of Agency: B. Narrativity

I have claimed that human beings act in time and recognize their constancy in that temporal acting, but that this temporal constancy alone does not adequately describe the sense of humans acting through time. A human being does not simply act through time and recognize this; he can recount his own personal experience of moving and coherently developing through time as a self-same agent. In other words, for any person to have a sense of self, he must be able to tell some story of his own agency. It is not merely that the agent is placed in time, connecting his experiences through time. Rather, those experiences make a whole (a story that "makes" sense), which can be retold when necessary. This story should be thought of along the lines of a history rather than a chronicle. A chronicle merely recounts facts and events as they occur in sequence, while a history places those facts (omitting some and highlighting others depending on the intentions and goals of the historian) into a coherent story with the facts tied together through the intentions and purposes of historical actors. The point is that an agent with a sense of self does not only say what happened in the past, but can give an account of why it happened, and how what happened ties in with other parts of the story (e.g., the present situation in which the agent tells the story). What's more, the story aims at a plausible and meaningful future in continuity with this past. In addition to accounting for where I have been, my story will include an account of where I am going, just as Alice has both a sense of where she has come from, however confused that may be in her new world of nonsense, and where she is going (she's following the rabbit and wants to return to a

"better" height). As Taylor aptly puts it: 'in order to have a sense of who we are, we have to have a notion of how we have become and where we are going' (1989, 47).

Let us consider a couple of examples to make this aspect more clear. Take Christopher Nolan's *Memento*. In the film, the main character, Leonard, seeks to avenge the murder and rape of his wife. However, Leonard's goal is complicated due to a condition he has suffered at the hands of the very same murderers/rapists: Leonard has lost the capacity to form new memories. As a result, he must leave himself notes and memos, the most important of which he tattoos on his body, to which he can refer in place of his memories. Leonard has a story, a narrative, about himself up to the attack. The continuation of that story, however, is compromised by his condition. Since he can no longer form new memories and make sense of his daily life, he can no longer tell a coherent story of the immediate past nor of the present. He still projects his story into the future through his desire for future vengeance, but the futurity of his story is far less clear as a result of the ambiguity of his present. In spite of this, Leonard recognizes the need to tell himself the narrative of his life and seeks to compensate for his inability to form the story naturally by leaving himself reminders, artificial memories that can tie up the story and make it coherent. Leonard's attempt to live an understandable life shows the necessity of narrative for his sense of self.

Although Leonard recognizes the need for a coherent story in order to have a clear sense of himself and what he is doing, his condition puts strains on the story so great that, in spite of his attempt to continue telling a story, his story falters throughout. This occurs not only for him, but for the viewers as well, who can

neither trust Leonard nor trust themselves to adequately interpret the backward and fragmented approach to story-telling the film adopts. It is quite fitting that Nolan has adopted this narrative technique, as it neatly models Leonard's own narrative confusion. As the film progresses it becomes unclear whether Leonard's version of the story is accurate. The clues he leaves himself are frequently contentious, and even the story he thinks is coherent is tenuous, leaving himself open to manipulations of his story by others he encounters. Although not entirely clear, it seems likely by the end of the film that Leonard's wife was not murdered at all. Instead, it seems that she has died after having tricked Leonard, who could not remember that he had just minutes ago administered her daily shot of insulin, into repeatedly re-administering her medication. Furthermore, if we can trust the other characters who do not suffer from his condition, Leonard has already avenged his wife's rape (possibly even while she was alive) with the help of a police detective, who, incidentally, ends up being killed by Leonard as the rapist owing to Leonard's anger with him the previous day when he deliberately left himself a faulty memo, a false artificial memory. There is a sense in which these gaps in the story do not matter. What matters for Leonard's sense of self is that he can continue to tell himself a story, which is insured by the note taking and tattoos. However, because this method is even further from perfection than is good memory, he faces constant gaps in his story that force him to doubt the story and thus doubt his sense of self. For instance, when accused of not knowing *who* he is, Leonard cannot really answer. He can only react defensively and stick to his story (which at this point ends up sounding more like a chronicle than a good narrative), in spite of its glaring lack of continuity. Although he understands

that he must have a story to which he can appeal in order to have a sense of self, the looseness of his story prevents him from having an adequate sense of self. Because Leonard's narrative is inadequate, his sense of self is compromised and weakened.

Another example is the case of psychotherapy, which attests to the narrative requirement we have been formulating. The therapeutic encounter between patient and therapist functions as a telling and retelling of a life story. The patient recounts aspects of her life in the hope that the therapist might somehow make that narrative more coherent or more tolerable. Paul Roth has referred to this process as re-emplottment (see Roth 1991). In psychoanalysis, Roth thinks, the role of the analyst is to retell the analysand's story in such a way that the story will now make more sense, presumably alleviating whatever neurosis the analysand suffers. According to Roth, this re-emplottment is not a perfectly objective retelling. The analyst neither reconstructs the analysand's story the way it actually happened nor provides the analysand with the actual chronicle of the analysand's past life. The goal is one of coherence, not correspondence. The analyst must be sensitive to the narrative requirement of each patient's life, filling in gaps in the story the analysand initially tells in order to provide a more plausible and livable story. Even if a perfect objective correspondence is possible, the goal is meaningful narrative, not true narrative. As with Leonard, what is sought is a workable story that provides the patient with a solid and meaningful sense of self. While we may disagree with Roth that this is how psychoanalysis (and/or other forms of psychotherapy) actually works or that this is how it should work (perhaps we think that psychoanalysis should seek to display the true story, not just a plausible story with therapeutic benefits), it is clear that this case,

just as the Leonard case above, shows that humans do, *and must*, seek coherent stories in order to act meaningfully and comfortably in the world. Even if we insist that, in addition to providing coherence, these stories should uncover the objective truth of the person's actual life, we nonetheless agree that humans require such narratives; we are just disagreeing about the criteria by which we can judge the success of narratives. Because no self-respecting therapist would be content to provide their patients with the truth if that truth offers no therapeutic benefit, even a correspondence version of psychotherapy attests to this dimension of the sense of self.

The Dimensions of Agency: C. Moral Situatedness

A being with a sense of self must be located within a moral horizon against which her agency is meaningful. Human beings do not merely act. They act meaningfully and purposefully. They act with a view towards what they take to be worthwhile and good. Such action requires a moral dimension without which human being is not human. Human beings are, what Taylor calls, 'strong evaluators'; they are desiring beings who can and do rank and evaluate their desires (e.g., Taylor 1989, 4). In other words, humans desire various goods that they rank as more or less worthy of desire. This is apparently not the case with animals, which may, to speak anthropomorphically, have desires for certain goods (for instance, a desire for food), but have neither a sense of the value or worth of those desires nor an understanding of why those goods are good and/or better than other goods. On the other hand, humans

understand their desires as better or worse, more or less admirable, more or less praiseworthy and blameworthy. This is an explicitly moral dimension of human choice and human being: humans, *qua human*, choose goods that they deem better and more admirable than other goods.

From the moral fact that humans are strong evaluators it does not follow that all human choices are the result of strong evaluation. Some choices certainly do follow from strong evaluation. If I rank my desire for intellectual stimulation as being of far greater worth than my desire for alcohol, then my decision to read Plato instead of going to the bar is the result of a strong evaluation. Even if I decide to go to the bar instead, the choice is still a matter of strong evaluation. The guilt I will feel the next morning when I realize that I could have been reading Plato demonstrates the value distinctions I have brought with me to the act of deciding. On the other hand, I might value intellectual stimulation broken up with the odd binge drinking session more than I value non-stop intellectual stimulation, in which case my Plato-free evening will be welcome. In either scenario, the meaningfulness of my choice depends on the kinds of strong evaluations I have already made. We can contrast this with my choice to eat toast for breakfast rather than cereal. I may not regard either breakfast as more worthy than the other. The fact that I ran out of milk last night might be the basis of my choice and this does not involve any strong evaluation. However, the choice between even the most banal goods can in some cases involve strong evaluation. For example, if, making a substantial life change, I decide to be a vegan, I will make a qualitative distinction regarding my breakfast choices, disqualifying some option that had previously been permitted.

In addition, we should not make the mistake of thinking that humans are always aware of the strong evaluations they make. Much of this evaluating takes place behind the scenes or in our linguistic and social background. Not all our rankings are explicit, nor can we always articulate them without difficulty. This aspect of the sense of self is largely intuitive, or at least it appears to humans as though it is intuitive. What is being described here is not a moral sentiment (as in Hume) or an innate capacity integral to morality (as Rousseau's pity). Rather, Taylor's idea is that strong evaluations are often so embedded that they appear as though they were entirely intuitive or instinctual. Articulation is sometimes helpful, for instance when our seeming intuitions end up in conflict, but not always necessary. I may very well get along without problems in the world on the basis of my strong evaluations, but situations can arise where those strong evaluations lead me to intuitively expect to perform contradictory actions. If, for example, I have a strong evaluation that ranks the interests of my family members above my own interests, I may generally live in line with this evaluation without facing any serious difficulty. However, if a family member makes a demand that strikes me as exceptionally stringent, if, for instance, my brother has asked me to drop out of school because he is offended by philosophy, I may find it more difficult to accept his demand and maintain my strong evaluation. At this point it will be helpful for me to examine my moral rankings and determine whether this strong evaluation can be held consistently and whether it conflicts with other strong evaluations I may have (perhaps I will discover that I only rank my family members' interests higher than my own when they are reasonable interests). In such a case, an articulation should help me

determine whether my strong evaluation is adequate and which choice of action is more in line with that seemingly intuitive evaluation.

According to Taylor human action occurs in a moral horizon, a moral space that defines and ranks goods. Even someone as different from and opposed to Taylor as John Rawls seems to recognize as much. According to Rawls, all humans have conceptions of the good, accounts of what kinds of goals and interests are worthwhile. This is both one of the elements of real world human being that Rawls puts behind the veil of ignorance (see Rawls 1971) and implied by his later political conception of the person as having a moral power to hold a conception of the good to which she is not politically or morally bound, but which she nonetheless holds (see Rawls 1993, 29-35). Rawls, thus, takes it as a fact of human agency and human understanding that we hold moral views about the world and about the value and rankings of goods. Just as we understand ourselves through our gender, race, sexual orientation, class position and wealth, so too do we understand ourselves as morally connected to goods. Unlike Taylor, who takes the particular goods to be important constituents of our meaningful self-understandings, Rawls thinks that while these conceptions of the good can and do change over time, such change can never threaten our essential political personhood and thus cannot alter our legal and political rights. Nonetheless, Rawls believes that however mutable these conceptions are, they are important and necessary for normal human living. Rawls goes even further when he suggests that *all* citizens not only have conceptions of the good, but affirm (more or less) comprehensive doctrines as well. Comprehensive doctrines are explicitly moral and they include 'conceptions of what is of value in human life, and ideals of personal

character, as well as ideals of friendship and of familial and associational relationships, and much else that is to inform our conduct' (Rawls 1993, 13). Although some comprehensive doctrines (perhaps most in North America) can be only partial in so far as they do not include all values and non-political ideals, all citizens display a necessary moral situatedness, however mutable.

Although Rawls and Taylor disagree about which kinds of identities are most philosophically important (whereas Rawls restricts philosophical consideration to political identity, Taylor thinks that moral and political identities cannot generally be separated and are both philosophically germane), they both agree that moral identities are essential to actual persons. A person's identity depends in good part on where they take themselves to be standing morally. My identity is the answer to the question "who are you?", to which I can appeal as a description of who I am vitally, where I come from essentially and where I take myself to be going. This identity is understandable within my moral background. According to Taylor, 'my identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose. In other words, it is the *horizon* within which I am capable of *taking a stand*' (Taylor 1989, 27; emphasis added).

The importance of moral situatedness can be brought out more obviously if we consider someone suffering from an identity crisis. Think of someone who discovers that he was adopted. This new piece of information in some important way reconfigures the previous information he held about himself, leading to a painful and deep sense of loss: a loss of meaning, a loss of identity, a loss of the content of his

sense of self. It seems to him that he no longer knows who he is, that somehow he must reconstruct his identity and redefine what is of value to him and what goods he ought to pursue. Perhaps he entered medical school at the prompting of his "father" the neuro-surgeon. Perhaps he did so, believing that it was "in his blood". Can he still maintain this belief comfortably, or must he either change life plans or alter the justification for choosing the life plan he has chosen? What has happened is that his moral horizon has been assaulted by this new information, leading to a vertigo, which will hopefully only be temporary, and which can only be alleviated by reconstructing that damaged horizon. Whether one's moral situatedness is threatened or not, both cases show the importance of being situated and having that situatedness be firm and understandable; the person suffering from an identity crisis testifies to this as much as the person who recognizes and accepts her current moral situation.

The Dimensions of Agency: D. Others

To say that beings with a sense of self can provide narrative accounts of their agency and are situated in a moral horizon is to say that beings with a sense of self are situated among others to whom they can and do recount their life stories and with whom they form bonds of moral obligation and social meaningfulness. As such, we should now add that an agent with a sense of self is always related to other like agents. As Taylor puts it, we become ourselves by entering a dialogue with others: 'we become full human agents, capable of understanding ourselves, and hence of defining our identity, through our acquisition of rich human languages of expression.

... But we learn these modes of expression through exchanges with others' (Taylor 1994, 32). An identification of ourselves as ourselves cannot occur monologically, as though we are somehow essentially isolated and self-sufficient, as though a single person could acquire meaning, language and morality all on his own. To be a being with a sense of self is to always already be located among other beings with a sense of self and with whom we share a context of meanings (moral and otherwise).

This claim does not simply mean that humans find themselves among others; rather, the claim is that *who* one is depends essentially on those *with whom* one is. The obvious empirical fact of living with others alone does not get at this dimension of agency. If the relatedness to others was simply a matter of being placed empirically among others, humans could identify themselves in isolation even though they find themselves among others. This would mean both that we are somehow self-sufficient relative to our identities and that, while we are placed in a social world (for better or worse), the world plays only a secondary and superficial role in terms of our self-identifications. We might think of the liberal atomic agent who, while living among others and constrained by those others to whom it owes moral and/or political obligations, is essentially independent of those others and is most itself when it is separate from them. However, this is not an adequate description of self-identity. I do not come into the empirical world with a ready-made identity. Rather, that identity arises from within that world where I inherit language, morals, and meanings from my relations with others. As such, in order for a being to have a sense of self, that being must be situated in this way.

It is also insufficient to make the epistemological claim that, while selves are independent, self-knowledge is dialogical. David Jopling has defended this position by arguing for the view that, 'self-knowledge is essentially a kind of dialogue-based social and interpersonal knowledge; that is, it is a dialogical competence that is constituted by the confrontation of the self with the other' (Jopling 2000, 17). This view is mistaken because it takes agency to be accessible through dialogue, but not ultimately constituted that way. According to this view, each person already is the "self" they are and their identity is defined by that, but the discovery of this "self" can only arise through confrontation and communication with others. Once again, this does not match up with our experience of living in the world as people with a sense of self sharing that world with others who similarly have a sense of self. A person's identity is not *discovered* through interactions with others; rather, the very identification of the agent occurs *in and through* those interactions. This means that the sense of self depends on others, or as Taylor puts it: 'human beings are *constituted in* conversation' (Taylor 1991, 314; emphasis added). As such, the agent with a sense of self is constituted in and through dialogue with others.[3]

Conclusion

What I have presented here is a sketch of what I take to be the general elements of the sense of self as a sense of one's agency. Although there are short arguments and descriptions along the way, I have not provided any independent argument to convince anyone that these features actually obtain in the human world.

This seeming omission is not without reason. As I intimated in the introduction, there can be no argument, *independent of the experience of agency*, that could prove or disprove the description I have set out. In one sense, this is like the impossibility of providing rational grounds for rejecting reason, since as soon as you argue against reason, you have unwittingly defended reason (something of which Kierkegaard was keenly aware). The rejection or defense of agency already presupposes an agent who rejects or defends. As such, the strength of the description/interpretation I have offered is intended be more or less phenomenological. I take this fourfold structure of agency to be implied in the experience of beings with a sense of their own being, of beings with agency, of beings who are self-aware. If it is contestable, it is not so on the basis of abstract arguments but through an alternative description/interpretation that shows the sense of the phenomenon differently.

What I have done here has been an attempt to take a first step in describing the sense of self *as it is lived and experienced.* The experience the sense of self certainly includes: a spatial and temporal locatedness; an ability and need to account narratively for that self-identity (and as we saw, even the failure to do so – as with Alice and Leonard – both signals this ability and need and is itself a narrative: e.g., "I am having trouble telling you who I am because I have changed so much recently"); a moral situatedness from which the agent defines himself as the kind of agent he is; and a relatedness with others with and against whom the agent acts, defines those actions and can identify himself as an agent in the first place. It may be the case that there are further features I have not considered. If that is the case, all the better for the phenomenology of agency! The possibility of providing a more robust

phenomenology is not ground for rejecting the phenomenological account one renders.

What will follow in the next chapter will be a further step in this phenomenology. Having intimated what the structure behind the experience of agency is like in all cases, I will now try to uncover the *details* of the experience of agents in *this* world, *here and now*.

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[1] The point of leaving out the article in front of "self" is to indicate that *the* self is a particular version of human agency that is neither universal nor without problem. This should become more clear as I progress in the ensuing accounts of agency generally and modern agency in particular.

[2] This account is not committed to the view that *all* humans have a sense of self. Any human being who does not meet these criteria cannot have a sense of self. What's more, if any other being can be shown to meet all these criteria, then we must admit that they too have a sense of self, whether it is identical to ours or not.

[3] We might think of Hegel's famous phenomenological account of self-consciousness here. In order for the self-conscious agent to be certain of its identity and in order to assure the truth of that identity, the self-conscious agent must be recognized by another. However, the other who recognizes the first agent must itself be self-conscious, otherwise the recognition will only be partial. Hegel, thus, proposes an essential double recognition. The first agent must be recognized by a second in order to be sufficiently self-conscious, but that second self-consciousness must itself be recognized as a fully self-conscious agent in order for the first recognition to be meaningful. In other words, in order for the agent to be sufficiently self-conscious, or, to use the vocabulary I have adopted, for the agent to have an adequate sense of self, it must be in the presence of a fully self-conscious recognizing being, another agent with a full sense of self (see Hegel in Rauch and Sherman 1999, 13-46).

2

THE HISTORICAL INVENTION OF *THE* SELF

Having identified what in my view are the basic experiential structures that underlie the sense of self, in what follows I argue for the historical contingency of the sense of self as a sense of *the* self and defend the view that our contemporary sense of self is a sense of *the* self as a deep and inner substance. Doing so will demonstrate that, to begin with, the language of selfhood is the most appropriate language for talking and thinking about selfhood here and now, in our attempt to reflect critically here and now on our sense of self. I will do this in three parts. First, following Charles Taylor I will provide a foreshortened account of the roots of selfhood in its modern variation. Second, I will contrast this version of selfhood with the ancient Greek version of human being, particularly Aristotle's account, in order to show that the modern language of selfhood is not exhaustive or authoritative, even if, as I have repeatedly noted, it is the language we currently use both to talk about agency and to make sense of our own sense of self. Finally, I will provide a defense of a version of the language of selfhood in light of potential materialistic or scientific accounts of human being, showing that, however adequate those accounts are for their purposes, they cannot respond to the exigencies of practical and lived self-understanding.

The Self

'Our modern notion of the self is related to, one might say constituted by, a certain sense (or perhaps a family of senses) of inwardness' (Taylor 1989, 111). Taylor's claim here admits immediately that the sense of self that the modern agent has is a sense of *the* self as an inner substance. As the earlier quotation from Strawson implicitly showed, adding an article before "self" is something we moderns seem to do with ease. We not only admit that a well-functioning human has a sense of her agency, but also add that what she has a sense of is *a* self, *as if* the self were some-thing that can be pointed to (if only in thought) and articulated, and somehow lies behind one's experiences. However, I will demonstrate in the following chapter that to have a sense of self in terms of "the self" involves us in conceptual confusions. It is precisely this assumption that I will take to task in the refinement of the language of selfhood. Nonetheless, the modern version of the sense of self does take that sense to be a sense of *the* self as a substance of sorts. As I noted at the outset, this way of regarding the sense of self is implied by the question with which we began (i.e., what is a self?), which seems to presuppose that the object of description (a self) is a thing, a substance with properties that can be explicated like any other objective thing. This substance, as Taylor's claim above makes explicit, is something that we can locate *in*side of us; it is spatially (and spiritually) located within us and is what we essentially are.

From the inner location of the self, we come to understand ourselves as beings with an inner depth or a deep self. This idea has been examined, for instance, in some

of Michel Foucault's most interesting texts. By looking at carceral practices (Foucault 1995) and the language of sexuality (Foucault 1990), Foucault has repeatedly demonstrated that modern agents understand themselves as deep selves. Take for instance his reading of Diderot's *Les Bijoux Indiscrets* (1990, 77-80). Foucault considers the story in order to show how sex is spoken of as something internal and true; sex is here conceived as something within us, which holds the secret to our true nature or true selfhood. If sex is captured, it can tell us the story of our real self. This attempt to isolate and listen to sex in order to be told the truth about ourselves is something Foucault's work tries to make explicit as an important aspect of modern culture: 'Among its many emblems, our society wears that of the talking sex ... [a]s if it were essential for us to be able to draw from that little piece of ourselves not only pleasure but knowledge' (77).

This presumption about sex as truth-telling has been demonstrated in a recent, albeit already somewhat dated, sociological study by Deborah Lupton. Lupton shows how this relationship to sex persists in contemporary culture and, in particular, the popular media, citing Phil Donahue's television talk-show as an example (Lupton 1994). The modern imperative of sexual truth urges people to uncover sexual secrets, to be open about sex, to talk about sex, to reveal the *truth* of their sex and sexual identity as though that identity is their *true* identity. This sense of revelation is fundamentally therapeutic. It is better to know the "truth" than to remain ignorant; it is essential that one know his "true" identity, or to use the language of selfhood, his "true" self, whatever that may be. In Lupton's example of sexual "deviants" on an episode of *Donahue*, the burden of the confession that takes place is aimed at

revealing the guests' true sexuality, albeit a deviant one: 'The program ... privileges knowledge, truth, unburdening oneself, not keeping secrets, and emphasizes the cleansing, cathartic process of the confession, the belief that as long as problems can openly and honestly be discussed, all will be resolved' (1994, 50). The guests are conceived as being *truly* deviant; their deviance is part of their *true* identities, their deep selves. As a result, the unusual sexual behavior of Donahue's guests is inevitable; it is a representation and manifestation of their truth: 'The argument used is that the individual engaging in homosexual extramarital sex cannot exist as a "whole person" without this contact, for his or her identity is inextricably interlinked with his or her sexuality' (53). Their deviance is their truth. Accordingly, one does not merely *do* what they do sexually; one *is* what they do sexually. As one of the guests says, 'I choose to live my total life as a complete person ... that's part of me, that's part of the person that *I am*' (53; emphasis added). In spite of the consequence of being labeled deviant and possibly jeopardizing their relationships, these guests are urged to reveal their "true" selves and not suppress their "true" sexuality. This knowledge is, presumably, positive in and of itself, even if it is accompanied by negative and painful results (e.g., the strain the truth places on their current relationships). It is important, as Donahue maintains, not only to 'get out of this closet', but to 'get rid of the closet', to get rid of the possibility of hiding one's true self, to eliminate the possibility of not knowing one's true identity (55).

While both Foucault and Lupton use their descriptions as a means to criticize contemporary culture and this modern notion of a deep self, this critical move is unnecessary at this point. The descriptions are helpful to show that the modern self is

conceived as a substance with some depth. Whether we conceive of that deep self as essentially sexed (as Foucault and Lupton do) or essentially un-sexed (as Descartes' account seems to suggest) is unimportant at this step in the inquiry. What is vital at the outset is that the self is conceived as a substantive self with depth.

Like Foucault, Taylor aptly warns against interpreting this reading of the self as universal. However, unlike Foucault, Taylor does not reject this account out of court. Instead, he wants to stress that we actually do appeal to this concept in our everyday understanding, and any attempt to extricate ourselves from this conception is tantamount to self-incurred meaninglessness. Instead of trying to rid ourselves of the deep self altogether, we should recognize our moral connection to this conception, as the conception with which we situate ourselves vis-à-vis goods and goals, and maintain that we are situated in the world as selves. Nevertheless, he too admits that this account of selfhood is historically contingent. There is nothing universal or necessary about the deep self: 'Rather, it is a function of a historically limited mode of self-interpretation, one which has become dominant in the modern West and which may indeed spread thence to other parts of the globe, but which had a beginning in time and space and may have an end' (Taylor 1989, 111). This means that it is from within this historical conception that we understand ourselves and the world. While it is possible that this conception changes, such change will occur from within the tradition and on the basis of the conceptual background of that tradition, namely, on the basis of *the self.* If Taylor is right, we currently understand ourselves as having selves in this specific sense, almost as automatically as we understand ourselves as having hands and feet. It is part of our self-understanding and cannot be liquidated in

one fell swoop (as it seems Foucault would like). Before trying to refine and modify this conceptualization of the self in the following chapters, we must explicate more carefully the features of the self as a deep self. I will do this following Taylor's description of the development of the modern self (Taylor 1989).

Features of the Self: A. Self-responsible Independence

Although he connects inwardness to the Platonic tradition, and in particular to St. Augustine, Taylor considers Descartes to be the historical originator of the modern conception of the deep self. This is so because it is Descartes who explicitly connects inwardness to an inner immaterial substance as a "thinking thing". Descartes looks within in order to find the self, and in so doing, finds the locus of truth and morality. Whereas others before Descartes, principally Augustine, have similarly looked within in order to locate the truth, this truth was a pre-established truth and order: 'Do not go outward; return within yourself. In the inward man dwells truth' (Augustine in Taylor 1989, 129). Augustine's proto-cogito looks within, but does so in order to find God's will and the pre-established path to God to which I am to conform. Conversely, Descartes looks within to find the measure of truth and being, in the process of which he finds the *idea of* God as *the self's* clear and distinct *idea*. In this way, Descartes' inward reflection internalizes truth and moral obligation. In Descartes, then, we find the roots of the modern idea that the true self is disengaged, and comes to be responsible for itself when, disengaged from and independent of its

body, its desires and its sensations, it passes judgement on all things in terms of its own ideas.

Philosophical knowledge has traditionally been regarded as a representation of the world. Knowing meant re-presenting a timeless order of things outside and independent of the individual knower. In contrast, while knowledge for Descartes continues to be representational, the representation must be constructed rather than extracted from the timeless order. One's use of reason is not a way of recognizing the order of the universe, the logos. Rather, for Descartes, reason is instrumental, it enables the knower to construct for himself order and truth. The criteria for truth is no longer merely the correctness of our understanding of the timeless order (i.e., getting the order right or re-presenting it correctly) as an adequation or correspondence of intellect to things (*adaequatio intellectus ad rem*). Rather, it is now certainty in the form of clear and distinct ideas derived from the activity of knowing; it is the self-certain activity of the knower that guarantees the truth about the world: 'I now seem able to posit as a general rule that everything I very clearly and distinctly perceive is true' (Descartes 2000, 113).

The first thing that Descartes discovers to be indubitable and certain, and thus true and knowable, is his own existence: *ego sum, ego existo*. While his senses may be faulty, while his memory is certainly fallible, while it is possible that all his experiences have occurred in a dream state rather than in the world, while he may perpetually be deceived by a malignant demon, Descartes remains some*thing* that senses, remembers, dreams and is tricked by the demon. In all cases, Descartes remains an I. However, demonstrating *that* he exists does not indicate *what* he is.

What is the "I"? Going through the list of possible properties and activities, it turns out that only thinking is inseparable from him. Whenever he utters "I", or is deceived or somehow misled, *he thinks*. Even while doubting all one's senses and prior knowledge, that which cannot be doubted is the activity of the doubter. Descartes is essentially a thinking thing or substance. Therefore, the doubter must certainly exist as a thinker, as a *res cogitans*.

This seemingly innocuous realization is hardly without consequence. First, thinking is essentially constructive. As Taylor points out, *cogitare* is etymologically related to *cogere*, to bring together or to collect (Taylor 1989, 141). Thinking is not passive, nor does it merely actively seek out a pre-established order. Rather, thinking thinks up the order, it brings together and collects. Second, that which we come to understand as existing as the active agent of thought is an ego, an inner substantive, yet immaterial, self. It is not just that I am, I exist: sum, existo. Rather, *I* am, *I* exist: *ego* sum, *ego* existo. I am *an I*, a *thinking thing*.

The truth of the *cogito* can only come about through a radical disengagement from our usual embodied perspective. We must doubt our body and everything that it filters; we must separate ourselves from the world as it appears to us. This injunction takes up the common trope from Parmenides and Plato onwards of the opposition between reality and appearance, with philosophy bringing us from appearance to reality. However, there is an important modification in so far as Descartes' turn to reality requires a disengagement that enables us to shape the order of the universe through reason and ascertain the truth of the universe. Reason is now instrumental or procedural, yet it is still connected to self-mastery. This entails an ethical dimension.

The thinker fulfills himself when he thinks aright, when his reason dominates and exacts instrumental control. According to Taylor's interpretation: 'To be free from the illusion which mingles mind with matter is to have an understanding of the latter which facilitates its control. Similarly, to free oneself from passions and obey reason is to get the passion under instrumental direction' (1989, 149). This move internalizes moral sources; it is in and through this reflexive activity of the individual self that one is good, that one gets it right, so to speak. The Cartesian reflexive turn achieves a self-sufficient certainty, a certainty that is self-generated, a certainty for which the independent thinker is responsible.

Taylor extends the discussion of these Cartesian themes by turning to Locke and what Taylor calls the 'punctual self', which is a self that gains control over itself through disengagement. This is the kind of self that Foucault has examined in his middle period; it is the self that gains control over itself and (re)makes itself through disciplined action: the military man who becomes an officer through military discipline, the school boy who controls his childish sexuality to become a normal(ized) citizen, the prisoner who reforms himself by being disciplined while incarcerated (Foucault 1995). This kind of disengaged control is similar to the Cartesian model, but goes further in so far as the subject's objectification of the world and his own self enables him to control and change that very self. As Taylor describes it:

> The modern figure I call the punctual self has pushed this disengagement much further, and has been induced to do so by the same mix of motivations:

the search for control intertwined with a certain conception of knowledge. This disengagement is carried further in being turned towards the subject himself (Taylor 1989, 161).

This position is even more radically reflexive than Descartes', focusing on first person experience in order to transpose and control it; what appears to experience is deprived of its power by being fixed by the knowing and thinking subject. Much like Descartes, Locke proposes to doubt common knowledge and beliefs in order to fix the foundation of human understanding and human knowledge. Rather than either accepting the powers of custom and our common interpretations of experience or building new knowledge on pre-established grounds, Locke's famous under-labourer method engages in a demolition of sorts, clearing the ground for the acquisition of true knowledge: 'it is ambition enough to be employed as an under-labourer in clearing ground a little, and removing some of the rubbish that lies in the way to knowledge' (Locke 1964, 58). The under-labourer is more than a metaphor. On Locke's account, knowledge is something that is built, or rather, built-up, not something already there to be located. Building (up) something implies, further, that one builds *on* something, on some ground or foundation. Knowledge is always built this way, but can be built on a poor ground or be built poorly. The Lockean project, then, is to demolish that artifice and ensure that the ground upon which the new artifice is to be built will be adequate to the thing being built, namely, knowledge.

This project entails an objectified conception of the human mind. Locke reifies the mind. Since ideas are located *there*, it is a thing that can be said to occupy

an immaterial space of sorts. The location of ideas in the mind, however, is not fixed and necessarily constructed in any particular way. These ideas can be rearranged by the thinking mind itself. The power of the mind as a thing and Locke's project of clearing show that Locke's account includes an independent self-responsibility which is new, yet quite familiar to us. We must think for ourselves, since only we can judge the adequacy of our ideas and knowledge, and this can only occur through an examination of ourselves (now read: our *selves*).

Locke makes this clear in his "Epistle to the Reader". First, Locke implores the reader not to take his account on authority. There is a hint of (false?) modesty here, as Locke hopes his reader does not think of him as an expert who knows everything. However, this modesty is merely an indicator of the more essential point, namely, that what is central to Locke's project is that the attempt to know be a private one, which each person must enter alone. Locke is not simply modest about his expertise; rather, expertise in the realm of knowledge is impossible. Each person must do the intellectual work for himself; however much Locke's treatise may help the reader, it is not a substitute for the reader's own self-reflection. Locke warns: 'this book must stand or fall *with thee*, not by any opinion I have of it, *but thy own*' (56; emphasis added).

Second, telling his reader that the *Essay* came about through discussion between friends, he makes it clear that any obstacles to that discourse could only be avoided through each participant's self-examination, implying that the reader must do the same in order to benefit fully from reading: 'Before we set ourselves upon inquiries of that nature, it was necessary to examine our own abilities, and see what

objects our understandings were, or were not, fitted to deal with' (56). This reformulation of understanding begins with each person's, each self's, own work of self-reflection; knowledge begins with the self, and in particular with the self's knowing its own self. We notice here an ethical dimension to this radically disengaged stance. Clearing the ground enables the self to remove itself from what it had hitherto been and remake itself according to true understanding and on a solid ground. As Taylor puts it: '[According to Locke] we are creatures of ultimately contingent connections: we have formed certain habits. But we can break from them and reform them' (Taylor 1989, 170). Radical disengagement makes self-remaking possible. This self-remaking self is the punctual self; it is a self that both identifies with the power to objectify and remake, and can distance itself from its adopted and mutable features.

Locke identifies the self with consciousness, detachable from its embodiment. A person, writes Locke, 'is a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can *consider itself as itself*...' (Locke 1964, 211; emphasis added). Not only is the person the same person, but the person recognizes this, it recognizes its identity; it can 'consider itself as itself'. Locke continues, echoing Descartes: 'The same *thinking thing*, in different times and places...' (211; emphasis added). The person is a *thing* that thinks, and in being so, it understands its being as continuous through time and space. This identity is accomplished 'only by that *consciousness* which is *inseparable from thinking*, and as it seems to me, *essential* to it...' (211, emphasis added). The self, then, is its own consciousness, as a *thinking thing*, not its embodied location. This cognitive aspect of the person is its very essence; it is what the person

really and truly is. Consciousness is not, however, mere consciousness of the objective world. Rather, consciousness is all that is essential to the person. It is thus possible, in principle, that the same person (consciousness) occupy different material substances. As he says elsewhere: '*It being the same consciousness that makes a man be himself to himself*, personal identity depends on that *only*, whether it be annexed only to one individual substance, or can be continued in a succession of several substances' (212-213; emphasis added). It is in addition a self-consciousness. The self is aware of its identity through its activity, but also aware of its own self. The self is thus object as well as subject, 'it being impossible for anyone to perceive without perceiving that he perceives' (211). It is as self-conscious beings that we call ourselves "selves": 'By this everyone is to himself that which he calls *self*' (211). This punctual self is thus nothing more than "a self", an "I". However, this stance suggests a paradox, which is essential to the modern self as an inner substance. The self takes up the first person perspective and identifies itself in this perspective, yet it does so by objectifying the world and itself, by looking at itself from the third person perspective, as an object. These two dimensions are of equal importance, or, as Taylor puts it: 'radical objectivity is only intelligible and accessible through radical subjectivity' (Taylor 1989, 176).

Features of the Self: B. Recognized Particularity

Adopting the kind of radical reflexivity I have been discussing is fundamentally transformative. From the articulation of human agency in the

language of selfhood and from the punctual self's project of self remaking, an ethical project of self-exploration can be adduced, one that is not developed in Descartes or Locke, but which is more or less tacit and implied in the very notion of "the self" itself. The self is some-thing that can know itself and can be known and recognized by itself as known. However, the self is not known as a matter of course; because the self lies within, hidden behind the countenances of the everyday and opinion, it can only be known and discovered through some reflexive activity (like Descartes' meditating or Locke's underlabouring). As such, we *should* find ourselves; each of us ought to find her own authentic inner self.

As Taylor shows elsewhere, this is a familiar trope in our contemporary world. The narcissistic aspiration of some people to develop themselves and only themselves, at the expense oftentimes of others, displays the modern self's desire for authenticity. While Taylor argues that this method is inherently unsuccessful and contradictory because its outward disregard for others is premised on and conditioned by the very social space it rejects, it is nonetheless a testament to the modern self's aspiration to live adequately and authentically through self-exploration (see Taylor 1991; especially 55-69). What's more, given the language of selfhood that has been inherited, this self-exploration takes place by turning inward and finding the true self that lies within. Michel de Montaigne is a famous early advocate of this project, whereby the self ought to search for her own originality, her own identity through self-examination. While predating Descartes, Montaigne's picture of the self is very modern in this regard.

Montaigne characterizes his project in the *Essays* as 'private and domestic'. His topic is, quite simply, himself, his self laid bare and articulated in its purity: 'I want to appear in my simple, natural, and everyday dress, without strain or artifice; for it is myself that I portray' (Montaigne 1958, 23). This passage from the message to his readers brings out both the project of transformative self-examination I will be considering and a second aspect of modern selfhood Taylor considers, the affirmation of ordinary life. Ordinary life is important for Montaigne in so far as it is in that life that he finds his true self, his authentic self; the self can be discovered even in, and primarily in, the ordinariness of the everyday. This location is somewhat different from the disengaged place where Descartes and Locke find their true selves, yet there is an important similarity. What all three try to find is the true self, the absolutely certain, self-responsible and authentic self. Montaigne, however, stresses the ethical dimension of this project as self-acceptance and personal discovery in a way the former, who are epistemologically focused, do not explicitly state. Not only is *the* self an independent and inner substance, but it is an inner substance that is specific to each particular person; we all have our very own true self that we ought to discover in order to be authentic. Nonetheless, in doing so Montaigne presumes to present the form of human being, much like Descartes and Locke. As he puts it in 'On Repentance': 'Every man carries within himself *the complete pattern of human nature*' (236; emphasis added).

Montaigne's *Essays* are *self*-searching, they seek the self, find it and lay it out for others' pleasure, as a reminder of the man and as a possible lesson of sorts for others. The lesson does not provide the reader with a solution to the problem of his

own authenticity, but offers the reader a way to discover this for himself; Montaigne's attempts at self-discovery are a model for others to attempt the same. Each person must discover his own particular self, his own way of being himself (of being *his* self). This idea is made evident in Montaigne's advice for the education of youth. The student's tutor will provide the student with readings, but the student, mirroring Descartes' own advice and method, will be perpetually encouraged to not take anything on authority, instead, he should employ 'his own judgement' (56). The ultimate goal is self-improvement: 'The profit from our studies is to become better and wiser men' (57). Becoming wiser and better means knowing oneself better: 'The first ideas which his mind should be made to absorb must be those that regulate his behaviour and morals, that teach him *to know himself*, and to know how to die well and live well' (65; emphasis added). Montaigne's project, unlike Descartes' and Locke's, seeks to assert the self's particularity and difference from others. However, there is an essentialist moment here as well. The essence of human being is this self-exploratory and self-interpretive project; it is the human condition or nature to find oneself as a self that is essentially located within. What's more, the particular self that one finds is who that person is essentially. The issue of agency remains one regarding my essential self, however particular it may be.

Features of the Self: C. The Individualism of Personal Commitment

The self is a committed self; it is a substance that wills, and in so doing brings about a moral order and defines itself. In order to be the particular inner substance

that is my essence, I must will to be that self and commit myself to that particular inner substance. Personal commitment is connected to the importance of will in relation to morality. An action or moral disposition is not good unless the agent *wills* the action or moral disposition; in other words, agents must be committed to the action they undertake or the disposition they adopt, and, more generally, the self must be *committed to* who it is in order to *be* who it is. The activity of will makes a good action and good person good. Take for instance a generous act. I give my friend a gift. What makes this act good is not simply the objective goodness of the giving, but my willing the goodness of the act. The goodness of this act is not independent of my willing it. Unlike the Aristotelian account, which we will address in the following section, the goodness does not depend on an independent order. That is to say that, although there might be some independent criteria by which to judge moral goodness or badness, an act can only be judged if we consider the commitment of the agent to the act and to its ensuing repercussions. What makes my generous action generous is that I willed it to be generous. If I mistakenly give my friend a gift, the result might be good, but has no moral worth. For instance, Kant has famously argued that moral worth does not lie in the consequences of actions but in the intention, where the action is performed for the sake of universal duty: 'The moral worth [of an action] depends ... not on the realization of the object of the action, but merely on the principle of volition according to which, without regard to any objects of the faculty of desire, the action has been done' (Kant 1993, 13). However, even Mill, the seemingly exemplary consequentialist, recognizes that the intention of an act is essential for moral valuation, when he says in a much neglected footnote: 'The

morality of an action depends entirely upon the intention – that is, upon what the agent *wills to do*' (Mill 1979, 18). The goodness of the objective gift (the thing that is actually given) is not a moral issue at all. Morality tries to determine what kinds of actions are good and the moral person will intend to bring those actions about. As such, the goodness of the gift only comes to be of moral concern once my will and intention are involved. Now, certainly Aristotle's account considers the intention of actors. Accidental good acts do not make a person good. However, the goodness of character and deeds depends more on the goodness of the person's life judged by an independent moral and rational order than it does on the actor actually committing himself to his character and his deeds.

There is also an ontological dimension to this issue. While will is necessary for judging the moral character of the self, it is also necessary for determining who that self is. The self is a willing agent and thus the self is who it wills itself to be. This is implied in, at least, the Lockean notion of a remaking self. Since it is incumbent on the self to locate itself as an essential self opposed to social and common manifestations of the person, bringing about the remaking from which one's essential self can be affirmed is a matter of will, of committing oneself to one's truth as a particular and inner self. As we will see in the next chapter, this aspect of the self is taken up and highlighted by the existential version of the self as self-making. According to the existentialists, who one is *is* who they make themselves to be; who the person is *is* the authentic or inauthentic, honest or dishonest, self-making process to which that person is committed and for which that person is responsible.

The social contract tradition is an interesting place to notice that an aspect of modern selfhood is that the self is a willing and committed agent. According to the modern social contract theorists, the self is the kind of being who can enter into social compacts, a being who can assent to being governed. The legitimacy of government, in fact, stems from the agent's (all agents') willingness to agree to be ruled and his commitment to the political state and its members (who have similarly committed themselves to the state and its members). In the state of nature, a state without coercive laws where everyone is free to do whatever they see fit, there is no recognizable measure of right and wrong or good and evil. That which preserves the person is good and that which does not is bad or imprudent. However, preservation, being mitigated in the state of nature, is best secured when a known, recognizable and enforceable measure of right is available. As such, justice and right come into being with the willing assent to be governed, with the *commitment* to live under the rule of right. As Locke writes:

> Men being, as has been said, by nature, all free, equal, and independent, no one can be put out of his estate, and subjected to the political power of another, without his own consent. The only way whereby any one divests himself of his natural liberty, and puts on the *bonds of civil society*, is by agreeing with other men to join and unite into a community for their comfortable, safe, and peaceable living one amongst another, in a secure enjoyment of their properties, and a great security against any, that are not of it (1980, 52).

The best example can be found in Rousseau's distinction between private and general will. Human beings, Rousseau thinks, enter civil society in order to protect their diverse private interests, in order to preserve themselves better than they could in a state of nature suffering from scarcity. Rousseau's quasi-primitivism in the *Second Discourse* is famous, but this stance must be understood both for its polemical quality (he was trying to win a prize after all) and for its neglect of the issue of scarcity. It is only, as Hume rightly observed, when resources are scarce that ownership and then competition arise: 'Wherever any benefit is bestowed by nature in an unlimited abundance, we leave it always in common among the whole human race, and make no subdivisions of right and property' (Hume 1983, 21). What's more, offense and retribution follow from competition, not from an abundant nature (including the nature of human being). So, the state of nature that Rousseau might laud is the one where scarcity is not a problem, namely, the golden age myth. The state of nature where there are fewer apples than there are people, or where those apples are difficult to locate, or where it is more difficult to find the apples than steal them from others, is the state of nature that we must leave in order to protect our interests. This exit can only take place, according to Rousseau, by a general and universal agreement to do so. In other words, everyone must *will* this move and be *committed* to the civil state.

This act of will inaugurates the civil state, and in doing so, we willingly subordinate our private wills to the general will: 'Each of us places his person and all his power in common under the supreme direction of the general will; and as one we

receive each member as an indivisible part of the whole' (Rousseau 1987, 148). The general will, however, cannot be understood as a foreign will. The general will is our own will as citizens. This separation of wills suggests that each person, once they have consented to enter civil society, wears two hats: the hat of the citizen and the hat of the private person. Ideally the two hats would be the same, and so the wills would coincide. In the case where there is a conflict between wills, the general will should take precedence, yet this is so because the general will's dominance is ultimately in our own interest. Private will conflicts with the general will only when the individual mistakes his interest. As such, will is essential, since without the act of will comfortable and commodious living would be impossible. Furthermore, the act of will brings with it a twofold commitment, which is a 'reciprocal commitment between the public and private individuals' (149). First, since civil society is in each person's best interest, as members of the sovereign, each individual is committed to all other private individuals. Second, as members and participants in civil society, each person is committed to the sovereign and so to the general will.

Willing to place oneself under the dominion of the general will is tantamount to willing a moral world. In Rousseau's state of nature, what is good is that which is useful. In civil society what is good is what benefits the whole, and Rousseau thinks that this goodness takes on a moral quality. It is in light of this that we can understand the difference between the modern version of contract and will and, for example, the Platonic Socrates' version of contract. According to Socrates, he should not violate the laws of Athens because he has agreed to follow them and those laws have afforded him the opportunity to live a philosophical life. However, the

goodness of this is not determined by Socrates' agreement with the laws or by his willing to follow them. The life of philosophical activity, which Athens has made possible for him up to a certain point, is good independently of Socrates' commitment to that activity. If the laws of Athens are good it is because they are good; they are not good because Athenians have agreed to them. What's more, Socrates' agreement to accept punishment for his philosophical activity does not somehow change the goodness of that activity (Plato 2000). On the other hand, in Rousseau, will occupies an instrumental role. It is because we will a moral and political world that social living is good; it is only when 'the voice of duty replaces physical impulse and right replaces appetite, does man, who had hitherto only taken himself into account, find himself forced to act upon other principles and to consult his reason before listening to his inclinations' (Rousseau 1987, 150-151).

For the first time, others' interests are taken seriously by each person. As it turns out, my interest as a private person, which is best secured in civil society, includes the interests of others because all citizens must have their private interests met in order for me, as a private person, to have my interests met. In other words, if civil society best secures private interests, then the fulfillment of my interest will depend on the fulfillment of others' interests. In the *Second Discourse*, Rousseau suggests that the self is constituted by two principles, self-interest and sympathy. In the state of nature others' interests are only considered in so far as they incite sympathy. However, sympathy is not trustworthy. As the state of nature becomes more developed and humans gain language and come to own property (fooling others into believing them when they claim something as theirs) sympathy is weakened. In

legitimate civil society, sympathy is replaced by a more robust self-interest. Others' interest are our own as members of the body politic and as subjects to the sovereign. This other-regarding stance inaugurates morality, making human life more noble and elevated. The lives we lead are made good and moral by the various acts of will, and the ensuing commitments, humans perform, not by an independent moral order.

What this brief description shows is that, according to Rousseau, the modern person, the self, is a willing agent. This means that, first, the self wills a world which is in his interest. Privately, the self wills his own survival and commodious living. However, willing this leads the self to will a social world where those interests can be better protected. Willing one's private interest leads the self to adopt a social will, which wills a world in the interest of all. This world can only materialize if the self and others actually will to bring it about, if they agree and consent to live in such a world. In addition, this world can only succeed in protecting those interests if the self is committed to that social world; the self must not only agree to the social contract, but must agree to do so continuously. In continuously agreeing to the social contract, the self simultaneously and perpetually wills the moral world inaugurated by the social contract. The self is both essentially capable of will and commitment, and is most itself and most successful when it is so committed.

An Alternative "Self"?: Knowing Oneself and Knowing *the* Self

> So we come to think that we 'have' selves as we have heads. But the very idea that we have or are 'a self', that human agency is essentially defined as

> 'the self', is a linguistic reflection of our modern understanding and the radical reflexivity it involves. Being deeply embedded in this understanding, we cannot but reach for this language; but it is not always so (Taylor 1989, 177).

I take for granted that the brief description of modern selfhood thus offered is more or less readily intelligible to modern readers. This is as much the case with readers of self-improvement magazines (e.g., the aptly entitled *Self* might be the most obvious one) and self-help books that do not merely look to improve the quality of the reader's life, but seek to provide guidelines for each person to improve *their self*, as it is with readers of *Sources of the Self*. After all, we are told by a famous popular therapist that *self* matters, which means that *the self* is of vital importance for personal wellbeing. I am more than a little embarrassed to refer to Dr. Phil McGraw here, but do so to help make this point. Dr. Phil's project is to help his readers (and presumably his viewers as well) uncover and actualize their authentic selves. What is an authentic self? It is:

> The *you* that can be found at your absolute core. It is the part of you that is not defined by your job, or your function, or your role. It is the composite of all your unique gifts, skills, abilities, interests, talents, insights, and wisdom. ... It is the you that existed before and remains when life's pain, experiences, and expectancies are stripped away' (McGraw 2001, 30).

McGraw is clearly appealing to the modern notion of the self as inwardly located, independently responsible, particular and committed that I have just detailed. As we will see shortly, the ancient Greek would certainly not agree that his "authentic self" was *not* his function or role, while the modern European would likely agree that her true self was that which is at her absolute core and prior to all contingent experience.

It is a common sense part of our contemporary North American world (if not the entire western world) that people have selves; not simply that we have agency, are self-conscious, have a sense of self, or can tell a story about who we are, but that we have *a* self, something, however inarticulate it may be to most, which we believe is indicative of who we essentially are. This is the reason why I have thus far neglected the philosophical critique of the substantive self that Kant initiates and that is followed through by the existential philosophers. While we will appeal to this tradition in the following chapter as a way of refining the modern conception of the self, it was important here to lay out the conception of the self that I take to be most commonly assumed in our culture, and this is the version of the self as substantive. Of course, it does not follow from this common sense view that there is anything peculiar or particular about this conception of selfhood. I have not yet given any reason to think that this sense of self is any different from other senses of self or that this version is not universal. While it may be natural for us to assume that we are beings with an inner depth, in this section I examine elements of the ancient Greek understanding of agency in order to show the divergence between that version of agency and the modern version I have been exploring. It must be stressed that by

turning to the ancient Greek model I am turning to a model of self-understanding that was actually effective in life. I am not offering an abstract argument that shows that the modern version is not (or cannot be) universal; rather, I demonstrate this by setting it against another version of agency that was effectively lived. In doing so I will, following Taylor again, provide a rather general account of the ancient Greek model of human being followed by a more focused account of Aristotle's version of human being in order to see more clearly the differences this general overview flags.

The claim that the ancient Greek conception of human being is importantly different from the modern notion of selfhood does not entail that there are no similarities or continuities between these two versions of agency. A philosophy of historical discontinuity does not reject the fact of historical continuity; rather, it urges that those continuities can mislead us into missing important and interesting historical differences and gaps. Foucault certainly focuses on discontinuities in his reading of history, yet he does not reject continuity altogether. For example, while he claims, in *the Order of Things*, that philology is more like biology and economics than it is like general grammar, and that it is more interesting to notice, in part because it has been neglected, the epistemological connection between these studies, it does not follow that there is no connection between general grammar and philology (or between economics and classical analyses of wealth or biology and natural history). Clearly there is a connection and a progression of sorts. Linear historical studies are more or less legitimate. However, those kinds of studies neglect other kinds of continuities (like the continuity between outwardly different disciplines of study that occupy the same epistemological and conceptual space – what Foucault calls an *epistémé*), which

he believes his archeological method can notice (see Foucault 1994). Similarly, the approach being taken here does not reject the continuities between the Greek version of agency, for instance, and the modern one. However, these continuities do not disprove the important and interesting dissimilarity between these two accounts. The continuities make ancient thought understandable to us, but we should not mistake this possibility of understanding with an assumption about a perfect conceptual fit.

Recalling the first chapter, we can assert as a general rule that all humans have some conception of their own agency. However, it does not follow from this that those conceptions are always perfectly identical. For the ancient Greek, "knowing oneself" meant knowing and recognizing one's place in the polis and in relation to the gods. It did not mean knowing one's inner or deep self; it did not mean knowing oneself as defined by the *cogito.* The shift to selfhood is the shift to subjectivity or to the "I think" and the *cogito* as autonomous and separate from the social or political sphere. Charles Taylor makes roughly this point in *Sources of the Self*:

> It is probable that in every language there are resources for self-reference and descriptions of reflexive thought, action, attitude .... But this is not at all the same as making 'self' into a noun .... The Greeks were notoriously capable of formulating the injunction '*gnóthi seauton*' - 'know thyself' - but they didn't normally speak of the human agent as '*ho autos*', or use the term in a context which we would normally translate with the indefinite article (Taylor 1989, 113).

For instance, although the Platonic ethical goal is self-mastery, what is being mastered is not a self in the sense I have articulated above, nor is it this self that does the mastering. Being master of oneself means, for Plato, to ensure that the human soul is well ordered according to its pre-established order. The higher part of the soul ought to rule the lower, and succeeding in securing this dominance is a mastery of oneself. A human soul is the coexistence of three elements: reason, spirit and appetite. Since reason is highest it ought to rule the latter two. Allowing one of the lower parts to rule is tantamount to tyranny, giving an unqualified ruler the chance to rule for its interest alone. Only reason, on the basis of which we can understand and know how we are constituted and how we can best secure that constitution, can rule in the interest of the whole; this is so because only reason can know what the interest of the whole is. We should avoid tyranny because it violates the real and true ontological make-up of human being. Humans are ordered a particular way, and the ethical goal is to ensure that this order persists.

To attain self-mastery one must understand or see correctly, and what one must see is the true order. The conception of reason Plato offers is substantive; correct vision is criterial to rationality. Reason is not our capacity to gain control over the world and manipulate it. Rather, reason is the capacity to see and understand the true nature of the cosmos. Accordingly, the soul is a microcosm of sorts, and reason is the capacity by which we can recognize this: 'The good life for us is to be ruled by reason not just as the vision of correct order in our souls but also and more fundamentally as the vision of the good order of the whole. And we cannot see one of these orders without the other' (Taylor 1989, 122). While there is a sense in which

the order is inside us, it is more importantly outside and independent of us. We do not make the order. The order is not good because of our act of willing it. Rather, the order is good, and we can be good only by realizing that order in our soul and in the polis. Order, and in particular the order of the soul, is found, not made as it is for the modern self.

Much like Plato, Aristotle provides an explicitly ethical account of the human soul as an organization or order of human being. A human being is a soul divided into two main parts: a rational and a non-rational part. Each of these parts are divided into two, a higher and a lower component. The higher form of reason is theoretical and the lower is practical. Theoretical reason has to do with the knowledge of universal truth, the verities of mathematics, logic and the cosmos, while practical reason has to do with know-how, knowing how to build, and, importantly for our discussion, knowing how to live well. The non-rational part of a human being is divided between the nutritive part (lower) and the appetitive part (higher). The ethical goal, then, is to apply theoretical reason in order to understand this order and apply practical reason in order to maintain this order. The goal is to function well, to do what humans do and to do that well and nobly. Attaining and maintaining this goal is tantamount to happiness. Like Plato, the order is given, not made, and ethical concerns reside in the preservation or non-preservation of this order.

Although this account differs substantially from the modern picture of selfhood described above, Aristotle's account of good and ethical human agency invokes an idea of self-interest that seems at first glance to be more similar to modern self-interest than the talk of cosmic orders might suggest. The person striving to be

good and to function well always seeks to do so for their own interest. It is in their best interest to be good. In order to maintain and justify the historical element of this project, we must see how this self-interest is not the interest of *a* self.

Arguing, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, that those people who are normally considered self-lovers do not really love themselves because what they love is the lower parts of themselves rather than their true nature (i.e., the proper order of their soul and its ruling part), Aristotle goes on to suggest that true self-lovers, those people who love their rational nature, are not only not deplorable, but are truly praiseworthy. These self-lovers will sacrifice everything for their friends, because doing so is virtuous. However, self-sacrifice is not only good for others; in fact, it is first and foremost good for the person performing the sacrifice, because the self-sacrificer achieves the fine for himself, while his friends gain the fruits of his sacrifice: 'He gains the fine, and so he awards himself the greater good' (1169a 29). Indeed, friendship, however other-regarding it may be, is always primarily self-regarding. A good person needs friends in order to be good, friends are both necessary for the performance of good and virtuous deeds and are constitutive of the good life. The goal then seems to be *self*-regarding or egoistic.[1] In what way is that for which we show interest not an inner, particular and self-committed self?

In order to respond to this concern we must recall the general aspects of the sense of self I enumerated in the last chapter. A well functioning human being will always have some sense of their agency, and this will require that they understand their agency as comprising a privileged locus of experience. In so far as an agent occupies this perspective, she will be interested in preserving the specificity and

coherence of that position. This is, in a most basic sense, *self*-interest, but not necessarily an interest of or in *the self*. The Aristotelian agent is interested in preserving and improving her position as the locus of experience, but this need not (*and should not*) be understood as *egoism* in the Cartesian sense. The self-interested agent in this case is not an ego, a substantive and essential "I", at all, but an ordered rational being who understands her natural function, understands her place in the cosmos and in the polis and can maintain the order of her soul. The question of egoism in Aristotle is in some sense altogether anomalous; there can be no question of egoism because in Aristotle there is no ego in the substantive sense. What's more, other-regarding interest is not at odds with self-interest in Aristotle, as it seems to be in modern discussions of egoism. Although the good person aims always at the fine and the best for herself, this does not put her in competition with others. Rather, others' interests are constitutive of the interest of the good person. It is by considering others' interests that the Aristotelian agent secures the good for herself.

Finding the "True" Account of Agency

That Aristotle's version of human being is not identical (or in relevant ways sufficiently similar) to the modern version of selfhood does not in itself decide if we should or should not continue to talk about the self. Nevertheless, the historical moment in this work does open up the possibility, as we have seen, that the language of "the self" might be rejected. In the light of this, a possible critic must be responded to. This critic claims that we should appeal to a more materialistic or

scientific language in order to understand and speak about human agency and we should do this because it is the true account. We should, this critic maintains, reject the language of the self because that language is untrue.

In appealing to the language of selfhood I do not deny the possibility that some other version of human being might be adequate for certain purposes, for which the notion of a self is not particularly helpful. Take, for instance, a neuro-biological model of agency as an example of the view that we need to get rid of the self in favour of a materialistic description of human agency. The appeal to the physiological and neurological make-up of human beings and its language of firing neurons and stimuli may provide an accurate description of how the human organism functions and serve as an explanatory model of behavior with some more or less compelling predictive power, something the notion of selfhood does not presume to do. However, where this model, and other materialistic models, invariably fall short is in their foreignness with regard to our own self-understandings, those very self-understandings that form the starting point of this research. Neither language is reducible to the other, and each language is adequate in a different sphere of articulation. What this means, in effect, is that neither science nor materialism can describe the self as it is lived. As Leo Rauch has put it in his recent commentary on Hegel's phenomenology of the self:

> In addressing ourselves to [questions regarding self-consciousness] in psychological terms[2], we would be considering one or more causal factors external to self-consciousness ... and while such factors might or might not

"explain" self-consciousness satisfactorily, we would still be far from having grasped it in descriptive terms as lived (Rauch and Sherman 1999, 55).

Furthermore, the language of selfhood can situate and account for the neuro-biological language in a way that the latter cannot account for the former. Asking neuro-biological questions about selfhood presupposes the language of selfhood (i.e., the self is the explanandum) whereas asking questions about the self does not presuppose neuro-biology. I begin to be concerned with consciousness because I begin with a conception of myself as someone or something who/that is conscious; I start with the view that I am *a* conscious self before explaining that conscious self. The reverse clearly does not hold. I do not first have to have a scientific understanding of the human being before I can go about experiencing the world and myself.

Phenomenologists have often rejected scientific accounts of the self and agency for the reasons I have just provided. Because scientific and materialistic accounts of agency cannot describe and interpret the *actual lived*-experience of the agent, they fail in some important sense to uncover the essence of that experience. Even more nuanced versions that try to locate mental content in the brain meet the same phenomenological challenge. For the materialist, of whatever stripe, the self is just matter, however subtly constituted it is. Nonetheless, even subtly constituted matter does not match up with our self-experience or with the perspective we take up as experiencing beings. Merleau-Ponty makes this case compellingly in

Phenomenology of Perception. Reminding his readers that the goal of phenomenology is to describe experience, he goes on to suggest that:

> I am not the outcome or the meeting-point of numerous causal agencies which determine my bodily or physiological make-up. I cannot conceive myself as nothing but a bit of the world, a mere object of biological, psychological or sociological investigation. I cannot shut myself up in the realm of science. All my knowledge of the world, even my scientific knowledge, is gained from my own particular point of view, or from some experience of the world without which the symbols of science would be meaningless (Merleau-Ponty 1962, viii)

Merleau-Ponty's point is that a scientific account of the human being presupposes a stance in the world, a particular posturing that is lived, and it is the job of phenomenology to describe that stance. As such, not only does the scientific or materialistic account fail to match up with the experience of being a self, it fails to uncover the stance from which the scientific account is meaningful in the first place. It is certainly in principle possible that my lived experience can come to be articulated in a materialistic or scientific language; humans might some day experience the world in the language of firing neurons and stimuli. However, when the language that describes experience changes, so does the experience of being an agent/self itself. What's more, this would change the experience of being an agent so drastically that I, *here and now*, can have no conception of what that experience would be like; that

possibility is fundamentally meaningless to me, and as such, the appeal to those kinds of accounts of the human being will not help us here.

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[1] For an discussion of Aristotle's egoism or non-egoism, see Kahn 1981 and Kraut 1989, chapter 2.
[2] While Rauch's comments are directed at psychological models of agency, not physiological ones as I have been concerned with, the feature of psychological models to which he takes is exception is the materialism that I have opposed as well. In fact, he more than likely has in mind neuro-psychologies rather than hermeneutic psychotherapies. As such, in spite of the difference between his comments and mine, I take the general thrust to be identical.

3

THE SELF-CHOOSING SELF AND ITS RELATION TO OTHERNESS

In the previous two chapters I offered a summary of a phenomenological description of the experience of agency, first, in general terms and, then, in historically situated terms. The first step brought out four features of the sense of self as a sense of agency, which I suggested are common to all self-experience: self-possession, narrativity, moral situatedness and the presence of other like agents. With the second step, I attempted to show that our contemporary experience of agency seeks to accommodate these features in the language of selfhood, further suggesting that *the* self is an independent, particular and committed self. As we saw, the assumption underlying this version of agency is that the self is a deep self, an inner substance that every modern agent has and is. What I want to do in this chapter is take this assumption to task. In this chapter, I show that the current experience of selfhood as independent, particular and committed can be more consistently maintained if we abandon the assumption that *the* self is an inner substance and replace this with a version of the self as a synthetic relation. In fact, the substantive version of the self will be shown to be unintelligible and inconsistent.

While I have argued that the language of "*the* self" is the language we have at our disposal, I have simultaneously remarked that we need not think that this language is closed to criticism or beyond refinement. On the other hand, I have suggested that a transformation of that language is both unlikely and highly problematic. This project, thus, faces the challenge of refining the language of "*the* self" without losing that language altogether. At this point, I want to meet this

challenge by extracting a more consistent version of the self. This version begins with the substantive assumption, but shows that this assumption is neither intelligible on its own terms nor necessary in order to preserve the three features of selfhood enumerated in the previous chapter. As such, this new account refines the language of selfhood by making it more consistent. What I offer, in effect, is an immanent critique of the substantive self not a defense of an altogether different version of the self. What impels this analysis and critique *in the present* is an ethical dissatisfaction from which this talk of "the self" has not spared us. To reiterate, this project is one of retrieval and refinement. I have attempted to retrieve the sense of our experience of selfhood, and I will continue to do so. However, now the refinement must begin as well. I will seek to refine the notion of the self by removing the substantive assumption while leaving the three distinctive features of the modern self as independent, particular and committed in place, thereby preserving the language of selfhood while transforming elements of that language and, hopefully, transforming the actual experience of being a self.

In the light of the consideration just outlined, the present chapter has two aims. First, by showing that the currently actual conception of selfhood is incoherent, I argue for a version of the self as a relational self-choosing self rather than as an inner substantive self. Taking the analysis of the previous chapter as my starting point, I show that the substantive assumption (i.e., that the self, which is independent, particular and committed, is an inner substance or deep self) is inadequate on its own terms; by examining the cultural understanding of "*the* self", I show philosophically that its underlying ontological assumptions are incoherent. Doing so gestures towards

a transformation in and refinement of selfhood that has yet to be realized concretely in cultural life. The goal is to offer a more consistent account of our current understanding of the self that will modify that version, rendering it more consistent and, as we will see in the final chapter, ethically more fruitful.

This will be accomplished by looking at and defending Fichte's account, in *the Science of Knowledge*, of the self as self-positing. Fichte is worth turning to here because his is the first direct and focused discussion of this view, from which the incoherence of the substantive self can be noticed. According to Fichte, the self is neither just subject nor just object; rather, it posits its own selfhood, and in doing so, is both subjective and objective. The turn to Fichte is meant to accomplish two tasks. First, it demonstrates the inadequacy of the substantive version of the self. Second, it defends a version of the self as self-positing. In order to establish the latter adequately, I undertake a close reading of the first section of Part 1 of *the Science of Knowledge* where Fichte argues for the absolute self-positing of the knowing subject. However, this turn also brings out an inadequacy with Fichte's account, which falsely abstracts from concrete experience. In Fichte, self-positing comes to be a kind of self-invention, where the self's self-positing brings itself (its self) into being absolutely. In response to Fichte, I argue that the self is self-choosing, not self-inventing; the possibility of coming to be a self is conditioned by an already established situation that opens onto self-choosing. As Kierkegaard puts it in *Either/Or*, the self posits itself, but the self that is posited must be there to be posited. What this means, in effect, is that the self is self-choosing and relational, not substantive; *the self is the relating, not the thing that does the relating.* Once I have

shown that the substantive notion of the self is problematic and can be supplanted by a more consistent version of the self as relational, I will then show how this version of the self continues to fulfill the three features of the modern self that were borrowed from Charles Taylor. By examining the existential version of the self-choosing self I will show that this self remains independent, particular and committed, and, importantly, more consistently so.

The second aim of this chapter is to show that the independent, particular and committed self-choosing self is always situated by others; the situation that opens onto self-choosing is made possible by others. As such, the self is constituted as a self in relation to others. The goal here is to show how the rejection of the substantive notion of the self moves us towards an ontology of otherness[1] (which I will explore in more detail in the next chapter through an examination of the work of Emmanuel Levinas) and towards an ethics of the Other (which the next chapter, again considering Levinas, will intimate, and which the final chapter will take-up specifically).

The Self-Positing/Self-Choosing Self

'Our task is to *discover* the primordial, absolutely unconditioned first principle of all human knowledge' (Fichte 1983, 93). With this task Fichte's *Science of Knowledge* undertakes an explicitly modern project. There is some similarity between Fichte's attempt to discover the first principle of knowledge[2] and Descartes' search for an indubitable truth, which will serve as a foundation for knowledge, or

Locke's project of finding the origin of knowledge. However, in so far as they begin with the worry that humans are often in error and need philosophy to help remove that error and secure truth, Descartes' and Locke's attempts to secure knowledge stem from a skeptical impulse.[3] Descartes and Locke begin philosophically by suspecting that they are currently in error and worrying that they may always be in error. Conversely, Fichte begins with the opposite impulse: a confidence that we actually have truth. Fichte does not begin by doubting empirical facts. Instead, he begins by recognizing that an empirical fact cannot itself be the ground of empirical truth. As such, Fichte's project is really a Kantian one, locating the conditions of the possibility of all consciousness. What conditions the consciousness of empirical objects cannot itself be an empirical state of consciousness. Rather, what conditions the consciousness of the empirical world is an activity, an act. To reiterate, the goal of locating this act is not to steer us away from perpetual error. In terms of our empirical experience, we are generally in truth not in error. Rather, the fear is that, while we tend to get things right, we might overextend empirical knowledge to include the conditions of empirical truth itself, which cannot, *in principle*, be empirical. In other words, we might commit an error by taking an act to be a fact.[4] As Fichte puts it: 'In describing this Act, there is less risk that anyone will perhaps thereby *fail* to think what he should – the nature of our mind has already taken care of that – than that he will thereby think what he should not' (93). Since our minds are well constituted to accommodate empirical reality, we tend to be correct about the empirical world under normal circumstances. However, we must avoid mis-taking that empirical reality. This means that we should avoid taking that which is not an

empirical fact for an empirical fact. Here again, Fichte makes a Kantian move of sorts, implying that the conditions of the possibility of consciousness cannot be facts of consciousness and so are not knowable in the same way objects can be known. Nonetheless, the conditions are thinkable, and only thinkable as the limits (as the conditioning limits, not as obstacles) of the consciousness of the empirical world: 'we must necessarily *think* this Act as the basis of all consciousness' (93).

Given the undeniable fact of experience, Fichte begins his search by taking a proposition that can be granted without dispute. The proposition need not be indubitable (and probably cannot be), but if there is no good reason (no reasonable reason) to dispute it, then we can adopt it without reservation as the beginning of the critical search. By examining this proposition the hope is that the thinkable Act that makes this truth possible will eventually be uncovered. The proposition Fichte takes up is a statement of identity: 'A is A', or 'A = A'. While 'A is A' is beyond dispute and in need of no further justification or deeper grounding[5], the proposition alone indicates nothing about the existence of 'A'. At best the identity of 'A' with itself implies that '*if* A exists, *then* A exists'. 'A is A' is thus recognizable immediately (and *a priori*) as being absolutely true in form, but of its content we cannot yet be certain.

Because 'A is A' is absolutely true in form if not yet in content, the truth of the proposition implies a necessary connection ('X') between the '*if*' and the '*then*', and this necessary connection is posited absolutely without further ground and assures the certainty of the truth of the proposition. The seeming absolute truth of 'A is A', is thus secured by 'X', by the necessary connection implicit in the conditional

statement, which is not itself a proposition or empirical fact. The condition of the possibility of identity is, accordingly, this necessary connection implicit in the conditional statement.

While 'X' guarantees the truth of 'A is A', we must determine the conditions under which we can say that 'A' actually exists. According to Fichte there are three steps needed to show the existence of 'A'. First, 'X is at least *in* the self and, posited *by* the self' (95). 'X' is in the self because it is the self that judges in the proposition 'A is A', judging the truth of the proposition according to 'X'. 'A is A' does not somehow hang in mid-air or in heaven; rather, it is a *proposition posited by someone*, some conscious self. As soon as this self judges the proposition and asserts the proposition, 'X' must equally be posited by the self, since, as we saw, 'X' is implied by the proposition and guarantees its truth, which we already take to be secured. In other words, there is no 'X' until it is posited by the self who thinks 'A is A'. The 'at least' of this first step must not be overlooked. It may still be possible that 'X' somehow exists independently of the self (perhaps as an objective law of nature), but that independent existence is not yet determinable. All that is determinable is that 'X' is in the self, and of this we can be certain whenever 'A is A' is thought and recognized as true.

Second, 'since X is supposed to designate a connection between an unknown positing of A and an absolute assertion of that same A, on the strength of the first positing, then *at least so far as this connection is posited*, A is *in* the self and posited *by* the self, just as X is' (95). Recalling that 'A is A' can be restated as '*if* A exists, *then* A exists', 'A' is posited as the antecedent as soon as 'A is A' is thought or

articulated. Therefore, the 'A' of the conditional statement is in the self and posited by the self in the same way that 'X' was, and dependent on the positing of 'X', which was implied in the original proposition.

Third, since the subject and predicate are united by 'X', and since 'A' is posited in the subject position, then the predicate is asserted absolutely: 'If A is posited *in the self*, it is thereby *posited*, or, it thereby *is*' (95). Since 'A' was posited in the subject position and since 'X' guarantees the existence of 'A' when 'A' is posited as subject, if there is an 'A', which there is in the subject position, then the 'A' must be in the predicate position as well: 'A' exists. This existence, again, lies in the self and on account of the self who posits the 'A'. The claim that a unicorn exists if a unicorn exists can prove the existence of a unicorn in the self in so far as the self has posited a unicorn in thought. This does not show that a unicorn actually exists independently of the self of course, but the unicorn, once posited, exists in thought.

While the absolute truth of 'A is A' cannot prove that 'A' exists independently of the self, its existence in thought indicates that there is something permanent and uniform in the self who thinks it. What guarantees the truth of 'A is A' is the continuity and unity of the 'I' that thinks it. Thus, 'X' can also be expressed as 'I = I', or 'I am I'. There seems to be a Cartesian move of sorts here, but to think so would be to mistake Fichte. For Descartes, the though of 'A is A' would indicate the uniformity and existence of the 'I' because the 'I' thinks it, whether 'A is A' is true or not, whether the thinking self is deceived or thinks with clarity and distinctness. What guarantees the 'I' is the activity of thinking. For Fichte thinking also proves the existence of the 'I', however, thinking will not prove itself to be the

essence of the 'I'. As he puts it elsewhere, 'we do not necessarily think when we exist, but we necessarily exist when we think,' which leads him to conclude that 'thinking is by no means the essence, but merely a specific determination of existence' (100). Fichte's 'I' is not a *res cogitans*. In fact, as we will see shortly, it is not a *res* in Descartes' sense at all.

As a fact of empirical consciousness 'I am I' is asserted absolutely; as such, it is absolutely true. However, 'I am I' is of a different form than 'A is A', which was also absolutely true. 'A is A' only has content under a condition, under the condition of the validity of 'X', which we have since determined is the validity of 'I am I', of the self in its permanence. Conversely, 'I am I' *is not conditional*, it does not have content only under a condition. Rather, it is absolutely valid. Fichte's strategy is to take a simple self-evident piece of knowledge (i.e., the principle of identity) in order to show that the self-positing of the subject lies at the basis of all knowledge. If we attempted the same analysis with the proposition 'I am I' that we used with 'A is A' we would immediately find that the 'I' is guaranteed simultaneously with the proposition. I am as soon as I utter 'I am I'. The necessary connection of the conditional depends on nothing other than the positing of the proposition itself. What we now notice is that the self's self-identity is implied in the truth of the proposition 'A is A': 'I who posit A in the predicate position, necessarily know, because *the same was posited in the subject position*, about my positing of the subject, and hence know myself, again contemplate myself, am the same with myself' (96). The existence of the self is implied in every empirical proposition, but unlike the empirical proposition, 'I am I' is valid in form and content; its content does not depend on some

other truth (as the truth of 'A is A' did) because I posit it. As such, the 'I' exists necessarily in all consciousness or knowledge; 'I am I' can be stated simply as, 'I am', suggesting that self-identity is not conditional. Therefore, the self precedes all propositions, it must be posited as the foundation of all facts, which, as facts thought by the conscious self and thus present in the self, imply this prior positing: 'Hence it is a ground of explanation of all the facts of empirical consciousness, that prior to all postulations in the self, the self itself is posited' (96).

To review, since 'A is A' is a judgement, it is an activity of mind. This activity rests on the absolute ground of 'X', which itself is the absolute validity of the self, the 'I am'. Therefore, what is absolutely posited and founded on itself is the ground of at least one activity of the human mind. The self is that which is absolutely posited and founded on itself. As we saw, the self is implicitly posited in the proposition 'A is A', but this positing is without ground since it is the ground of the proposition. As such, it cannot be posited by something else, it must be self-posited; it is an activity, not a fact grounded by an activity. In other words, this positing is an absolute activity of a self as self-positing, which always signals and is signaled by the self's existence: 'The *self posits itself*, and by virtue of this mere self-assertion it *exists*; and conversely, the self *exists* and *posits* its own existence by virtue of merely existing' (96). The existence of the self implies its self-positing, and the self's self-positing implies its existence. The self is both the agent and the product of action; the 'I am', which guarantees the truth of the proposition with which we began, is an act. In short, the self is an activity, not a substance: 'The intellect ... is an *act*, and

absolutely nothing more;' however, 'we should not even call it an *active* something, for this expression refers to something in which activity inheres' (21).

As self-positing, the self arises as an absolute subject, as 'that whose being or essence consists simply in the fact that it posits itself as existing' (98). The self is absolute and necessary *for itself*, and anything that is not absolute and necessary for itself is not a self. To use a Hegelian turn of phrase, the self is what it is (a self) both in itself (essentially and conceptually) and for itself (as experienced subjectively). As such, the self is essentially self-conscious, or, which is to say the same, is both subject and object; the subject is its own object (see, Hegel 1999, 13-20). Self-consciousness acquires a substrate (an underlying constancy), but this is the absolute subject positing itself as a constant substrate, not an inner substance in which qualities or powers inhere. The self-positing self cannot be only subject or only object. To abstract from this dialectical relation is to lose the self, either in its subjectivity or its objectivity. This is precisely the problem with the conception of the self as a substance (i.e., the deep self). Descartes' *res cogitans* can be read in two ways. On the first reading, the *res cogitans* is only a subject, as an ego (*ego sum*), which is essentially separate from the objective world. After all, although Descartes can eventually trust that he has a body, that body is not what he essentially is. Accordingly, Descartes' ego is a pure subject. In order to rescue the objectivity of the self we might turn to a second reading, focusing instead on the thingness of the *ego* that is a *res*, in which case the self is an object of sorts with *quasi-subjective* properties, *a thing* that thinks, whereby losing its subjectivity. However, if the self is only subject, then it cannot be aware of itself, because that of which it is aware must

be the object of awareness. On the other hand, if the self is only object, then it cannot be aware of itself because that which is aware must be subjective. Either way the self-consciousness of the self is obscured, and the substantive self is shown to be unintelligible. As self-conscious, the self is both a self in itself (objectively) and for itself (subjectively). If the self can posit itself then that self must exist, and if the self exists then it necessarily posits itself. In other words, self-positing and being-for-self (or self-conscious selfhood) are identical.

Fichte's account thus far seems to make the self into a God, a self-inventing being positing itself *ex nihilo*. For Fichte the self is an absolute self-positing, and nothing more. However, this cannot be an adequate account of the human self. We must keep in mind that any human activity is that of a finite and situated being. The human self, as it is actually found, is finite and situated, bound by the limits of finitude, which are also the very conditions of the self's own self-positing; finitude is the positive limit of self-positing, not a negative limitation or impediment. As such, it is best to consider the self-posting of the finite human self as a situated self-choosing. Rather than being an absolute activity of self-positing or self-inventing *ex nihilo,* the self is a situated activity of choosing oneself. In order to articulate the human self in its finitude, there must be something there to be posited; in other words, the structure and limits of the self as self-choosing predate any actual positing of the self. We should let one of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms remind us of this:

> That which I choose I do not posit, for in case this were not [already] posited, I could not choose it, and yet if I do not posit it by the fact that I chose it, then

> I did not choose it. It exists, for in case it were not in existence I could not choose it; it does not exist, for it only comes into being by the fact that I choose it, otherwise my choice would be an illusion. ... In this case choice performs at one and the same time the two dialectical movements: that which is chosen does not exist and comes into existence with the choice; that which is chosen exists, otherwise there would not be a choice. For in case what I chose did not exist but absolutely came into existence with the choice, I would not be choosing, I would be creating; but, I do not create myself, I choose myself (Kierkegaard 1959b, 217-220).

The point Judge William makes here is that, in order for a choice of self to be an actual or real choice, the self must be there to be chosen. In order for the choice to be a choice and so a self-positing, that which is posited must be there to be posited; there must be a self there to choose. If this is not the case, then we are working with a version of the self as a god-like self-inventor, which does not match up with our experience of the world as situated and finite. On the other hand, in order for this process to be a self-positing, that which is posited must come into being with the positing. The self is there to choose, but the choice actually brings it about. If the choice does not bring it about, then we are working again with some substantive account of the self (whether that substance be subjective or objective) where the true and authentic self is already there in place before the act of existing in the world, which we have now shown to be inadequate. In summary, the self that is posited must already be there to be posited, otherwise, the positing would be a self-invention;

however, that the self is already there to be posited does not mean that there is not an actual positing going on. This process is not entirely unlike the kinds of choices we make every day.[6] I choose to be a philosopher. The choice must already be there for me to choose. The choice of being a philosopher is only a live and meaningful choice if it is there to be chosen. However, I am not a philosopher until I choose to be one, until I bring it about by choosing and acting. In order for me to posit myself as a finite self, "self" must be there to choose (the structure of selfhood as a situated self-constituting process is there for me). However, I am not "self" until I posit it through my choice, through the activity of positing myself. As a result, it is best to distinguish this modified version of self-positing by referring to it as self-choosing, against which self-positing, in the Fichtean sense, is experientially inadequate.

The Existential Self

I have suggested that the self is better understood (i.e., more consistently and intelligibly understood) as self-choosing or relational (a relation between subjectivity and objectivity) than it is substantively. It remains to be seen, however, whether this new articulation of the self is consistent enough with the general self-understandings of selfhood examined in the previous chapter. If the self-choosing self is radically different from the substantive self and if contemporary agents understand themselves in the latter way, then we encounter the same problem I tried to avoid earlier: namely, that a rejection of the language of agency to which we appeal in order to understand ourselves can be likened to self-incurred meaninglessness. In other words, if the self

is better understood as self-choosing, why maintain the language of the modern deep self? In order to answer this problem, I will examine the self-choosing self in more detail. By invoking the account of the self-choosing self as it has been developed by existential philosophers, I show that this version of the self meets the same requirements that the substantive notion of the self meets (i.e., it is independent, particular and committed), and thus works as a more consistent version of modern selfhood; it is more consistent because the self-choosing self is more intelligible than the substantive self and remains modern because it accommodates all three features of the modern self as well as, if not better than, the substantive self. What's more, because the existential self fulfills all three aspects unequivocally, it serves as a better and more consistent example of the modern self than do the examples Taylor himself appeals to in *Sources of the Self.* Not only is the self-choosing self more consistent than the substantive self on philosophical grounds, but it is more consistently modern, and accomplishes what the substantive self claims to accomplish with more success than the substantive self does. In other words, it is a better version of the self on the substantive self's own terms.

The logic of the existential version of self-choosing can perhaps best be captured in the famous Sartrian catch-phrase: 'existence precedes essence' (e.g., Sartre 1965, 35). What Sartre means by this is that one's self-definition and the concepts that can be appealed to in order to understand oneself cannot predate the self itself, nor can they be independent of the self's own self-activity and self-understanding. In other words, the essence, or whatness, of human being is defined and articulated by the actual lived existence, or thatness, of human beings; *being* is

defined by *beings* who *are*. More precisely, *being* is defined by beings in the *process* of being, by beings who *become*. Human beings are "essentially" essence makers who make themselves what and who they are. In good Fichtean spirit, the self comes to be by its own activity; it is made in the act of self-positing. Sartre summarizes his thesis as follows:

> [M]an (sic) exists, turns up, appears on the scene, and, only afterwards, defines himself. If man, as the existentialist conceives him, is indefinable, it is because at first he is nothing. Only afterward will he be something, and he himself will have made what he will be. ... Not only is man what he conceives himself to be, but he is also only what he wills himself to be after this thrust toward existence. ... Man is nothing else but *what he makes of himself. Such is the first principle of existentialism* (35-36; emphasis added).

Obviously, *what* I am is not entirely up to me. The potentials of my body notwithstanding, I cannot presently make myself into someone who can lift five-hundred pounds. I can certainly choose to become physically strong, a process that will take a great deal of time and effort, and which will only come about when and if I *choose* to improve the strength of my body, but while I train or contemplate training, I *am* presently a person who is incapable of lifting five-hundred pounds, whether I like it or not. I cannot make that different right here and right now. The *here* and *now* are important because they indicate the spatial and temporal locatedness of my-self as a self. While the *there* and *then* of my having been and my future being

are important, they are not adequate for isolating my-self; my past and my future are important for my-self's self-becoming (as we saw with Taylor, this temporality is necessary for us to define ourselves in terms of having come from somewhere and of going somewhere), but my-self, who I *am*, is primarily found in the present activity of choosing. However, that present activity is always a coming from a past and a projection into a future; it is always already situated. Who I am essentially cannot be located somewhere in the past, perhaps an immemorial past, nor in some ideal future to which I should aim. Rather, my-self is found in the present as a movement from the past and a projection into the future.

This has two consequences for the account of the self under consideration. First, this means that our self-choosing is limited. Human selves are finite and that finitude is the very condition of their *being* selves in the first place. The limits of self-choosing could be examined in some depth, but, immediately, it is obvious that there are some physical limits (like my current physical weakness), connected to what Sartre and Merleau-Ponty might call my facticity. Second, the selfness of the self, while informed by the factical world, is not factical, it is not purely and simply objective. As we saw above, Fichte (and Hegel) also noticed this aspect of the self and self-consciousness. Accordingly, the self is objective, but it is not an object. If the self is self-chosen, then whatever is particular about the self must be something self-chosen, or, as Kierkegaard (speaking as Anti-Climacus) says, the self is a self-relating relation, 'a relation that relates itself to itself or is the relation's relating itself to itself in the relation; the self is not the relation but is the relation's relating itself to itself', implying that the self is not an empirical thing (Kierkegaard 1980, 13-14).

When I refer to my self, I am referring to something more than my physical being. As we've seen, the physical locatedness of the human being is necessary both for a sense of agency and for the experience of that agent as a self. However, the self is not that physical locatedness. The location enables a self, it is not the self.

Furthermore, the *now* of selfhood suggests that the self-choosing self is an historically situated self. This self, which is factically located, is geographically and temporally located as well, whereby it inherits from the start a context of meanings from which it will be able to get along in the world. While I cannot make myself into something that flies on its own (given my factical limitations), neither can I make myself into something that is meaningless. An ancient Greek cannot make herself into a computer programmer any more than I can fly. "Computer programmer" is completely meaningless to the ancient Greek and thus does not present itself as something that can inform her self-choosing; it is not a live possibility for her self-conception. Again, following the argument above, we can say that the self is not its historical location. The location makes the self possible, but it is not ontologically equivalent to the self.

The self that emerges from this is a free self, a self that is unfreely located somewhere, but which must choose what it is concretely; it chooses the self it will be. This also brings with it a sense of responsibility for the choice. Since it is *I* who choose, the consequences of that choice are consequences *I*, my-self, have brought about. Furthermore, I am responsible in so far as I can *respond* through justification for that choice. If the choice is mine, I can, and sometimes must, provide some apology for the actions I undertake based on this choice and an apology for the being

(the self) I have become. In some sense, this latter version of responsibility as apology is the more important one for this account of a self. It is through apology that the self comes to be articulated. The self comes to be through its choices, but its selfhood is articulated in those instances when the self must account for itself, must justify itself. This is what Marcel refers to as testimony and which he thinks is the most profound of existential actions:

> My testimony bears on something independent from me and objectively real; it has therefore an essentially objective end. At the same time *it commits my entire being as a person who is answerable for my assertions after myself.* This tension between the inward commitment and the objective end seems to me *existential in the highest degree* (Marcel 1949, 95; emphasis added).

This brief invocation of responsibility and testimony already intimates to us the role the Other will play in the constitution of this self-choosing self. Before looking more closely at that, however, I will show how this version of the self as self-choosing matches with the three aspects of modern selfhood borrowed from Taylor.

The Existential Self as Modern Self: A. Independence

As we saw in the previous chapter, the modern self is independent in so far as it is responsible for arriving at its own self-certainty on which it can found truth. Similarly, the self-choosing self is an independent self. This is immediately

noticeable once we recognize the similarity between this version of the self and the Cartesian ego. The existential, self-choosing self *exists* because it does those things (including, but not restricted to, thinking) that are human *activities*. Indeed, Sartre's philosophy begins with the recognition of Cartesian subjectivity: 'I think; therefore, I exist' (Sartre 1965, 51). The similarity with Descartes is twofold. First, the self is a subjectivity that cannot be transcended; the human being is always already subjective, a being that is the locus of experience and of rational and deliberate activity (e.g., thought); as objective as the human being may be given its facticity, the human being is also subjective, and this subjectivity is essential to the selfhood of the self-choosing self. Second, the self is a radical *I*: *I* exist. What is discovered in this version of the self is not merely the structure or the conditions of human being, although this is certainly discovered. In addition, we notice that the self is something which is *I* and at all times *I*. The self is thus discovered as independent of otherness, including other selves. Whereas we are each of us subjects incapable of transcending our subjectivity, I am not you and you are not me, because only I am I.

There is, of course, an important dissimilarity with Descartes. Descartes' subjective I is not only independent. As we have seen, it is a substantive subject, it is a deep and inner self. The self-choosing self, however, is not substantive in this inner sense. Because the self is both subjective and objective, any abstraction from that is misleading and incorrect. The Cartesian deep self, as we saw, commits this sort of abstraction in one of two ways. On one reading, the Cartesian self is a pure subject, an essentially subjective self that happens to be attached to an inessential objective body from which it must distance itself in order to discover its self-certainty as the

foundation of truth and knowledge. In this case, we find a subjective and immaterial substance and only that; everything else is inessential. The objectivity of the self is lost or rendered inconsequential. On the other reading, the subjective substance is reified and becomes objective, as *res* cogitans. In this case the self is both subjective and objective, but in a way contrary to the notion of a self-choosing self. If we contend that the substance that is the essence of the self is an object of sorts, we are eliminating the essential dialectical relation between subject and object. On this reading the subject is an object, which is different from saying (as the proponents of the self-choosing self hold) that the self is simultaneously subjective and objective. As such, it makes no sense to talk about the self as an inner substance. Recalling Fichte, there is a substantive element here, but this substance is *subjective*; it *is* what the subject *does*. The self is both agent and product.

The aspect of independence is, once again, reminiscent of Marcel's notion of testimony. Marcel contrasts observation with testimony, taking the former to be an objective description of an objective state of affairs. As such, observation is purely objective, signaling a changeless phenomena. While my observation might be wrong (if for instance I witness a car accident and observe that there were two passengers in the car while in fact there were three passengers), that which I observe is not altered by my incorrect observation; the truth of the phenomena is independent of the failure or success of my observation. What's more, observation can take place in isolation. For example, the solitary observer in a lab is just as qualified to observe as a group may be. Finally, in so far as *one* observes, observation takes place from a neutral standpoint. *One* can observe the contents of a test tube just as well as *you* or *I*; in

other words, observation is indifferent to the particularity of the observer. In contrast, testimony is always subjective, personal and inter-subjective. It is always *I* who testifies, never *one*, and the testimony is always directed to and for another (another independent *I*). Take for instance the case of the car accident. One might observe the accident, describing the event objectively. This differs drastically from the bearing of witness to the accident. While the witness is expected to provide an observational description of the accident, the testimony itself depends on much more. The essential difference is that in testimony I must stake a claim, I commit myself to the truth of the description I offer, suggesting that it is *I* who can do so, and it might even be the case that only *I* can do so – if, for instance, I am the only witness to the accident. Furthermore, I only do so for another, a police officer for instance: "yes officer, I, Edvard Lorkovic, saw the accident, and assure that the description I give is as accurate as I can render." Of course, I may again be wrong in my description, and from an objective standpoint that matters (for legal and/or insurance reasons); however, my testimony is an adequate bearing of witness only so long as I have staked the claim for another, if I have put my-self on the line so to speak (see Marcel 1949, 91-103).

This account of commitment and staking a claim is essential for the self-choosing self, as will become more apparent when we examine the third feature of the self-choosing self as a modern self. For the time being, it suffices to remember that the independent I is responsible for itself, for its version of humanity. The independent self is self-responsible, because only it is what it is; the self makes itself up and so is responsible for what it comes to be. It is responsible for what it becomes

and what it says; it is responsible for its testimony in a way that does not hold for observation (since, again, *one* can observe just as well as I).

The Existential Self as Modern Self: B. Particularity

The sense of particularity inherent in the self as self-choosing can best be brought out if we consider the impulse of existential philosophy, if we consider the concrete problems with which these philosophers concerned themselves. In order to do this, I will turn to Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being.* In the novel, there is a scenario that models the worry of existentialists: the oppressiveness of totalizing philosophies and politics and the need to assert one's particularity as a separate, individual and *particular* self. Early in the novel, one of the main characters, Tereza, is tormented by a dream in which her unfaithful lover, Tomas, sits suspended over a pool of water, holding a gun. Around the pool march naked women, including Tereza, who are expected to do knee bends and sing on command. Whenever a command is not adequately fulfilled, Tomas indiscriminately shoots the guilty parader. While Tereza is certainly terrified of being shot by her lover, this worry is neither her first nor most important worry. First, Tereza is frightened by the dream's representation of sameness. For her, nudity is a display of sameness, of un-differentiation, 'a sign of concentration camp uniformity, a sign of humiliation' (Kundera 1984, 57). The naked women are indistinguishable, they are fundamentally identical; they are the same. As such, Tereza, as the particular self she takes herself to be, is erased in the dream because, in her nakedness, she is identical to the others.

We can call this the fear of Sameness. Second, Tereza is horrified because in the dream she is expected to sing. The fear does not arise from Tomas' order to do so, nor from his threat to shoot anyone who doesn't sing, but from the fact that the other women sing happily, they rejoice in their sameness, 'theirs was the joyful solidarity of the soulless' (57). Tereza sings along, but she does not rejoice. She sings because she fears that she will be killed by the other women if she doesn't join in. In this case, sameness is self-regulating, it does not and cannot tolerate difference, at least not the claim to difference from that which sameness considers same. Therefore, in order for Tereza to maintain what little particularity she has left (by not being killed!), she must erase that particularity by making herself even more same; she must appear to take pleasure in her loss of particularity and self in order to preserve what little particularity and self remain. We can call this the fear of the Loss of Self. Finally, Tereza is horrified not simply because the women are both same and glad to be same, but because their happiness is a celebration of their 'imminent demise', since they recognize that Tomas will shoot them. Because all the women are the same, they are completely interchangeable, and as such, their sameness is made 'absolute' (58). They are not at all concerned with dying, because for them, the death of one same woman does not matter. If they are identical, it matters little which instance of sameness exists and persists. Because she too is same, Tereza is completely expendable. As such, we can call this the fear of the Expendability of Sameness. All this comes to be even more horrifying because it is Tomas, her lover, the person who is supposed to help her maintain her particularity, the person to whom she has lovingly turned in order to escape the world where bodies are equal, who initiates this

march of sameness. However, what terrifies her is not Tomas' willingness to kill or make her expendable, but that even the person who might render her particular by recognizing her particularity *does not* do so, implying perhaps (most terrifyingly of all) that he *cannot* do so.

Kundera's episode suggests a critique of absolute Sameness analogous to the concern of many existential philosophers (and existential writers in general[7]), in particular Kierkegaard, who rejects Hegelian philosophy precisely on those grounds. According to the author of *Fear and Trembling*, Johannes de Silentio, the particular self is lost in the Hegelian System, and everything is rendered same. From the perspective of universal reason, particularity is characterized as ethically sinful because it is not universal and does not fit into the System; particularity is neither universal nor rational. The ethical goal of the universal individual is to eradicate his individuality, to surrender to the universal (Kierkegaard 1983, 54). It is for this reason that the Hegelian cannot understand faith, or rather, that the Hegelian mistakes faith and thus violates faith and particularity. Faith, for Silentio, is the mode of particularity: 'Faith is namely this paradox that the single individual is higher than the universal – yet, please note, in such a way that the movement repeats itself, so that after having been in the universal he as the single individual isolates himself as higher than the universal' (55). The philosophy of Sameness makes an error, both philosophically and ethically, because it makes invisible the particularity of the self. For Kierkegaard, the self is not really universal; it is a particular without a corresponding kind.

Perhaps more interesting is the implicit claim that totalitarianism is not always literal, but is always dangerous. Few people in a position, and with an inclination, to read and be interested by Kundera, Sartre, Jaspers, Marcel and others, would need much convincing that political totalitarianism is dangerous and evil. However, what they might not realize is that totalitarianism is not simply a kind of political state, but is a way of understanding the world, the human being and that being's place in the world.[8] Tereza's fears are like the fears of the person suffering at the hands of a totalitarian regime: her's are the fears of the concentration camp, of 'concentration camp uniformity' (57). According to this view, sameness is like a concentration camp, it is every bit as oppressive and destructive; it oppresses and destroys the particular self. An excellent example of this is the *Muselmann* of the Nazi concentration camps, who we will revisit in some detail in the following chapter. The *Muselmann* has lost his humanity through by being rendered indeterminately same. The oppressiveness of sameness is also wonderfully captured in Magritte's *Galconda* where the generic bowler wearing man in black falls in droves, signaling no distinction between the men (in spite of the slightly different details of each character). The oppressiveness of this image of a rain of men, where the men are indistinguishable and where the likely result is an enormous pool of identical and very dead people, should be evident.

Philosophically, Marcel makes this same point in *Man Against Mass Society* where he argues against materialism. Materialism, whatever form it takes (be it an economic, philosophical, scientific or practical materialism), treats the human being in purely objective terms, placing humans in their 'death throes' (see Marcel in

Solomon 1974, 125ff). What Marcel means by humans being in their 'death throes' is more than the view that it is now possible for humans to be eradicated (nuclear warfare would do the trick). Rather, this claim means that, conceptually, the humanness of humans is in danger; whether concrete biological human animals survive or not, the understanding of humans as humans is in jeopardy. For the materialist, a human is a thing, a thing that can be known and conceptually rendered without remainder, or, as Kierkegaard puts it, for this person 'everything has become necessity' (Kierkegaard 1980, 40). However, Marcel thinks that humans are fundamentally more than this (as I have argued herein), that humans, consistent with the general thesis of self-choosing, are subjective as well as objective and that any attempt to grasp the human in purely objective terms will always leave something out, much like Jaspers' (seemingly Kantian) view of human being and transcendence as some-things that cannot be conceptually rendered, yet are nevertheless not nothing:

> What we refer to in mythical terms as the soul and God, and in philosophical language as Existenz and transcendence, is not of this world. Neither one is knowable, in the sense of things in the world. Yet both might have another kind of being. They need not be nothing, even though they are not known. They could be objects of thought, if not of cognition (Jaspers in Solomon 1974, 135).

By accepting a materialistic account of human beings, we in effect accept to treat humans, including ourselves, as things, much like the prisoners in a

concentration camp. Primo Levi's account of a fellow Aushwitz prisoner is telling in this regard: 'He is Null Achtzehn. He is not called anything except that, Zero Eighteen, the last three figures of his entry number; as if everyone was aware that *only a man is worthy of a name, and that Null Achtzehn is no longer a man.* I think that even he has forgotten his name, certainly he acts as if this was so' (Levi 1993, 42; emphasis added). Due to his place in a totalitarian system, Zero Eighteen has become a number only, a thing. He has had his essential particularity eradicated.

The point here is not only that there is a moral problem with any political or conceptual configuration that elides the particularity of persons. Rather, there is an important philosophical claim being made here that uncovers an important aspect of the self-choosing self. The immorality of totalizing and eliminating particularity stems not from some independent order, from a divine morality, but from the essence of human beings as self-choosing, as simultaneously and essentially subjective *and* objective and responsible for the product of their self-choosing. While someone like Fichte might not recognize this and may be producing an all too universal system, this aspect of particularity is intrinsic to and implied by *finite* self-positing as the essence of situated human beings. If the self is self-choosing, then any articulation of the self which conceptualizes it as primarily an object, as some-thing which can be accounted for in objective terms only, has made a philosophical error, an error which unfortunately seems to have drastic and fatal political and moral consequences.

The Existential Self as Modern Self: C. Commitment

For the existentialists, the solution to the totalitarian threat lies in subjectivity and/or transcendence, and in either case, in the *commitment to one's own self.* For Marcel, we must turn to the transcendent, to 'a level of being, an order of spirit, which is also the level and order of grace, mercy and charity' (Marcel in Solomon 1974, 131). In turning to the transcendent we are turning to our own subjectivity, to our own conceptual indeterminacy. For Sartre, we must turn to subjectivity proper, which is itself transcendent in so far as it is always on the way, it is always becoming in that its being is to be constantly re-self-defining. In either case, whether the solution lies in that which is transcendent or in the subject's own transcending subjectivity, what we see is that the solution to the problem of materialism and/or totalitarianism is a (re)turn to the particularity of the self, and this (re)turn occurs in and through a commitment to that self.

If I am a self-choosing self, and if I reject the substantive view of the self and/or an account of the self as an instance of a human nature as the existential philosophers do, then I am responsible for the self that I have become, which is the result of my own doing or my own self-activity. As such, I am necessarily committed to that self in two ways. This first kind of commitment is a logical commitment, not unlike my commitment to 'B' once I have agreed with the premises '$A \supset B$' and 'A'. I am committed because I have, through my self-choosing, willed the self that I am, that I have become. Now certainly, I can make myself into a self that is ostensibly non-committed, if for instance, I choose to be the kind of person who does not make

commitments to others, or breaks those commitments when made. In this case, I might be a person who breaks promises or refuses to ever take a stand on moral and political issues, a person who defines himself and presents himself as essentially and deeply non-committed. Nonetheless, *I am logically committed to that non-commitment*; I am responsible for making myself the kind of person who does not commit himself because it is as such that I have chosen myself, much like the coward Sartre admonishes who is responsible for his own cowardice, for making himself into a coward, into someone who blames his nature, his environment or others for the kind of person he is. He can certainly do so. There is no ontological necessity precluding such self-choosing. However, the self that this person has become is something he has brought about and something to which he is committed: 'But when the existentialist writes about a coward, he says that this coward is responsible for his cowardice'; in other words, 'he has made himself a coward by his acts' and as a result, 'is defined on the basis of the acts he performs' (Sartre 1965, 49).

What's more, by making myself into a non-committed person, a self to which I am nonetheless committed, I make myself inconsistently. Ethically speaking, the truly consistent kind of self I can be is an ostensibly committed self, since I am committed to the self I become regardless of my moral stance on the question of commitment. Because non-commitment contradicts its own commitment to non-commitment, I *should* commit to commitment rather than non-commitment. This is the second kind of commitment. Because I am logically committed to the self I have become, whether I like it or not, I should morally commit myself to that self, as the

independent and particular self it is, and strive to make that self consistently and in such a way that I can justify it.

This signals the famous distinction between an authentic and inauthentic self. The inauthentic self is the self that is not self enough, it is the human agent who either has not attained sufficient subjectivity or hasn't understood her essential objectivity, and so has not yet attained her self. On the other hand, the authentic self is the self proper, the self that has gotten being a self right, which has attained its own selfhood. The particular self-choosing self that makes itself into a self that ostensibly rejects this is essentially inauthentic, it is guilty of a conceptual contradiction: it makes itself into a self that conflicts with its very activity of self-choosing, much like the person committed to non-commitment.

Before the Other: Kierkegaardian Self-Choosing

Thus far we have arrived at two conclusions in this chapter. First, the self is more consistently understood as self-choosing than it is as an inner substance. Second, while the conception of the self as self-choosing conflicts with the self as substance, these two conceptions of the self are not so radically different. In both cases we are referring to a sense of agency that is articulated in the language of selfhood, as independent, particular and committed. Because the account of the self as self-choosing both improves and preserves the language of selfhood, it is the right account of the self to use in our phenomenology of self. What remains to be done in

this chapter is to create a bridge with the next chapter's thesis that the self is the Other. What I will now show is that the conception of the self as self-choosing, as an independent, particular and committed self-activity, includes as one of its essential situating limits the presence of others. In other words, self-choosing occurs *before the Other*, meaning that self-choosing always occurs in relation to others and is established by something other than it, by the Other who calls on the self to be a self. In order to establish this bridge I will turn my attention to an examination of Kierkegaard.

The first section of the main body of *the Sickness Unto Death* provides the most explicit statement of the self anywhere in Kierkegaard's oeuvre. Writes Kierkegaard (as Anti-Climacus):

> The human being is spirit. But what is spirit? Spirit is the self. But what is the self? The self is a relation that relates itself to itself or is the relation's relating itself to itself in the relation; the self is not the relation but is the relation's relating itself to itself. A human being is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity, in short, a synthesis. A synthesis is a relation between two. Considered in this way, a human being is still not a self (Kierkegaard 1980, 13).

While this opening may be read as a Hegelian joke, adopting an ambiguous dialectical language in order to show that Hegelian dialectics are ultimately unintelligible, this interpretation is implausible when considered against the

earnestness of Anti-Climacus' attempt at edification and the remainder of the text. It is worth noting the subtitle of this text. *The Sickness Unto Death* is also *A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening.* Unlike most of his other pseudonymous texts that were strictly aesthetic and indirect communications meant to convince bad Christians that they are not Christian enough, this text is the first pseudonymous text that ostensibly tries to upbuild, tries to say something substantive about being a Christian and about faith. This is also signaled by Kierkegaard's own admission that, while Johannes Climacus, the pseudonym who originally stated the problem of coming to be Christian as opposed to being Christian as a matter of course (e.g., Kierkegaard 1962, 13), is a lower character than Kierkegaard himself, Anti-Climacus (*ante-before-prior to*-Climacus) is higher, is more Christian than Kierkegaard, he is 'Christian on an extraordinarily high level' (Kierkegaard 1991, 280). What's more, the entire text works out the version of the self that is here stated. While Kierkegaard may intend the reader to think of Hegel, silently laughing at Hegel's opacity as she tries to decipher Kierkegaard's difficult passage, we must take seriously the version of the self Kierkegaard tries to display here. It is only if we read this earnestly that the rest of *the Sickness Unto Death* is at all intelligible as a 'Christian Psychological Exposition *for Upbuilding and Awakening*'.

This passage articulates a version of the self-choosing self. As we have seen already, the self is not a thing or substance to which one can point. Rather, the self is the activity of choosing oneself. What we now see is that this activity of self-choosing is a relation; thus, the self is essentially relational. This relation is not simply the relation between two independent terms, but is a relation of two terms that

are mutually implicated, which *are* only in so far as they are related, and where the relation *is* only in so far as the terms are related. This means that the self is a synthesis of these mutually implicating terms: 'A human being is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity, in short, a synthesis'. However, it is not established synthetically as a matter of course: 'Considered in this way, a human being is still not a self'. By this Kierkegaard's pseudonym means that coming to be a self, as a synthetic relation, is something that comes about through some activity of the synthetic relational self: namely, through self-choosing and by relating itself to itself. An already established synthesis would remain a substantive version of the self.

Accordingly, this relation is radically reflexive in the way that self-consciousness is. Self-consciousness is a consciousness of consciousness. As such, the object of self-consciousness is both the external world of which consciousness is conscious and that consciousness itself, which is the self-consciousness as well. As Hegel puts it: 'Consciousness, as self-consciousness, henceforth has a double object: one of these is the immediate object which is the object of sense-certainty and perception ...; the other object is self-consciousness *itself*' (Hegel in Rauch and Sherman 1999, 15). Self-consciousness is its own object and the subject of consciousness. This self-consciousness, however, must equally be able to be conscious of its own self-consciousness in order to be conscious of its own self-activity. Self-consciousness implies further and deeper self-consciousness, where the self-conscious being can be aware of being aware of being aware, etc. Similarly, the self is not just a relation between itself as object and itself as subject. It is a relation

that relates constantly and simultaneously to its own relatedness; it is not just that the self relates to itself, but that *the self is the relation* to itself.

In order to maintain that the self is a relation that relates to itself, the self cannot just be a synthesis of terms. It is not, in other words, a negative unity where the relation of two terms is established by a third term. The self is not the already established third term that synthesizes the two poles of the relation (e.g., eternity and temporality, or, to use the language we have adopted, subjectivity and objectivity). The self is synthetic, but in a positive sense. The relational self is a positive unity intrinsic to the mutual implication and relatedness of the terms; the synthetic unity *is* the relation relating itself to itself. In other words, the self *is* the actual relatedness of the terms in question. The self does not simply relate to itself (or to other things like the world); the self itself is a relation, not a thing or substance that happens to also relate. The Cartesian ego can likely relate, but it is not relational. For example, that the ego relates to the natural world in and through its appropriative knowing of the world shows only that the ego is capable of relating to something that is not identical to it. The self-choosing self, on the other hand, is relational in so far as it is essentially a relation, not a thing. It very mode of *being* is relational. This is meant to show that the self-choosing or relational self is essentially dialectical; the self *is* the dialectical relation between the maker and the product being made. As Emil Fackenheim, echoing Kierkegaard, puts it:

> Human being must be understood as something more than a mere product, and yet as something less than self-choosing.[9] Instead of a self-constituting, it

> must rather be the accepting or choosing of something already constituted, and yet also not constituted, because the accepting or choosing is part of the essence. Thus ... we have come upon a dialectical relation between the situating and the situated. ... [T]his dialectic focuses on the relation between the self *qua* accepted and the self *qua* accepting, or between the self that is chosen and the self that does the choosing (Fackenheim 1961, 83).

A relation that relates to itself in this way can be constituted in one of two ways: it is either established by itself or by something else. If the former, then the relation is self-inventing, it is the source of its own being. Such a being is God (or at least god-like). This is Fichte's absolute self-positing self. However, as we have seen, this is not a plausible, or even an intelligible, version of finite and situated human being. Humans do indeed choose themselves within the context already given to them, but they cannot invent themselves *ex nihilo*, they cannot invent the situations in which they choose themselves or the positive limits that make self-choice possible. Even if solipsism is conceptually possible (although I will later argue that it is not), it is experientially nonsensical. Human experience, as it is lived by finite situated humans in the world, never inclines one to solipsism, never inclines humans to think that they somehow invented themselves and the world (i.e., both objects of self-consciousness).

As such, the only other option is that the self that is its own relating to itself is established by something else, by something other. The self cannot invent itself out of nothing, but must be established by something other than it, by a situating limit

without which the self cannot come to be in the first place The self one chooses is there to be chosen, and what establishes it as something to be chosen is something other than the self. However, this cannot be a pure creation. To be established by something other is different from being created or invented by something other. The latter implies that what is created is created ready-made. This would, once again, slip us back into a substantive version of the self. Rather, that the self is established by something other means that something other than the self initiates the self-choosing process by which the self comes to be a self. The self, as a relation that is its relating itself to itself, is *occasioned* by something other than it.

The otherness that establishes the self-choosing self cannot be entirely other; it must somehow lose some otherness by entering into a relation with the relational self, which it has established; in being a situating limit, this otherness enters into a relation with the self. The self-choosing and relational self is also in a relation with the constitutive limits of its own possibility. Again, Fackenheim makes a similar point: 'The situation which situates self-choosing must be other than it; and it must yet enter into its ontological constitution, thus losing some of its otherness' (Fackenheim 1961, 45). What this means is that the self-choosing self is a relation that is established by something other with which the self also relates, a relation that is essential to the self being a self at all. For Kierkegaard that Other is God; however, as we will see in the following chapter, the Other is not only (or necessarily) God. The self-choosing self is established (but not produced ready-made) by the Other with whom it relates.

While I explore this issue in detail in the next chapter, it is worth briefly considering what it is that occasions this coming to be a self through self-choice and what the nature of the relation between the self and its limit (the Other) is. The synthetic self is, according to Kierkegaard, the authentic, religious self that chooses itself before God and in faith. He thinks that it is only through faith that the self can truly be synthetic and relational. As such, a helpful way to think about this self is to consider Kierkegaard's famous description of one such self: Abraham, the knight of faith (Kierkegaard 1983; see also *Genesis* 22). Abraham comes to be a knight of faith by being called by God to sacrifice his son, whereby he sacrifices ethical obligation in favour of an 'absolute duty to God' (see Kierkegaard 1983, 68-81), to the calling Other. Abraham comes to be an authentic self, a truly synthetic relational self by choosing to be so (he could, after all, have chosen to not sacrifice Isaac, or to pretend to not hear God's voice), but this choice is occasioned by God's call. Abraham does not (and likely cannot) do this on his own. He must be called on by God. Of course, *only he* can answer this particular call; no one else can bear the burden of his absolute duty to God. Nonetheless, Abraham's answer required that he be called by something other, by God. The possibility of his being a truly synthetic self is thus conditioned by God's call, by the Other who has priority over the self. The relation between Abraham and God can be characterized as a relationship of call and response. God calls on Abraham to assume an absolute duty to Him, and Abraham must respond, he must accept a total obligation to God as the absolute Other. It is only in doing this that Abraham comes to be a fully synthetic self-choosing self. Coming to be a self, in this case, depends on being called on to be a self and choosing oneself on the

occasion of this call. This last issue occupies the central theme of the following chapter.

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[1] By "ontology of otherness" I do not mean an account of how the Other comes to be. Rather, I intend by this an account of how the self comes to be in relation to and on the occasion of the Other.
[2] It is significant that Fichte aims to *discover* the principle rather than construct it. This is so because the principle is already there at work and needs only to be located, extracted and explicated.
[3] We merely need to recall Descartes' admission that he has come to realize that much he took to be true was in fact error, and note the part this plays in situating his attempt to secure certainty, in order to notice the skeptical impulse of his inquiry: 'several years have now passed since I first realized how numerous were the false opinions that in my youth I had taken to be true, and thus how doubtful were all those that I had subsequently built upon them. And thus I realized that once in my life I had to raze everything to the ground and begin again from the original foundations, if I wanted to establish anything firm and lasting in the sciences' (Descartes 2000, 104).
[4] This is another way of articulating the error, discussed in the previous chapter, of providing a materialistic or scientific account of agency. These accounts mistake the activity of consciousness or selfhood as a fact of the empirical world.
[5] That there is no need for such justification or further grounding, does not of course mean that such justification is not possible. As Fichte shows, a further grounding is both possible and necessary, and it is this grounding that he seeks to locate in his study. However, that justification is not needed as a way of *proving* the truth of the proposition. Recall, Fichte's starting point is *not* skeptical, and as such, 'A is A' does not require a further justification for it to be accepted as true; we already "know" it to be true in the empirical world, even if we do not yet know what makes it true or secures its truth.
[6] While the choice of self is *not unlike* the choices we make every day, these are not identical. The choice of self is a choice that is always already being made, whereas the choices I make on a daily basis are contextual and limited to particular circumstances.
[7] Without examining in any detail the way literature can and has made this critique of sameness, it might be worthwhile to recall the great critic of systemic rationality, Franz Kafka. For Kafka, the bureaucratic system, as the epitome of reason, is both absurd in its systematicity and obscures or annihilates the self. A couple of examples should suffice to support this claim. *The Trial*'s Joseph K is an everyman who is no man (he doesn't even have a name), a perfect representative of the rational system who cannot really tell his life story because he is being tried for an unknown crime for which he cannot be excused. Similarly, *The Metamorphosis*' Gregor Samsa is so obscured by his bureaucratic and rational life that he is literally transformed (into an insect no less!); reason has annihilated his self and replaced it with an unrecognizable shell (see, Kafka 1998; 1971, 89-139).
[8] We will have occasion to see how Levinas agrees with this in the following chapter, but I resist including him here lest I am read as considering Levinas, as his good friend Jean Wahl mistakenly did, as an existential philosopher.
[9] Fackenheim's use of "self-choosing" in this context suggests that he intends by this what I have intended by the use of "self-positing", namely a kind of self-invention *ex nihilo*.

4

MY-SELF AS MY-OTHER

The oneself cannot form itself; it is already formed with absolute passivity.
-Emmanuel Levinas

I am you, when I am I
-Paul Celan

In the previous chapter, I defended a version of the self as self-constituting in the sense of a situated self-choosing that exists as such in a dialectical relation with situating limits, including some form of otherness that establishes the self in the first place in this relation. In this chapter, I develop this understanding, focusing in particular on the relationship between selves and others, in such a away as to bring out how in its self-choosing the self is co-constituted by its other. Most philosophies that take this relationship seriously take one of two tacts. Either they urge the self to recognize the other, granting the other certain privileges or rights that may be otherwise lacking though deserved (e.g., autonomy, respect), or they insist on a more personal relationship where the other calls on the self, demanding an immediate and personal response. The former approach is taken by theorists of difference and recognition (e.g., Iris Young, Charles Taylor) who insist that difference (primarily moral and cultural) must be attended to in order to ensure an equal and vibrant political and ethical world. The latter approach, implied in Kierkegaard's defense of the particularity of the individual and prefaced by Buber's dialogical philosophy, is taken up and developed by Emmanuel Levinas, who makes the compelling claim that selves are articulated as such in

relation to the Other (*autrui*) who remains separate and radically other (*autre*)[1]. While it may be the case, as Alain Badiou argues, that the ethics or politics of difference and of recognition owe much to Levinas, whether acknowledged or not, it is undoubtedly correct that, as Badiou also puts it, the philosophers of difference and of recognition are 'strikingly distant from Lévinas's actual conception of things' (Badiou 2001, 20). Whether there is an unavowed debt or not, I will demonstrate this 'striking distance' and argue in favor of Levinas' account, showing it to be a more convincing articulation of the self-other relation. However, this defense will bring with it an "opening up" of Levinas' position. I will suggest that the Levinasian view – a radical ethics stemming from the face-to-face encounter between the always separated self and Other – should be further radicalized to give the Other more than ethical or ontological priority. The Other is neither merely higher nor is it before; the self is not merely articulated in relation to Others, the self *is* Others. In other words, there is a sense in which I am both *my-self* and *my-Other*.

In order to defend and develop this version of the self as Other, I will begin by considering an approach to the Other that fails to account for the alterity of the other person. I will examine Iris Young's ontology from *Justice and the Politics of Difference* in order to show, first, that her account of the self and Other (and, by implication, the accounts of other similar theorists of difference) is inadequate, that it mistakes social consequences for ontological origins, and second, that Levinas' version of the self-Other relation does not fall prey to the same problems. For Levinas the relationship between the self and

the Other is not simply an ethical problem, it is both ethical and metaphysical, because the origins of the self *are* ethical. Once I have developed and defended an interpretation of Levinas' version of the self, I will suggest a modification to this account, which I take to be implied by and gestured towards in Levinas' account from *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence*. By adopting a turn of phrase from Jean-Luc Nancy, I will argue that the self is simultaneously singular (my-self) and plural (my-Other). I will end this examination by indicating how this version of the singular and plural self should not be confused with psychoanalytic versions that may ostensibly be similar.

The Politics of Difference

Although I will shortly take exception to Young's version of the self and its relation to others, I will begin by presenting a sympathetic account of her view in her own terms. Doing so will help highlight the strength of the Levinasian version of the self to which I will turn in this chapter.

Arguing against contractarian models of group formation that elide groups and associations by taking groups to be formed by individual atoms contracting together to form collectives, Iris Young, in *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, urges that groups are prior to individuals. Against the atomist social ontology prominent in the liberal philosophical tradition, which maintains that the *being* of a group is constituted by the coming together and mutual agreement of individual *beings*, or worse, that the *being* of a group is constituted by the arbitrary coincidence of some

contingent set of characteristics among individual *beings* (e.g., skin pigmentation or genitalia), Young defends a view that gives ontological priority, if not always ethical and political priority, to groups: the *beings* who make up a group depend on the prior *being* of their group, not vice versa. In other words, groups pre-exist individuals. 'Groups,' she writes, 'constitute individuals. A person's particular sense of history, affinity, and separateness, even the person's mode of reasoning, evaluating, and expressing feeling, are constituted partly by her or his group affinities' (Young 1990, 45). As such, a person's experience of the world and identity is informed and formed by their prior determination as a member of some social group. In contrast to the associational model she criticizes, even the willingness and desire to form associations and make contracts is so (in)formed.

It does not follow from this social ontology, however, that individuals are completely determined and fettered by their group membership. In spite of the ontological priority of groups, individual persons remain free to modify their mode of membership or even change membership altogether. Young insists that her account 'does not mean that persons have no independent styles, or are unable to transcend or reject group identity. Nor does it preclude persons from having many aspects that are independent of these group identities' (1990, 45). An individual human being is more than an instance of a group. Important aspects of a person's identity can have little (if anything) to do with group membership. For example, certain activities vital to a person's well-being can be understood independently from their group membership, as my playing a musical instrument ostensibly has nothing to do with being a man (although my playing an electric guitar likely does). Nonetheless, independent being

is always understandable in virtue of that being's membership in a group. A human being is more than an instance of a group, yet is always and already such an instance as well; their independent styles and challenges to group identity always follow from their deeper and prior group identity. Young invokes Heidegger's notion of "thrownness" in order to describe this aspect of social groups, suggesting that we experience our membership in a group as though we always already are members of the group(s) to which we belong. Even when we change group affiliation we do so from the context of having been part of the original group. Our personal identity presupposes some form of group membership however mutable the membership may be. Furthermore, those aspects of a person's identity that are independent of group membership do not show that the person is not also a member of some group. Group membership may not exclusively form persons, but it is nonetheless vital and necessary. While human beings are not *only* members of some group(s), they *are* always already members.

Although Young's account runs against a strong individualist tradition of thought coextensive with the individualist social ontology of liberal politics, her position has the strength of cohering with that same tradition once put under critical scrutiny. Though I may think of myself as wonderfully independent and a radical individual, only a little reflection will show that this independence is socially granted and (at least) in good part arbitrary. In other words, I had little to do with securing a space for myself in which I could be independent. Had I been born in poverty, I would lack the political and economic independence that I presently enjoy, or, had I been born in a rural or peasant environment, I would likely have a stronger sense of

community and communal selfhood against which my independent selfhood would be secondary; both the homeless man and my peasant class immigrant parents have a very different sense of independent selfhood than I do. Even if philosophical reasons could be provided to defend the prescriptive view that independent selfhood is better than non-independent selfhood, there can be little doubt that the possibility of living out a life in that way is conditioned socially. As Young puts it, borrowing from post-structuralism, 'the self is a product of social processes, not their origin' (45).

Young's version of the self's social constitution correctly signals the important constitutive role of others in the process of coming to be a self. As we have seen, the self is not made in isolation, but comes to be a self by choosing itself in a limiting situation and among others. However, this version of the self continues to be substantive. Unlike the Cartesian ego, Young's self is not already established on its own as a thinking thing, nor is it a self abstracted from its concrete existence; yet like the Cartesian ego its selfhood does not originate in self-positing or self-choosing, but is a self "posited" by its group. While this self is in some sense *made*, it is *not self-made*. As such, this version of the self is ultimately objective; the self is a social object, a thing determined and established by a group, and so, neither a synthesis of subject and object nor a relation.

Young's self is an instance of a group, not a self-choosing process. In her defense, Young does not think that a self is only an instance of a group. A self is more; it can both have independent styles and negotiate the terms of group membership. Nonetheless, each particular person is always already an instance of the preceding group, however mutable that may be. Selfhood in general can be

articulated in those terms as well. According to Young, selfhood is always ontologically preceded by grouphood; in other words, the self is always an instantiation of a kind (i.e., a group). Groups, therefore, are quasi-universals, while selves are the particular instantiations of this universal. While this universal is, in Young's case, clearly historical, it continues to precede the particular, both ontologically and logically. This is much like Descartes version of the ego, whereby each particular person is an instance of the *res cogitans*, or like versions of human nature that claim that each person is an instance of a pre-established general human nature. If that is the case, then we have lost the particularity established following through the logic of self-choosing.

In opposition to Young, we should maintain that selves are not instances of a group, but are instances *in* a group[2]. Selves are formed (which means that they are self-chosen in a limiting situation that includes others) *within* social relations, not *by* social relations. Selves are particular and come to identify themselves through their interactions with others, other members of their groups and members of other groups. My identity is not just given by my group, it is articulated and *made* within the boundaries of that group. As Taylor argues, we become ourselves by entering a dialogue with others: 'We become full human agents, capable of understanding ourselves, and hence of defining our identity, through our acquisition of rich human languages of expression. ... But we learn these modes of expression through exchanges with others' (Taylor in Gutmann 1994, 32). A self is always a self in dialogue with others, as such, it comes to be a self in a situation with others; it is not determined by that situation. Turning to Emmanuel Levinas, we will now see how

we can avoid a substantive account of the self while elucidating the importance of other people, as a formative and situating limit, in this process of self-choosing.

Levinas' Radical Ethics

If Levinas' philosophy were summarized, at least two claims would have to be highlighted: (1) contrary to the entire tradition of philosophy as an ontological subsuming of otherness under sameness, the self is radically separate from, yet related to and founded by, the Other; and (2) this founding ethical relation between a self and an Other is a necessary responsibility to and for the Other. Although Levinas' project is expressly anti-ontological in his insistence that ontology is the philosophy of Sameness and thus does violence to the primordial ethical relation between self and Other, the first of Levinas' claims speaks from an ontological dimension, broadly construed, whereas the latter is ethical.

The first claim (1) has to do with what a self *is* and how it is constituted. I certainly do not intend to discount Levinas' critique of ontology as a philosophy of Sameness. Nonetheless, it is important to stress that this critique is itself concerned with being, with the mode of being of the self who faces the Other. While he later admits that his earlier work tended to use an all-too-ontological language[3], Levinas' methodological comments in *Time and the Other* indicate that his project is *in some sense* (yet not in *every sense*) ontological:

> The analyses I am about to undertake will not be anthropological but ontological. I do believe in the existence of ontological problems and structures, but not in the sense that realists – purely and simply describing given being – ascribe to ontology. It is a matter of affirming that *being* is not an empty notion, that it has its own dialectic (Levinas 1987, 39).

The second claim (2) concerns what that self *ought* to do given its ontological make-up or selfhood, or more precisely, it suggests that the self's selfhood is constituted ethically. It must be noted, however, that this prescription is not the kind of claim we are accustomed to in the history of ethics. Levinas does not offer rules for ethical behavior or basic ethical principles on the basis of which we might evaluate actions and actors. Instead, his ethics seeks to understand the meaning of ethics, the meaning of ethical relation and ethical prescription. In doing so, his view is prescriptive in so far as it gestures towards goodness and the ethical relation as the ground of human being, and so provides some criteria by which to check whether one's being in the world, one's ethos, is adequately ethical/moral, yet it is always also descriptive in so far as it describes the self as a being constituted by an ethical encounter.

These two moments, however, cannot be so easily separated: the description is one that is explicitly ethical in so far as the being of a self is an ethical "being", in so far as it comes to *be* in and through an ethical encounter with an Other, while the prescription is informed by the former description. Nonetheless, and in spite of Levinas' resistance of the language of ontology and rejection of programmatic ethics

as being too ontological, it will be helpful to keep to this initial summary division and refer to the two dimensions as "ontological" and "ethical". It is with the first "ontological" dimension that I am primarily concerned in this chapter, while the "ethical" will take the fore in the next. I do this in order to follow the logic of this project as an attempt to, first, lay out a phenomenology of the being of the self and, second, to examine the ethical implications of this. This sequence should in no way be read as suggesting that the ontological comes first in Levinas. He is very clear in this regard, it is on the basis of the ethical that the self comes to be in the first place: the ethical comes first.

Levinas: 1. Self-identity and otherness

In *Totality and Infinity* Levinas tells a story that is intended to account for the worldly experience of human beings as beings in relation to other similar beings. Levinas thinks that this experience roots the tradition of philosophy, but that the same tradition also implicitly masks this experience. This relation is the face-to-face encounter between a self and an Other (a human other, not an other thing; "*autrui*", which is absolutely "*autre*", not just any "*autre*"). There is a sense in which this ethical relation is at the root of the metaphysical relation. Metaphysics has sought, and continues to seek, that which is out of reach; it seeks the beyond, the invisible. The metaphysician finds himself in this world, but seeks something outside that world, because 'the true life is absent'; through metaphysics, the metaphysician is related to that which is absolutely other (Levinas 1969, 33). The Platonic Socrates'

preparation for death and the whole tradition of Christian piety indicate this sense of metaphysics; Socrates loves and aims at that which is beyond this world, which makes up the really real against which this world is but appearance, while the pious Christian lives for the after-life, when and where the sinfulness of this world will be redeemed.

This relation between the metaphysician and the metaphysical, which is an aiming at and a striving for the absolutely other, does not signal a need: the metaphysician does not need the metaphysical. Rather, metaphysics is characterized by Desire, a desire that is never fulfilled but overflows itself and accomplishes itself in this overflowing: Socrates does not have the forms in hand (not that the forms could be "in hand" as an object could), he seeks them, never getting at them (perhaps he gets at them before and after his lifetime, but during he only has access to a trace - is not the Divided Line literally a trace? - of the forms). Similarly, the self does not need the Other s/he faces, does not use that Other as a tool or object of enjoyment. Rather, the self desires the Other, desires the Other's presence as Other, and so, desires the relation itself. Ethics is metaphysics, and both result from a primordial Desire for otherness.

Levinas' story begins with an account of the self in its egoism, in its isolation and particularity in a foreign world, which is, nonetheless, open to the self's enjoyment. The I of this egoism is placed in a world made up of external things, it is faced with otherness. That otherness, as otherness, is necessarily different from the I, and so the I is differentiated by this confrontation. Much like Hegel's version of identity as the negation of negation, for Levinas the I is articulated as such as a result

of the negation of otherness, as not-I (i.e., I = not other; other = not-I; I = not not-I). As such, the confrontation between the ego and otherness does not challenge the ipseity of the I. Rather, this otherness is both the occasion for the ego's self-identification and comes to be at the I's disposal. The objective and external world is a world that the I can and does enjoy; it is a world the self can use, appropriate and take up for its pleasure and ultimate sustenance. Sustenance, however, does not bespeak a need pure and simple. Sustenance is metaphysical and ethical in nature, not just biological. A human being does not need food in the way that a vehicle needs fuel. Certainly, as an embodied being, a human being needs food for its maintenance, but this is not the essential experience of eating. Food is needed, but it is also fundamentally enjoyed.

When considered phenomenologically, the possibility of over-eating seems to prove that even the most basic human needs are not simply needs. An overindulgence in food or drink may be construed as an attempt to fulfill a need for food and drink that fails, since it over-fulfills the need. As a result, the needfulness of the need is compromised; I can damage my overall health by overeating, and more immediately, I can make myself temporarily uncomfortable. Why, then, would I over-eat? If eating merely fulfilled a need, my failure to eat the "right" amount would show that I had not yet determined what the "right" amount was. Yet, when I overeat, I can hardly say that I have made a calculative mistake; I know that the amount I am eating is too much, if not the first time, at least at some point. If I have made any mistake it was in preferring some form of enjoyment immediately, which I would later come to regret. However, even this last possibility suggests a naiveté

about the experience of overeating, and in any case focuses on the element of desire and enjoyment I have signaled. Overeating (and perhaps overdrinking is a more apt example) is usually done with full knowledge of the repercussions, with knowledge that what is being done is not aimed at fulfilling a need, but at fulfilling a desire that can never be entirely fulfilled. One over-eats, not because it is needful, but because it is enjoyable (at least temporarily).[4]

The enjoyment gained through this confrontation between the ego and the objects of the world is not so easily accomplished. Although the objects of the world are ultimately appropriated and enjoyed, this enjoyment is always tenuous, always challenged, and in constant need of *re*-appropriation. Appropriation is not accomplished once and for all, but must perpetually be secured anew; the objects of the world are at hand, but not always in hand, and so must be perpetually hand-ed and re-hand-ed. This requirement signals the presence of concern in light of future uncertainty, or, what Levinas calls 'concern for the morrow' (Levinas 1969, 143-144). The self, thus, finds itself in an essentially equivocal relationship with otherness: the self is both independent of otherness and can use it to its advantage and enjoyment, but this independence also implies a dependence; the self depends on this otherness for its enjoyment and for its very being. The self is not a self without this confrontation and equivocal relation between itself and otherness.

The self in a world of other things, depending on otherness for its selfness, nonetheless seeks to bring that otherness into itself, thus making the other Same. By appropriating and using things for his/her enjoyment, the self brings those things into itself by giving them a meaning. Enjoyment is a way of being and a sensation, a

knowing or grasping of the object of enjoyment, whereby the distant object is absorbed by the enjoying subject (see Levinas 1987, 63). The foreign world, essentially other and strange, is made into the self's home in and through enjoyment. This enjoyment gives to this neutral world a meaning for the self. For example, that thing, which is other and can be enjoyed and grasped, comes to be an apple (i.e., comes to have some conceptual make-up and meaning for me) as I appropriate and enjoy it. The world is the self's home, it is the condition of the subject's selfhood, and this home (the otherness) becomes, in some sense, the self itself (it becomes Same) because it is conceptually determined by the self.

Levinas: 2. The Interruption by the Other

While dwelling in this home, however, there is something (which turns out to be some*one*) that cannot be used and appropriated as the other things are, which cannot be known or enjoyed, which reveals itself rather than being present and at hand, waiting for the self to give it meaning. This other (*autre*) is the Other (*autrui*), the human other, who presents herself, through expression, as a face. We might think of the Old Testament's creation myth here. Adam has the job of naming everything in the garden, thereby giving all the objective otherness a meaning, yet he does not, *and cannot*, name God (or himself for that matter) because God's presence is meaning itself, it cannot be given meaning by Adam's appropriation of otherness (see *Genesis* 2:19-20).

The Other presents itself with a face that speaks; its addresses the self, demanding a response from the self. The Other approaches the self, arriving face-to-face with the self. As such, the otherness of the face is qualitatively different from the otherness of the world that has been confronted and appropriated. As a face, the Other, unlike the other, is meaning unto itself; expression is meaningful without prior conceptual determination. If it were possible for me to conceptually determine the Other's expression prior to the manifestation of the face and its expression, then that expression would not ex-press at all; it would simply fulfil my own conceptualization, being a manifestation of something already fitting my understanding, something that already has a place in my concepts, like the child's game where differently shaped objects are placed in the appropriate holes on a board. However, this does not adequately demonstrate the experience of the face-to-face. The face is not an object to be fitted. The expression of the face is completely new, which is why Levinas speaks of the Other as coming from the future, as essentially and absolutely *surprising*, because both the future and the Other cannot be grasped, they come from "beyond" (see Levinas 1987, 74-77, 79). The face is shocking in that it challenges and breaks up the prior conceptual determinations I might have brought to the encounter, and it does so because its presence is an ethical calling. The Other's expression is freestanding. In short, the face resists me and my conceptualization of it.

This does not mean that the face merely resists my prior conceptual determinations of it. Rather, it entirely resists my ability to conceptually render it. As Levinas famously puts it, it arrests my ability to be able or my power to have

power (see Levinas 1987, 74, 81-84).[5] The face doesn't merely resist me in so far as it at times disagrees with what I want from it, and seeks to physically resist me. This kind of resistance is the resistance of objects that can be appropriated, but are out of reach: for instance, when some thing (say a fruit) is at hand but cannot be in hand. More radical than this resistance is the resistance of an unappropriateable Other. The face resists in so far as I *cannot* determine it because I lack the power or ability to do so; it brings with it its own meaning. In other words, the face is not simply not in hand or unreachable, it essentially cannot be grasped or taken in hand, and so, resists the logic of reaching altogether. To use a more epistemological language we can say that, while things can be unknown yet as things are in principle knowable, the Other is in principle and essentially *un*-know-*able*.

The expressing face confronts me, it speaks, and so, it demands a response. This demand shows the Other's superiority over the self, its ethical height in relation to the self. The Other commands the self, showing the face to face relation to be essentially asymmetrical. While this notion of height and superiority will come to be more important as we examine the ethical dimension of Levinas' work, this asymmetry also shows the essential radical separation that remains between the self and the Other as a result of this original ethical encounter and asymmetry. There is an unbridgeable distance between the self and the Other. This Other, in its expression, remains absolutely separate, cannot (can never!) be appropriated and brought under Sameness. The Other remains radically other, radically separate. The Other *is* radical alterity. However, by referring to the absolute alterity of the Other Levinas does not intend an absolute alterity so removed from the self that it cannot be

witnessed, and so, not experienced, in some sense. If by experience we mean a perceptual coming to conceptually grasp something, then the Other cannot be experienced, and essentially resists experience. Nonetheless, there is a sense in which the Other is experienced because it confronts us and brings us into an ethical relation. The Other's speech, or as Levinas articulates it in his later writing, the Other's saying (see Levinas 1981), brings the Other into ethical relation with the self. There is a simultaneously distance and proximity between the self and the Other. In other words, the Other is both near and infinitely far. What's more, distance implies proximity. Anything too near is too same and not other. Anything too far is unmeaningful; it is not just conceptually indeterminable, but unintelligible and incapable of entering into a relationship with the self. The Other's distance as an ungraspable otherness implies its proximity. The Other is neither a meaningless alterity nor a relative alterity, much like the alterity of things, which can be brought under the power of the Same. Over the Other the self cannot have power. In face of the Other I am not able to be able, yet by revealing itself to the self it comes into relation with the self.

This relation between the self and the Other, which is absolutely other yet reveals itself to the self and so opens itself to a relation with the self, is the ethical relation. Ethics is opened up by the revelation incurred by the epiphany of the face, by the Other's expression. In effect, the self finds itself ethically related to the Other, and thus ethically responsible for and to the Other, by being called on by the Other. The Other's expression requires a response; the Other's expression, its call, *demands* some response, it demands an "I am here," an Abrahamic willingness to be present to

a call. Of course, this particular response can be lacking. The self can decide to neglect this call, but this evasion always implies the need for an adequate response, and comes to be a response itself. To say nothing is to say that one wishes not to respond, which is itself a response. Abraham could have refused to answer God, he could have assumed that the voice was not God's, that he was going mad, but his refusal to answer would inevitably be an answer as well, an utterly inadequate answer. The silent response is inadequate because it fails to do what it attempts; silence hopes to not respond at all, but its evasion is a response, it is a dishonest "I am not here". We can imagine Abraham not hearing the call in the first place, ending the story of his faith by eliminating the beginning. However, once he did hear God's call, his response was necessary. This requirement shows the immediate responsibility of the self before the Other; facing the Other, the self is no longer able to be able, but is able to respond and must respond because its power has been arrested. As such, we should think of responsibility as a respond-ability. As soon as the self is faced, the self must respond, and thus it finds itself responsible for its response. In other words, the self must justify itself to the Other. The self is responsible to answer the Other, whereby protecting the Other's absolute otherness by maintaining the inviolability of the Other before the Same. As we will see below, this theme is more carefully developed in *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence*.

Even attempts to appropriate the Other show themselves, in their internal logic, to prove this radical alterity. Murder is an attempt to control and assume power over the Other in a way analogous to the control the self exerts over things. As Other, this person I face and who I wish to kill cannot be killed. I can only commit murder

by forgetting this Other's humanness and otherness, by turning him into an other thing. In doing so, I have done something illicit, 'I have not looked straight at him. I have not looked him in the face' (Levinas 1998a, 9-10). In short, I have not treated this Other as an Other, but as an other. This mistreatment, however, implies its own failure, it implies that what it seeks to over-power cannot be over-powered; I wish to kill and over-power the Other, but end by killing and over-powering an other thing. While murder implies that what/who I wish to kill is the Other, I can only murder by treating the Other as an other thing, which is what determines the violence of murder. As Levinas puts it in *Totality and Infinity*: 'I can wish to kill only an existent absolutely independent, which exceeds my powers infinitely, and therefore does not oppose them but paralyzes the very power of power' (1969, 198). Only the Other can be murdered, because only the Other resists my power. Because I lack power in my relation with the Other, I can try to annihilate him in order to assume power, ridding myself of the resistance altogether. However, by doing so I implicitly admit my lack of power over him, proving the Other's radical alterity and dignity, and our total and necessary separation.

As such, murder is essentially violent in a way that taking an object in hand is not; it implies the inviolability of that which it attacks: violence 'can only be directed toward a free being who, as such, does not lay himself open to violence' (Levinas 1998a, 28). Unlike taking objects in hand, murder is not mere use. Rather, its very conception is logically immoral, which assumes that the Other who is murdered *should not* be murdered and *should not* be treated as an other or as an object. As such, the very act of murder (as murder) implies the ethical injunction against murder.

Levinas correctly insists that the ethical command to not murder does not imply the ontological impossibility of murder; of course, the Other *can* be murdered and eliminated: 'Murder, it is true, is a banal fact: one can kill the Other; the ethical exigency is not an ontological necessity' (Levinas 1985, 87). However, the Other can never truly be annihilated, even when murdered, because the very act of murder shows and affirms the Other's radical alterity and dignity; because the Other's face is not an idea, is not a concrete fact, the faceness cannot be destroyed and so the Other's otherness, the Other as face, persists beyond the death of the Other as other, as physical presence. The annihilation of murder is 'a purely relative annihilation' (Levinas 1969, 233).

From this, the injunction 'Thou shall not commit murder' comes to take on two meanings. The first is the obvious prescriptive meaning that states that this particular act is morally pernicious. Herein lies the moral and/or political exigency against murder. The second meaning suggests that murder is *essentially impossible*: thou shall not commit murder because that which is murder cannot ever successfully fulfill its own demands; namely, the Other cannot be annihilated even when the Other is killed because the Other's face, which is not *a thing* to be controlled, lives on.[6] This is more apparent in Levinas' original French articulation. In *Totality and Infinity* he suggests that this injunction makes up the face's first words (not necessarily spoken words however), yet, instead of stating this as an injunction taking the imperative form, 'ne commets pas de meurtre' (do not commit murder), he uses the simple future, 'tu ne commettras pas de meurtre' (you will not commit murder) (1961, 217). In *Ethics and Infinity* he uses 'tu ne tueras point' (you will not kill, or

you will kill nothing, seeming to imply that there is nothing you can kill), again signaling a future impossibility vis-à-vis the act of murder (1982, 81). Waldenfels has similarly flagged the future tense of these commands and agrees that, as such, they are 'not normal imperatives' (Waldenfels 2002, 70). In so far as the injunctions are not normal imperatives, he argues that they signal a resistance on the part of the Other, the same resistance we have examined already, which 'changes our power (*pouvoir*) to kill into a sort of powerlessness (*impuissance*)' (70). This language, however, does not sufficiently stress the conceptual impossibility of murder, and focuses rather on the ethical imperative: facing the Other, I feel powerless because I am called by the Other to whom I feel obligated. Instead, both articulations suggest that, whatever the self does in its relation to the Other (and no matter what it *feels*), the act will not be murder in so far as it will not succeed in accomplishing what it proposes to, even when the act is ostensibly murderous. The first word is not a command or law, but a warning and revelation that murder as the annihilation of human otherness is impossible, it is an order limiting moral action, but an order that will not be violated in spite of attempts to the contrary, like telling one's child that they will (or should) love you. On a banal everyday level murder is not only possible, but all too common; however, this everyday occurrence does not annihilate the Other; so long as there is an I who wishes to kill, there will be the Other who can be killed. Murder invariably fails, proving the absolute alterity of the Other.

This somewhat controversial view of murder does not justify murder or suggest that murder as such is not an ethical and/or political problem. Quite the contrary. The insistence that murder fails to accomplish what it seeks to accomplish,

is ground enough for resisting it, for striving to eliminate it from the concrete world. The strictly consistent behavior is to not murder, to treat the Other as an Other not as an other. Murder wants it both ways. It wants to get rid of an Other, but can only do so by treating the Other as an other, whereby it no longer rids itself of an Other. Murder's failure is not an invitation to practice it freely, since it won't work anyhow. Instead, this is more reason for understanding the difficult responsibility of the self before the Other. What's more, the future impossibility always gestures toward the present and past (an immemorial past) command ("Thou shall not kill me, the Other you face") and ethical relation.

Levinas: 3. The Third and Justice

In addition to its own demand on the self, the Other's face brings with it a presentiment about other Others, what Levinas refers to as the third or the neighbor (see for instance Levinas 1969, 100-101, 212-214; 1981, 16, 157). The Other's presence implies the presence of a third party, another Other with whom the self is also in relation and to whom the self is obligated. It seems that the presence of a third is in some sense empirical; it is not the case that I, faced with a calling Other to and for whom I am responsible, am left alone with that Other. The *fact* of the matter is that there are more Others who likewise call and to and for whom I am equally responsible; it is in fact the case that I live in a concrete world with many Others: neighbors, family members, friends, strangers. However, the otherness of other Others is always already implied by the presence of the first Other, and so is not

originally empirical. As we will see, Levinas' story is not an empirical or historical one. We do not start off alone, then face one Other, then face other Others. Rather, we are always already facing multiple Others; this is how the self comes to be a self that can make itself in the first place. The Other is the self's coming to be in the first place. The multiplicity of the third is contained in the gaze of each Other, and so, 'everything that takes place here "between us" concerns everyone' (1969, 212). What looks at me in the face-to-face is not some random, self-identical thing. What looks at me is a *face*, a human face bringing with it human morality and responsibility: 'The epiphany of the face *qua face* opens humanity' (213; emphasis added). That face, while singular, already gestures toward the plurality of Others. Other Others are implied in the face-to-face because the subject's constitution as a self occurs in this confrontation with ungraspable otherness, in the plurality of the Other's presence. As Levinas puts it in *Time and the Other*: 'existence is pluralist'. This pluralism is 'not a multiplicity of existents'; rather, 'it appears in existing itself,' which 'insinuates itself into the very existing of the existent' (Levinas 1987, 75). Because the ego comes to be, is hypostasized as an existent, in the confrontation with otherness, its existence is essentially plural; the encounter with the Other's face opens the self to a human world.

The relation with these Others is justice, a responsibility to and for the Others who demand respect through language and expression. The Others command the self, but their command commands the self to command, to make rules, to install justice. In effect, the third forces the self to compare the incomparable (i.e., each Other). Because the Other is mysterious, is not conceptually renderable, is unknowable (not

just unknown), the Other and the other Others cannot be compared the way two known or knowable things could be. Nonetheless, the total responsibility for all the Others *forces* the self (this responsibility has power over a being who has had its power arrested) to compare these incomparables. In other words, absolute responsibilities must be weighed. Because each Other is Other, the same responsibility the self must assume in relation to the Other is extended to other Others. However, such responsibility is essentially impossible. I cannot be fully responsible for each Other because responsibility to one Other precludes responsibility to another Other; I cannot be fully present to more than one call at once. Nonetheless, responsibility is not diminished or moderated by the presence of many Others, as might seem reasonable; the self's responsibility is not divided between the various Others. Rather, to paraphrase Derrida slightly, 'every Other (one) is every (bit) Other [tout autre est tout autre]' (see Derrida 1995, 68 and 82-115[7]). Responsibility is *full* and so requires the instigation of laws and justice for all Others. I make laws because I cannot be sure that each Other will be accounted for, since I cannot simultaneously be present to all Others. My responsibility is for each and every Other, but I cannot trust that the Others will not hurt each other. In order to be responsible to each and every Other I must command them.

In being commanded to command, justice extends to the self, but not for the self as a lone self, but always as a self among and for Others. Here the possibility of self-preservation arises, yet always first and foremost as a preservation of the Other, not as Hobbesian self-interest. Rules benefit the self not as a self, but as a being related to Others; it turns out that I am as other to the Other as the Other is other to

me. As Levinas says, it is only thanks to God, whose absolute otherness seems to imply other Others, that I am other for the Others and so have justice for myself as well, not thanks to myself (Levinas 1981, 158). If the third wants to persecute me, I ought to accept that abuse, unless the abuse turns out to be abuse for an other Other, which, in all likelihood, will be the case. It is the possibility of this latter abuse that prevents me from accepting the first abuse; the Other might be hurt by the abuse I endure (as a parent certainly would if her/his child were abused), or, what's worse, the Other might be next. In order to assure that all Others are preserved, justice is needed; my responsibility for all Others requires it. I can and should accept persecution for myself, but never for Others, whoever they may be; for them I demand justice (see 1985, 99).

Levinas: 4. Strengths and Weaknesses, or Levinas' Transcendentalism

Levinas' temporal narrative from the I in its egoism to a self in relation to a plurality of Others is not an empirical narrative; the story does not describe the way individual egos come to be selves (a psychological story like the psychoanalytic one) or how humanity has developed from pre-self-aware beings to fully self-aware selves (an historical story like the Hegelian and Marxist ones). Rather, the story attempts to compel its readers by making certain experiences, presumably shared by the readers, come to light (the experience of Levinas' readers in relation to objects in the world and other people).[8] By doing so, the story tries to make the reader realize that this self that the reader has and is only comes to be (it becomes) in relation to Others. The

ethical relation is pre-original; *it is from this relation that the self arises as a self in the first place*. The self prior to the Other's presence as face, is not yet a self, it is meaningless because that "prior" experience can never *be*. Existence without existents, however much we might attempt to articulate it (as the "there is" or insomnia or vigilance), is ultimately 'only a word' (Levinas 1987, 46). The self is a self by being related to the face of the Other. Thus, in face of the Other (and the other Other), the self in its egoism, which is not strictly speaking a self, becomes a full and concrete self, a self in relation with Others, a self with obligations to the Others who speak, an ethical self. It is not as though the self is first on the scene and then is faced with an Other who calls on it. Rather, the self arises from this confrontation, since the self and the Other are simultaneous. The self, *qua self*, is always already confronted by the Other. As such, there is an important sense in which Levinas' account of the self, which is really a phenomenology of alterity (1987, 35), is a transcendental philosophy, seeking the conditions of the possibility of the subject's *being*, of the subject's being a self, which is neither a simple description nor an explanation of a being (an existent).

Levinas' position improves on Young's in its insistence on the radical separation between selves and Others, on grounding the being of a self in the existence of otherness, primarily the otherness of the Other. This view can admit socialized variations in an experience of separation, however it does so by assuming a prior and more fundamental separation. Our conception of separation can be and is socially determined, but that social determination is itself premised on the (ethically, not empirically) prior radical separation between selves and Others, as well as selves

and otherness. This puts us in a position to evaluate and judge socialized versions of selfhood and separation. If those versions do not recognize proximity and separation, then they ought to be rejected. Here too we find a way of understanding the idea that a self is thrown into its social and group context, however, this version does not assume a substantive self. It is because the self is essentially separate and constituted in and by an ethical relation with Others that it can notice, or rather understand, its thrownness, can notice that its full selfhood is constituted in relation to Others (i.e., the self becomes a concrete self when placed within a world facing un-understandable Others, when it is in group and social circumstances); the essential logic of selfhood includes the concrete self of the face-to-face. In that sense, it is a mistake to say that we *notice* that we are thrown into social relations at all. Rather we just are in social relations because the logic of selfhood shows that the self *is* constituted in relation to Others. The self is in some sense passively created in and through the confrontation with Others, but that self is also, in some sense, self-chosen following from the occasion of this creation; the self chooses itself as a self who is or is not ostensibly responsible for the Others for whom the self is always and already ethically responsible. The socialized experience of Levinas' readers cannot be proved wrong, but those socialized readers can, by following Levinas' phenomenology, come to notice that the logic (logos) of their social being is premised on and made possible by the ethical relationship of radical separation.

What's more, this defense of ontological separation shows that the self is essentially particular. Particularity is perhaps best captured in Levinas' account of solitude. The only thing an existent cannot share is the activity of existing: 'One can

exchange everything between beings except existing'. In this way, the existent, the self, is essentially solitary: 'To be is to be isolated by existing' (Levinas 1987, 42). The fact of living among others and in society can never make the existent's existence something that can be shared. The self and the Other remain radically particular in their relationship. This means that the self is not an instance of a kind. Even less is the Other an instance of a kind. The Other is particular and new, shattering the conceptual determinacy of a kind. The self chooses and defines itself in the situation of being ethically encountered by the Other.

Although Levinas' account of selfhood is more compelling than Young's (who I have taken as a particularly sophisticated and clear-headed representative of the politics of difference and recognition), it does not avoid problems altogether. Levinas' account, for instance, leaves us with a certain ambiguity. Since the self is ethically obligated to the Other and since 'every other (one) is every (bit) other', the self is responsible for each and every Other in its particularity. Since empirically there happens to be more than one Other and since transcendentally the third is always already implied in the face of the Other, it is of course impossible to fulfill the requirement of absolute responsibility, so the self is forced to compare the incomparable and forgo ethical obligations to all Others in favour of just obligations to all Others and particular obligations (which are just and moderated by justice) to some Others. In this sense, particular concrete commitments the self has (e.g., to family members) signal an unavoidable ethical failure. As a result, the self can never sufficiently justify its commitments to those Others to whom the self is not concretely committed. To think of this as a failure, however, is at odds with much of our

everyday moral experience, the same moral experience for which Levinas' work seeks to account. On the level of everyday moral experience, these private commitments are not only not ethical failures, but it seems to be the case that the self is *most ethical* when it is engaged with those Others to whom it is privately committed, whether this commitment comes at the expense of other Others or not. From this perspective Levinas' view of these commitments as necessary ethical failures is itself a failure.

Which view better reveals the essence of the matter? There is a sense in which both views are at least partly right. On the one hand, the face-to-face with a new Other bespeaks an ethical obligation which *will* fail if the self must remain obligated to those Others to whom the self is already obligated. For example, being called on by a homeless person indicates this failure. Ethically, I should be responsible for this person and must respond somehow, but my response will inevitably be insufficient so long as I want to maintain my prior commitments. In other words, I cannot be fully present for this person without ceasing to be present for the Others to whom I am already obligated and for whom I am already responsible (e.g., my family, my friends). The pity and awkwardness the self likely feels in this situation suggest that the self has ethically failed. On the other hand, this failure signals a simultaneous ethical success: I am in good part failing in this instance *because I am already succeeding and must continue to succeed in other instances.* My commitment to the other Others with whom I am already related is not just a matter of justice. That obligation, when it is genuine, is an ethical victory. While this chapter continues to be concerned with the ontology of the self, this ethical

interjection is essential. By understanding and accounting for this ethical success, as I will attempt in the remainder of the chapter, Levinas' account will be opened up: the self is not only constituted through an opposition with an ethical Other, the self *is* this Other. I will show this by appealing to Jean-Luc Nancy's notion of 'being singular plural' (see Nancy 2000, especially 1-99). Although I believe this notion to be implicit in Levinas' work (especially, as we will see, in his later work), it is never explicitly stated nor sufficiently articulated when alluded to.

Being Singular Plural

> Being singular plural: these three apposite words, which do not have any determined syntax ("being" is a verb or noun; "singular" and "plural" are nouns or adjectives; all can be rearranged in different combinations), mark an absolute equivalence, both in an indistinct *and* a distinct way. Yet, this in itself does not constitute a particular predication of Being, as if Being is or has a certain number of attributes, one of which is that of being singular plural – however double, contradictory, or chiasmatic this may be. On the contrary, the singular-plural constitutes the essence of Being (Nancy 2000, 28-29).

In *Being Singular Plural* Nancy defends the claim that human being is simultaneously singular and plural, it is 'singularly plural and plurally singular' (28). Nancy, following Heidegger, does not treat Being as some entity to which we can predicate plurality and singularity. Rather, being singular plural is the condition of

being for human beings, it is the way humans are. As such, human existence is always a co-existence, a sharing of *the world* (*le monde*), which is essentially singular and plural: 'The world is the co-existence that puts these existences together' (29). The French "*monde*" is quite fitting in this regard. "*Monde*" does not simply mean the physical world (*la terre*), nor even the less material world of meaning. While "*monde*" captures the sense of "world" exactly, it adds an explicit reference to people (not individual people, but a group of people). For example, taken literally "*tout le monde*" means "all the world," yet spoken it refers to "everyone," to all the people who are part of some relevant space (the largest space being "*le monde*" itself). People do not simply populate the world; they *are* the world in some sense. Humans are both *in the world* and *the world itself*, which is different from claiming that they are *of* the world, which would imply the world's primacy over humans, much like Young's use of "group", rather than their simultaneity. What's more, the world is always a sharing, a co-existence; the world, the home of humans, is a shared home. We should not miss the similarity with Levinas here, who thinks of the world as a world of nourishments, a home to which the self is welcomed by otherness, and particularly, the Other (see Levinas 1969, 156-158, 170-171; 1987, 62-64). The world situates humans vis-à-vis other humans, it situates the self among Others. The self is always worldly, and being worldly implies the necessary presence of Others. This shows the essence of human being: beings both require each other for their being in the world, which is the only possible being available to such beings, and need the world for their being with other beings. Existence is co-existence, which is worldly and peopled.

As such, the essence of Being is the co-existence of beings; it is co-essence. Co-essence is not a numerical assemblage of essences or existence, it is essentially *co*: 'coessentiality signifies the essential sharing of essentiality, sharing *in the guise of assembling*, as it were' (Nancy 2000, 30; emphasis added). In fact, Levinas makes much the same point when he describes totality and society not as 'a pure and simple addition of beings' but as 'the addition of beings who do not make up one number with another' (Levinas 1998a, 16). Being is not something one can get at on its own, whether we try to get at it abstractly or by concretely putting together (assembling) the totality of human properties and predicates; rather, it is the sharing of being, the being-with of being in the world, or, to put it in Levinasian terms, it is the '*entre-nous*' (between us) of all human experience (*qua human*). Even Descartes' seeming individualist meditation shows this according to Nancy. The possibility of the *cogito* is the possibility for each and all of Descartes readers to recognize its priority and self-certainty, it is the co-possibility of being and ego, it is the possibility of the self; the I who *is* is the I who *is-with*, the *I-with*: *ego sum* = *ego cum*. After all, Descartes writes for an audience, which he expressly addresses before meditating, as though to invite them to meditate and ask them to assure the self-certainty he seeks to prove (Nancy 2000, 31). Saying "I" or "self" implies saying it to and among others *who can say likewise* (they are not just other; they are Other); the self is not a self in itself, for itself or by itself, it is a self as 'one of us', it is always already a self among Others (66). This is reminiscent of Hegel's version of spirit as the "I" that is "We" and the "We" that is "I" (Hegel in Rauch and Sherman 1999, 20). Nancy's appropriation of this is obvious when he writes that the unity of spirit is 'the unity of the one that never

goes without the other and, further, the unity of the one that goes to the other, of the one that *is* only this *going to* the other'. What's more, 'the other is itself, in its turn and at the same time, a "one" that goes to the other' (Nancy 2002, 20).

As a worldly being, human being is always already a being-with, but not the being-with of a Heideggerian *Mitsein*. Nancy's being-with is not simply a matter of being located among otherness, some of which happens to take a human form; it is not just a matter of being located in an intersubjective context of meaning that makes meaningful encounters with others possible. Rather, Nancy's being-with follows from Levinas and the between-us (see Nancy 2000, 21-28), it is an originary "we", 'it is "community" without common origin' (23), or as Levinas puts it, 'it is a collectivity that is not a communion' (Levinas 1987, 94); being-with is being-with-Others-who-call. In other words, it is the original ethical encounter that makes intersubjectivity possible, not intersubjectivity that makes ethics and meaningful encounters possible. Instead of the *side-by-side* of Heidegger's being-with, Nancy's being-with is more like Levinas' *face-to-face* or the I-You collectivity of the between us. According to Levinas, Heidegger's "with" describes 'an association of side-by-side, around something, around a common term and, more precisely for Heidegger, around the truth. It is not the face-to-face relationship, where *each contributes everything*, except the private fact of one's existence' (Levinas 1987, 41). A being cannot *be* in isolation. This is not simply an empirical impossibility in so far as we find ourselves among others. Instead, total isolation is an ontological impossibility, which is why Nancy can refer to being-with as originary (Nancy 2000, 40-41). Being, which *is* only as the existence of beings, is essentially a being-with. In other

words, the logic of Being implies at all times and in all contexts the singular plural aspect of being one among others, which shows, incidentally, the impossibility of genuine solipsism. As the condition of human being, being-with is also the condition for philosophy and the questioning of ontology, which are both human activities. As such, the doubt regarding the Being of beings other than me (other than my-self) is premised on the interconnectedness of my-self and those beings; the fantasy that is solipsism is only possible starting from being-with. As Descartes himself, the unwilling instigator of modern solipsism, noticed, my being depends on the being of some other being, namely God, as the originator of the idea of infinitude in me, and so my very doubt and philosophical questioning depends on this other being with whom I am (Descartes 2000, 113-122).

If Nancy's presentation is correct, then it follows that the singularity of each self is inseparable from the plurality of singularities: 'the singular is primarily *each* one and, therefore, also *with* and *among* all the others. The singular is a plural' (Nancy 2000, 32). This togetherness of singulars forms another singular, which is made up of a plurality of singulars who are always already plural. Following from this, and recalling that 'these three apposite words ... can be rearranged in different combinations' (2000, 28), the articulation of being as singular and plural has *at least* two meanings (at least two configurations). First, human being, the being of humans as humans, is a pluralism, a pluralism of singulars. The idea is not that the human world is an addition of singular beings that produces a singular human being or/as essence. Rather, the being of humans is a relation between singular, and so separate, beings. Both solipsism and idealism are incorrect. This version approaches Levinas'

professed position. Second, the being of a singular human being is plural. This second meaning includes two moments. First, again close to Levinas, the singular human being is always already in a world populated by others (Others); being is always a being-with, an '*entre-nous*', it is an original pluralism out of which the singular self arises: 'The self itself is between us' (Nancy 2002, 78). Second, and it is this moment that is of particular interest for my project, the being of a singular human being is plural in so far as that person's very being *includes and is comprised by* other singularities, other singular plurals, other Others. It is not simply that the being of a self is a being-with, but that the being of a self *is* the being of other human beings, other selves; my *being-with others* is my *being others*; my singular self *is* plural.

While I am articulating this view as an opening up of Levinas' account of the self's ethical origin, there is a close connection between Nancy's conception and that of Levinas as developed in *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence*. Rejecting the Husserlian and psychoanalytic versions of the psyche, Levinas describes the psyche as a 'dephasing', as the same at odds with itself. The psyche is not just sameness, it is a discomfort with sameness, a sameness which is not adequately same; it is 'a loosening up or unclamping of identity' (Levinas 1981, 68). Levinas describes this dephasing as a self-abnegation, it is responsibility for the Other. Responsibility for the Other is a self-abnegation because, as we've seen, it is total, at the possible cost of the self; as Levinas puts it, it is the giving of bread from one's own mouth. The bread that is given must come from one's own mouth, otherwise the gift is not really a gift at all. In order for it to be a gift, what is given must be desired and enjoyed by the self. The self who abnegates himself cannot make the Other a gift of bread if he has

enough bread for himself. Doing so cannot suffice as a gift. Rather, the bread that is given must be enjoyed (not just enjoyable). Giving is neither pity nor charity; it is sacrifice. While we may think that Levinas' description of responsibility goes too far (and this is in good part the worry I have raised in this chapter), what we must notice from the start is that he is not making recommendations to his readers. He is not saying, "this is what I think responsibility is, and if you agree that the self is responsible for Others, then you should be willing to go this far with me; you should be willing to give bread from your own mouth." Instead, Levinas builds this sense of responsibility right into the structure of the self. The self, or psyche, just is this dephasing as self-abnegation. That is what a self is, whether particular concrete selves admit and fulfill this or not.

Because of this responsibility, the psyche is 'the other in me,' 'the same for the other, the same by the other' (69). By saying that the psyche is the other in me, Levinas is suggesting that the psychic being of a human being includes the others (including Others) who that being faces; my capacity for being a psychic being is the result of the Other's entering me, comprising me; the self is constituted and constitutes itself as a self with being (a self who *is*) in response to the Other's presence and call. This entering is not, however, an appropriation or assimilation. To reiterate, the Other cannot be assimilated because she cannot be grasped, she is ungraspable and unknowable. The entering cannot be a knowing, it is a non-assimilating entering; as we will see shortly, it is *respiration*. The psyche is also the same *for* the other; being *for* implies the alterity of the other *for which* the same is and the sense of responsibility, as a respond-ability, the self (as same) has for the Other

who is other. I am *for* the Other because the Other is an otherness to which and for which I am accountable, and this is so in virtue of my coming to be a self through the encounter with the Other. In other words, the same self also turns out to be a consequence of the alterity of the Other; the psyche is the same *by* the other, sameness is the result of otherness. Not only is the same responsible for the otherness it faces, but the otherness is the source of the sameness of the self. The Other is the condition of the possibility of the subject's being, its sameness and self-identity.

As a way of articulating the Other's presence in the self, Levinas refers to the Other as my inspiration, which is intended as much more than a mere metaphor. We might initially think of the Other as my inspiration on the model of art. Take as an example a portrait of a painter's lover. The painting is more than a representation of the lover; it is the result of an inspiration. The painter is inspired by her lover, and her love for the lover, to produce this particular work of art. In doing so, the painting's condition of possibility is the lover and so it contains him in some important sense. However, the painting hardly annihilates the lover, it commemorates him, but more importantly it is him because without him there is no painting. Without the inspiration, the painting never *is*. The lover is an essential situating limit of there being this painting in the first place. While this is in good part what Levinas is on about, the more apt and stronger interpretation of inspiration is the model of breath, or respiration. I in-spire (*in-spirare*, take in breath) in order to live. That which I inspire, the air, is vital for my life, and enters into me (literally) with every breath I take, every time I preserve myself by breathing. However, in inspiring, that which is inspired does not cease to exist. I do not assimilate the air when I

breathe, which persists apart from me and beyond me (I will surely expire, *ex-spirare* – in both senses – before the air does). It is this kind of inspirational role that the Other plays. Without the Other's entering me, I am not, I cannot live, I cannot *be* a self. However, like the air, the Other is not assimilated or rendered same by my inspiration; the Other persists as Other in order for me to *be* a self. Quite simply, there is no I without this inspiration, without the Other perpetually entering me. Levinas' version of the self invokes Rimbaud's famous line, 'I am an other,' but with a twist. While Rimbaud's claim means that I am strange to myself, that I do not understand myself as fully as I would like, Levinas' 'I am an other' should to be taken literally: I am my Other, I am my-self and my-Other, my-self includes and is my-Other (Levinas 1981, 118).

Nonetheless, Levinas' more recent 'I am an other' does not adequately respond to the worry I raised earlier. This position continues to consider the inability to commit oneself to those to whom the self is not comfortably committed as an ethical failure. While we will explore the issue of ethical success in the following chapter, for the moment it suffices to state our disagreement, that the ethical failure, which we admit is a failure, signals a concomitant ethical success, which for Levinas may be a political or social success but remains an ethical failure. To recognize this as a failure is to recognize what success would be, and that there are occasions where the self does more or less succeed (or at least, *can* more or less succeed). For this reason I will follow along the lines I have taken up from Nancy's account.

If it is the case that human being is both singular and plural or, which is to say the same thing, if the self is singularly plural or plurally singular, then it follows that

my selfhood includes Others. In other words, I should understand my-self as my-Other; I am my Others while being separate, as an individuated I (a self), from Others. This potentially counter-intuitive claim can be made more plausible if we speak of Others in terms of ends. Kantian talk of persons as ends in themselves subtends our political world, if not our ethical world; human beings are autonomous beings who are valuable in and for themselves, rather than being valuable in so far as they can be used by someone. This value is guaranteed and protected by universal human rights, which are ultimately political rights and privileges grounded in the essence of free rational human being (see Kant 1993). In the language of selves and Others, we might say that the Other is an end in itself, and as such, should not be used or manipulated by the self only as a means to some other end. As an end in herself, the Other has value and dignity. Therefore, it is wrong (both ethically and politically) for me to act in relation to the Other in a way that violates her dignity by treating her as a means.

"End" here clearly means something like aim, goal or purpose. As the end of bathing is cleanliness (or relaxation), the end of a person is its own personhood and moral autonomy. Since a person is an end in itself, it is its own aim, goal or purpose. However, "end" also means a limit, which the first meaning always signals and implies; I can aim at an end because the end is not identical to me, there is a limit – an end – between my-self and my end or goal. In this way an end is always the *end to* something (limit), while being the *end of* something (goal). The *end of* a chapter in a philosophy book is the argument being laid out (perhaps some other financial, personal or professional end as well) while the *end to* the chapter is the actual finish

of the chapter, the last paragraph, the last sentence, the last word, the last article of punctuation, the last period. This period is the *end to* the chapter, a chapter which has an end goal (an *end of*); the goal needs the period to make (and complete) its point and the period needs the goal's point to give it meaning. The *end to* the chapter, however, is not limited to the physical end of the written page. That end is intimated throughout the chapter, even at the very beginning of the chapter. The end refers to what preceded it. It also signals what proceeds from it. In the *end to* the chapter is contained the entire book (and may extend further into past and future texts, as someone like Derrida might suggest), as this end is contained at every other moment. The end is immanent at all points, even when it is not imminent; it is included even when not immediately forthcoming.

If "end" contains both senses described, then to speak of a person as an end must be understood more broadly than the standard Kantian story has tended to. The person is the end of itself and the end to itself. Not only is the person's personhood its moral goal, but the person's personhood also forms a limit between itself (the person) and that which is beyond it (otherness, the Other). However, just as the end to the chapter logically contained what proceeded from it, the end to the person, the end to the self, logically contains that which it limits: the Other. This implies both a passive and active 'ending'; the self is the *end to/of* that which extends beyond its limits (i.e., Others, and the external world, or in Levinasian terms, exteriority), but that which extends beyond the limits of the self is also the *end to/of* the self. The Other ends the self and the self ends the Other. What this means is that both the Other and the self, while remaining separate and unequal in the ways described by

Levinas, include each other (after all, two subsequent chapters include each other, but are not perfectly identical; their inclusion is only possible in so far as they remain separate). The self is immanent to the Other and the Other is immanent to the self. This immanence is not, however, a subsuming or an appropriation, it is an inspiration. I am my-self and my-Other. As such, my responsibility for the always separate Other extends to those Others with-whom-I-am (since we are-with each other), those Others who-I-am. The Other, being me, is my moral goal; not only is my own personhood my goal, but the Other's otherhood and personhood are my moral goals as well. These Others can be any Others, however, in practical every day terms these Others are the Others I am-with. Any Other can end up being my end, being-with me, inspiring me, but it is only when they are-with me, when they confront me and enter into a relationship with me, when I in-spire them, that I am responsible for them, otherwise they are too other, because not me enough.

My-self as My-other not the Other in the Same

Before moving on, in the next chapter, to lay out the ethical implications of this version of the self, I will articulate more fully what "my-self as my-Other" means by showing what this account is not. The claim that the Other is inside the self, or part of the self, is not an altogether new one. From the creation of Eve from Adam's rib, to the seemingly schizophrenic conversations of *Rameau's Nephew*, to the Victorian obsession with the alter-ego within (every Jeckyll has a Hyde), to the psychoanalytic account of an unconscious dimension to the self that manifests itself

in outward and conscious activity, the notion that strangeness and otherness has a source inside each person has been more common than I have thus far suggested. In order for the account I have offered, through Levinas and Nancy, to be compelling, I will have to show, however briefly, how this version of the self differs from some of these earlier articulations and why this version is better. In doing so, I appeal to Julia Kristeva's *Strangers to Ourselves*, which has the strength of being both an historical survey of the relationship between the self and the stranger (between the same and the Other) and, since it is written by a psychoanalyst, a document taking its position from one of the most recent and influential accounts of otherness as rooted in the self.

It is important to stress that, in this text, Kristeva is primarily concerned with real-world concrete relationships, those relationships where someone in a privileged position faces another who is not so privileged, another who is foreign to her basic way of life and world of experience. Her concern is first and foremost the status of the immigrant, the refugee, the invader, the foreigner and the stranger, not merely the logic of foreignness or otherness. At the outset, Kristeva does not examine questions about the source of selfhood at all; she is not yet interested in the basic and foundational relationship between sameness and otherness. Instead, she begins with the concrete world where strangeness actually creeps in, examining historical moments where this relationship is handled differently. Nonetheless, Kristeva completes her work with a less historical account, one which seeks to make sense of the concrete experience of strangeness. We see here an immediate connection with Levinas. He too seeks to make sense of concrete experience by finding the source and the conditions of that experience. However, the focus is different. While

Kristeva hopes to extract the logic of otherness from her historical studies, Levinas seeks to show what the logic of otherness is before any historical manifestations of otherness.

Kristeva begins her text with a summary of her position. This initial paragraph is quite telling, so I quote it in full:

> Foreigner: a choked up rage deep down in my throat, a black angel clouding transparency, opaque, unfathomable spur. The image of hatred and of the other, a foreigner is neither the romantic victim of our clannish indolence nor the intruder responsible for all the ills of the polis. Neither the apocalypse on the move nor the instant adversary to be eliminated for the sake of appeasing the group. Strangely, the foreigner lives within us: he is the hidden face of our identity, the space that wrecks our abode, the time in which understanding and affinity founder. By recognizing him within ourselves, we are spared detesting him in himself. A symptom that precisely turns "we" into a problem, perhaps makes it impossible. The foreigner comes in when the consciousness of my difference arises, and he disappears when we all acknowledge ourselves as foreigners, unamenable to bonds and communities (Kristeva 1991, 1).

This passage shows us immediately Kristeva's approach: it is an historical survey of the foreigner, which uses the trajectory of the foreigner in order to both bring out the foreigner's most basic origin and show that the history has gotten it

wrong. This last point should not be overlooked. Kristeva's history is not an historicism; she is more or less content to judge history. 'The romantic victim of our clannish indolence,' 'the intruder responsible for all the ills of the polis,' 'the apocalypse on the move,' 'the instant adversary to be eliminated for the sake of appeasing the group' are all wrongheaded understandings of the foreigner; the foreigner is *not really* any of these even though there have been times when the foreigner was understood as such. In reality, in *truth*, 'the foreigner lives within us.' This may be a truth foreign to our expectations, foreign to our experience of the foreigner as we understand it commonly. It may be strange that the stranger lies within, but true nonetheless; the strangeness of this claim does not refute its truthfulness. Once this strange truth is recognized, the relation between the native and the foreigner can improve, 'we are spared detesting him'. The argument goes as follows: if I do not hate myself but I hate the foreigner, and I discover that I too am foreign, then I either must hate myself or not hate the foreigner; since I don't hate myself (or don't want to hate myself, or shouldn't – but from where does this prescription arise? – hate myself), I must not hate the foreigner, or rather, I *should* stop hating the foreigner, since the implied claim in Kristeva's reasoning is entirely prescriptive in light of the unfortunate description of the actual real world treatment of foreignness. Whether the argument is compelling or not, the point is clear: the *truth* about the self and the stranger (a truth that most of human history has missed) is that strangeness lies within the self and so the stranger should not be hated because the self is strange as well; hatred of the foreigner is contradictory if the hater, who is

foreign, does not hate himself. What's more, this truth is liberating, since the recognition of this truth will bring about a better social world.

Kristeva attributes the discovery of this truth to Freud. The truth about the origin of strangeness is missed throughout history (at least throughout intellectual and political history) until Freud articulates the truth by suggesting that each and every self contains an unconscious that is radically foreign to the conscious selfhood of the self. With Freud, foreignness enters the world of reason. The only conflict left between foreignness and sameness (reason) is the latter's unwillingness to accept the former. Once the acceptance is secured, the conflict is eliminated. Following from this discovery, Kristeva asserts that, 'henceforth, we *know* that we are foreigners to ourselves, and it is with the help of that sole support that we can attempt to live with others' (170; emphasis added). Freud has seemingly provided us with the first truthful account of the foreigner and otherness. An attention to this will, Kristeva thinks, invariably improve the world in which foreignness actually creeps in. By knowing that foreignness lies within we can come to stop hating it (both internally and externally).

'With the Freudian notion of the unconscious the involution of the strange in the psyche loses its pathological aspect and integrates within the assumed unity of human beings an *otherness* that is both biological *and* symbolic and becomes an integral part of the *same*'. As a result, 'foreignness is within us: we are our foreigners, we are divided' (181). Here we notice our disagreement with Kristeva. While the claim that we are our foreigners is ostensibly identical to my claim that I am both my-self and my-Other, Nancy's notion of being singular plural, and even

Levinas' talk of the psyche as the other in me, there is a fundamental discordance here as well. Kristeva gives otherness a biological space in the self. I am other because I, the self, biologically contains the unconscious, the foreign. We need not worry whether the unconscious is actually biological or not for the point being made. By giving otherness biological, rather than merely symbolic, purchase, Kristeva, as she clearly states, makes otherness a part of the *same*, not just a part of the self. This is precisely the traditional view of Ontology that Levinas (with Nancy and Lorkovic following him) rejects. Furthermore, when Kristeva claims that we are our foreigners, she does so as an implication from the first claim that foreignness is within. This move makes logical sense only if we assume that she means that I and my foreigner share *the same foreignness*, that foreignness (as the unconscious) is everywhere identical, that foreignness is the essential kernel we all share that makes us selves. I am my foreigner because we share some universal sameness (i.e., an unconscious), but then we are more same than other, and so, no longer essentially separate and particular. Instead of unifying all humans through the sharing of reason, Kristeva does so by invoking shared strangeness, which continues to suggest an ontology of sameness and a substantive account of the self (the self is an unconscious and foreign thing). In opposition to this, I want to maintain a disagreement with the ontology of sameness, stressing that the Other remains radically other, and with any substantive version of the self. We do not share some kernel (whether reason or strangeness) that makes us same. We share plenty (bodies, language, the world in which we live, and even the condition of our selfhood), but that sharing does not make us same. Instead, what makes the Other me is precisely our separation and

proximity: we are separate yet ethically related. What's more this ethical relation is the occasion of my coming to be a self in the first place. The Other occasions my self-choosing, it is not a substance, same everywhere, that makes selfhood essentially what it is. The Other's intrusion founds me, makes it possible for me to choose-myself. As such, the Other co-constitutes the self. Situated self-choosing is occasioned by the Other's call.

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[1] In the remainder of this work I will follow the convention, adopted by many of Levinas' translators and English speaking commentators, of using "Other" to refer to the personal other (i.e., other people) and "other" as the impersonal, general and generic sense of otherness.

[2] I use "instance" with some reservation. Selves are not instances of a kind. As I have been arguing, following Kierkegaard, the self-choosing self is particular, and so, not an instance at all. There is no universal kind to which we can appeal, only a general structure of particular self-choosing. As such, the reference to "instance *in* a group" might be better stated as, "particular *in* a group" or "singular *in* a group", which remains at odds with Young's version of the self as an instance *of* a group.

[3] For example, contrasting *Totality and Infinity* with *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* in the German preface to the former, Levinas writes: '*Otherwise than being or Beyond Essence* already avoids the ontological – or more exactly, the *eidetic* – language which *Totality and Infinity* incessantly resorts to' (Levinas 1998a, 197).

[4] While I am not certain how this would be fleshed out exactly, the case of under-eating seems to fall under this same logic. One under-eats because they come to hate food, but the possibility of hating in this way seems to presuppose a desire for that which can be hated. One does not hate that which is needed, nor does one hate that which is against a need (e.g., I do not hate carbon dioxide just because I need oxygen). Rather, one hates that which can be desired. In other words, the person who under-eats seems to have a desiring relation with food, albeit a negative one. I thank my interlocutors at the selfhood conference in Edmonton during the spring of 2002 for bringing this issue to my attention.

[5] What I am referring to here is Levinas' recurring pun, "pouvoir de pouvoir". Nominally, "pouvoir" means power, while verbally, it means ability, to be able or to can. Levinas' debt to Marcel and Jaspers on this point should be evident.

[6] An interesting way to think about Levinas' face-to-face and the impossibility of murder is by comparing this to the Rastafarian "I and I". Instead of saying "you and I" the Rasta says "I and I", ascribing to both the self and the Other particularity and egoity. Both are inviolable I's because all humans are I, yet separate and distinct I's (the *and* of "I *and* I" is essential here). Because of this, murder again becomes impossible in some sense. As Buju Banton puts it to the murderer to whom he sings, 'kill I today you cannot kill I tomorrow' (Banton 1995). Of course this means, most simply, that if I am killed today I cannot be killed tomorrow because I won't be around to be killed. However, we should not mistake this as a plea for mercy. I do not ask the murderer to not kill me today because it is not in his best interest (because he won't have an opportunity to kill me later). Rather, even if I am killed today, I will be around tomorrow because Others will still be around, since I-ness cannot be killed. Much like Levinas' account of the impossibility of annihilating the unappropriateable face that arrests power, this seems to imply that even if "we" are all killed ("we" as a political or social group: in this case, the people of Jamaica), I, the human face survives; the self and the Other persist in spite of murder.

[7] This is a slight paraphrase because Derrida uses "*autre*" not "*autrui*" as my use of the capital suggests

[8] This 'coming to light' is not a perfect coming to light or a conceptual rendering. What Levinas says is essentially unsayable and is at best elucidated (to use a Jaspersian notion) by being said, by being brought to (some) light.

5

THE ETHICS OF THE SELF AS OTHER

If you love me like I love you
Let's get together and be as two
-Lightning Hopkins

The goal in this final chapter will be begin to adduce some ethical implications from the preceding account of self-being as Other. In this regard, the fundamental question I am asking is: if my-self is my-Other, what does this mean for philosophical ethics, for the self's ethical engagement, and in particular, for the self's engagement with the Other? By posing this question, I am taking for granted a connection between ontology and ethics, that in some sense ethics is a matter of being properly who we have come to understand ourselves to "be". Put more simply, what we take human being *to be* essentially conditions what we think is good for that being, what the being *ought* to do and how it *ought* to be. As Charles Taylor puts it, morality involves claims about human being as such: 'A moral reaction is an assent to, an affirmation of, a given ontology of the human' (Taylor 1989, 5). All the famous traditional ethical models show this. It is because humans are rational social beings whose function it is to reason that Aristotelian virtue ethics can conceive of goodness in terms of successful and excellent reasoning; it is because we are essentially rational beings who are simultaneously *in*essentially embodied and impassioned that, regardless of the consequences, we ought to follow the categorical imperative as the principle of practical reason rather than passion or impulse; it is because we are naturally pleasure seeking beings that Utilitarianism can conceive of value in terms of utility (i.e., pleasure and the absence of pain) and prescribe a

political and moral maximization of pleasure. It is not by chance that in Aristotle the first defense of happiness as the chief good of humans depends on a description of the function of human beings as a rational activity, happiness being activity in accord with virtue. The function of any being is what that being is for, *what it is* essentially. According to Aristotle, a human being *is* a reasoning being. As a result, since everything has a function, since everything can fulfil that function well or poorly, and since to fulfil this well is to be virtuous, any human who reasons well is virtuous and good, and this is the highest good of human beings, it is happiness (see *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1097b 21-1098a 20). Perhaps even more obvious is Bentham's famous claim that *nature* has placed humans 'under the governance of two sovereign masters, *pain* and *pleasure*,' which must be appealed to in order to 'point out what we ought to do' (Bentham 1948, 1). In all cases, the ontology implies an ethics.

It does not follow from the connection between ontology and ethics that ontology necessarily comes first. Nor does it mean that it is only on the basis of ontology that we can engage in ethical debates, although an agreed upon ontology will likely render those debates more fruitful.[1] Rather, and more akin to Levinas, the ontology one adopts and defends is always implied by an ethics, which is not secondary to the ontology but is the source of the conception of the being in question. Of course, we are faced here with the Levinasian concern with Ontology as the philosophy of Sameness and his argument that Metaphysics (and ethics, which is Metaphysics) precedes Ontology, that the desire for otherness or the moral encounter of the face-to-face is primary and conditions the pursuit of truth (Levinas 1969, 42-48). However, as I have shown, while Levinas' ethics is not Ontology as a

philosophy of Sameness, it is ontological in so far as it provides an account of and, more importantly, a justification for the being of human beings as ethical and responsible beings. In spite of his suspicion of Ontology, Levinas is concerned with the 'general economy of being' (see for example, Levinas 1987, 39). Our ontology (Levinas', Nancy's and Lorkovic's) is essentially ethical, and so, those ethics must be spelled out more clearly. This spelling out is what I will attempt in this chapter. In effect, the question of this chapter is the famous political and moral question: what is to be done?

Although I make no claim to being definitive or complete, in what follows I suggest three ethical consequences of the account of the self as Other, which are intended as recommendations for future ethical work. I characterize these consequences, not as propositions or principles that follow logically from the account taken as a set of premises, but as shifts in ethical discourse or as a refocusing of ethics in three ways implicit in the intelligibility of that account: a refocusing of ethical questions, of the direction of ethics, and of traditional ethical themes.

Refocused Questions: Have I Become a Self Worth Becoming?

The first issue, then, has to do with the refocusing of *questions* in ethics. Whereas ethics tends to be concerned with action (right action, moral action, good action), if the self is other in the way I have suggested, then we must concern ourselves less with activities and doings and more with the actual mode of being of the self, which certainly includes activities or doings, but cannot be reduced to these.

It is not the case, however, that activities and doings are of no ethical concern. Since the self is not a substance, but is a situated self-choosing activity, it follows that in some sense the self *is* what it *does*; its *being is its doing and its doing is its being*. Hence, the ethical focus must shift from one either on doing (consequentialism) or on being (deontology) to the essential interaction of being and doing. Being or moral character is not, *pace* Mill who thinks that character is merely an habitual disposition to produce good or bad results (Mill 1979, 18), only ethically important in so far as it tends to produce ethical actions and consequences. Rather, the being of the agent is in itself essentially ethical, and so, is the essential trope of practical ethical concerns. For what the self *does* is realize (in both senses of the word "realize") itself by choosing itself. My actions constitute me as who I *am*; my activities are self-realizing. It is my *being* myself, the who and what I choose to be, that must be of ethical concern. As a result, our ethical questions should not primarily be: Is that action good or right?; Am I being dutifully or righteously? Instead we must ask: Does my action realize an adequate self, who is nonetheless its other?; Am I being a self as other well or poorly?; Am I becoming a self worth becoming? In short, we should conceive of ethics not only or mainly as a concern for the self's doings or its being, but as a concern with the self's being as doing, and doing as being.

In posing the latter questions we must extend our ethical evaluation to every part of the self, to all the banalities of the self's everyday way of being. In short, ethics must return to its roots as a concern for one's ethos. I am not suggesting that "ethical dilemmas" (e.g., should Jones lie to Smith or not) are not ethically or philosophically important. Of course, such dilemmas are important and, of course,

they do actually occur in our lives. The point is, however, that our ethical comportment is not, and cannot, *only* be judged in those instances. Moreover, such instances only arise from and get determined with respect to a prior situated ethical way of being. As much as my ethical comportment is judged in respect of such dilemmas, it is judged in the everyday and the commonplace because I comport myself (my-*self*) in the common place as well as in the morally extraordinary, and that comportment can be ethical or not, can conform with my constitution as a self with and as the Other or not. Because it constitutes the self and comes to be the self, the Other is always already present, is there in all those banalities of the self's everyday life, and so, the opportunity for ethical success or failure arises even there.

Heidegger makes a somewhat similar point in the 'Letter on "Humanism"' when he considers Heraclitus' fragment 119: 'A man's character is his daimon,' which Heidegger retranslates as 'the human being dwells, insofar as he is a human being, in the nearness of god' (Heidegger 1998, 269). Heidegger thinks his retranslation is confirmed by a story Aristotle tells:

> The story is told of something Heraclitus said to some strangers who wanted to come visit him. Having arrived, they saw him warming himself at the stove. Surprised, they stood there in consternation – above all because he encouraged them, the astounded ones, and called to them to come in, with the words, "for here too the gods are present" (Heidegger 1998, 269-270).

While Heraclitus' visitors expect to see the wise man, the lover of wisdom in the process of loving wisdom rather than warming his inessential body, Heraclitus corrects them by telling them that even *there*, in the familiar, in the banality of warming his body, does he abide because even there are the gods present, even there is he called to ethics in the presence of the unfamiliar. Heidegger refers to this originary ethics as ontology, not ethics proper (271). While this ostensibly differs from the account I have been defending, the thrust is the same. Ethics as the coming to be of a human being in face of the unfamiliarity of the Other occurs even in, and primarily in, the familiar. What, after all, can be more familiar than my own self-being, which is, let us remember, only possible in virtue of the intrusion of the unfamiliar Other? The Other is present in my everydayness, and this is of the utmost ethical concern.

If ethics should attend to the being of the agent, we must consider how this attention should proceed. While this will be articulated more fully in the latter two recommended shifts, at this point it is worth noting that, since the self is constituted in and chosen on the occasion of the face-to-face encounter with an unfamiliar and unknowable Other who calls and demands a response, ethical success and failure will be judged in terms of this encounter and the ensuing self-choosing. If the self is its Others, then the realm of ethics arises in the space of this original calling and the perpetual need to respond adequately and choose oneself in the light of this responsibility. Ethical success lies in the ethics of responsibility, the ethics of respond-ability.

A sub-implication of sorts is that we should reject any account of ethics or politics that is indifferent to ethical projects. In opposition to people like Rawls or Kymlicka, my choice of ethical project is not just politically and philosophically interesting when it infringes on others' ethical projects or when it promotes or degrades the ideals and institutions of a political liberalism. The conception of the good I adopt and, in particular, the content of this conception, rather than the mere fact of having a conception in the first place, is ethically and philosophically relevant. Since I am my Others, there is a sense in which my ethical project is my Other's ethical project and vice versa, and that project cannot be a matter of philosophical indifference. In fact, indifference is utterly immoral, as it explicitly violates the constitution of myself as Other and with Others. I must both care what my and the Other's goals are and coordinate those goals according to our fundamental interconnectedness (our inter-being, the 'entre-nous'). Because I cannot be indifferent to the Other (as the face intrudes on my-self), I cannot be indifferent to the Other's ethical project. What's more, because the Other is in some sense me, I cannot be indifferent to the way our projects overlap, or, most importantly, how my project affects the Other who I am. One way of articulating this shift is to reverse the liberal reversal of the good and the right; in short, we must stress the priority of the good over the right, yet in a way that does not imply a devaluing or disregard of the right.

This approach will immediately raise liberal eyebrows. The good should not be given priority, the liberal will argue, because such prioritizing can be painfully unjust. Because we cannot be certain that any particular conception of the good is the true one, we cannot give that conception political priority because doing so can

severely violate others' conceptions of the good. As a result of the priority of the right, persons should be granted the freedom to pursue any good they deem worthy on the condition that the demand they make for the good be reasonable, namely, that others will not see the pursuit of this good as a violation of their own pursuits and that the person's expectations for resources needed to pursue the adopted conception of the good will be moderated according to the availability of social resources (see Rawls 1993, 173-211). What's more, the liberal will claim that liberalism is not indifferent to conceptions of the good. Liberalism may be agnostic regarding the truth of conceptions of the good, but it also recognizes the importance of having those conceptions and having the freedom to pursue those conceptions. In contrast, the view I am advocating smells of moral conservatism which is both paternalistic (and no one likes paternalism in politics and ethics!) and radically anti-egalitarian, thus conflicting drastically with the political and moral values we generally espouse in the West (what Rawls might call our considered convictions).

However well this worry works against some conceptions that value goodness over rightness, it cannot work against the modified Levinasian version I have been developing. This is because the good of the self cannot be in violation of the good of the Other. Since the Other *is* the self, the Other's good *is* the self's good. Although fecundity is important for him, as we will see shortly, Levinas' account is not a paternalism. It is not the self who knows best, it is the Other. Regarding the Other, the self has no knowledge, that relation is not epistemological, it is ethical. There is a sense in which Levinas can be construed as an anti-egalitarian, but in the other direction. It is the self, not the Other, who is not equal enough, who is *subjected* and

persecuted. However, even this anti-egalitarianism comes to be egalitarian with the third party's intrusion, already implied in the face of the Other, and command to command. Justice is required for all and demanded by all Others, and this *is good*, it is *the good* of human beings living in society with other human beings and co-constituted by other human beings. This is why, on the Levinasian account I have defended, my non-indifference to Other's conceptions of the good cannot allow me to accept any Others' conceptions that violate, not me, but other Others. As such, we continue to discriminate between acceptable and unacceptable conceptions of the good, but the criteria has now changed. The criteria is no longer political reasonability, it is ethical goodness as an attentiveness and responsibility to the Other.

Will Kymlicka has warned against being mislead by talk of the priority of the right over the good. He claims that liberalism's critics have rejected this priority on the basis of a misunderstanding. If they were to understand what the liberal means when he gives the right priority they would likely agree with him. It is not the case, according to Kymlicka, that liberals reject the importance of conceptions of the good. As we saw in the first chapter, even John Rawls thinks that all well constituted humans will have some view about what is good for them and what gives their lives meaning and value. The liberal point is that the pursuit of these goods must be preserved and promoted by justice, by the right, and with this, Kymlicka thinks, the critic of liberalism will agree: 'Critics and defenders of liberalism share the view that principles of right are a spelling-out of the requirement that we give equal consideration to each person's good' (Kymlicka 1989, 21). In other words, the liberal thinks that all humans have and must have conceptions of what they think it is good

for them to do with their lives and that, so long as these conceptions are reasonable in so far as they do not place unjustifiable demands on others who similarly hold conceptions of the good, then the attempt to fulfill those conceptions should not only be permitted, it should also be promoted and facilitated. While we might personally disagree with these conceptions and even try to persuade others to change their conceptions, there is no political reason to prohibit conceptions of the good that are reasonable.

While it may be the case that many critics of liberalism would agree with this and have come to be critics for the wrong reasons, if by 'each person's good' we mean 'each person's own idiosyncratic – and potentially capricious! – conception of the good' then I disagree with Kymlicka and must distance myself from the critics who he thinks may have misunderstood the liberal position. Not all conceptions of the good, even reasonable ones, are good or ethical. Any conception that violates Others *in any way*, that resists responsibility or rejects the ontological place of Others is not sufficiently ethical, whether it is politically reasonable or not.

Consider the following example. Kata is a hard working upstanding citizen. She neither demands too much from other persons nor does she demand too much from the state. She has a regular job, works seriously, is a sympathetic and generally pleasant co-worker and friend, does not violate other persons' conceptions of the good in any obvious way, and meets no resistance from others when they find her pursuing her good. She is a good citizen, pays her taxes and only appeals for any form of social assistance when needed. However, she is a materialist, and a bit of a selfish one at that. Her conception of the good includes a conception of herself and

others as no more than objects, matter in motion. What's more, she does not really care what others do or how they live (whether well or poorly). However, she does not hurt them or make their lives more difficult. In fact, she is quite civil to everyone she meets, but at the end of the day, she gives their interests no serious thought or concern. She sometimes throws a few coins to the homeless man who panhandles outside her apartment, but has never looked him in the eye. She even says hello to him as she walks by, but has never really greeted him, has never welcomed him and approached him as anything more than a hopeless homeless person. She enjoys spending time with family and friends, but is never truly concerned about them. She enjoys their company because they bring her pleasure and hopes that they will do well so that they can continue to bring her pleasure. Her conception of the good and the life she pursues are certainly reasonable, but do not (and likely *cannot*) meet the otherness of the Other, and so, do violence to the Other in spite of doing no ostensible damage. The individual liberal (*qua* private person with an idiosyncratic conception of the good) might disagree with Kata's conception of the good, may not wish to adopt it and might even disapprove of Kata's values. However, as long as Kata's conception is reasonable (and I think it is), the liberal (*qua* liberal) is forced to be indifferent philosophically and morally to her conception of the good. The indifference to this issue is the problem with liberalism. I agree with the liberal that conceptions of the good are important and necessary for well functioning human being, however, those conceptions are only good enough when the person in question considers others' conceptions of the good *as her own.*

Kymlicka has accurately portrayed the ground of the liberal belief in the priority of the right, which shows clearly the disagreement between the liberal conception of the self and the Levinasian one. According to Kymlicka, Rawls' prioritizing of the right over the good is 'just the corollary of his affirmation of *the separateness of persons*' (Kymlicka 1989, 24; emphasis added). Although Kymlicka disagrees with Rawls' invocation of separation as a rejection of utilitarianism and thinks that talk of the priority of the right is generally misleading, he shares the view of humans as separate, which ultimately justifies the liberal hope of ensuring that all separate persons have the occasion and means to pursue their freely chosen conceptions of the good, to develop themselves and their lives as they see fit. Since persons are separate, free and differentiated individuals with their own private goals and ethical projects, the right should be given priority in order to promote and guarantee the freedom of such separate individuals in order to guarantee their pursuits of the good. While anyone who agrees with Kymlicka's version of the separateness of persons (and Kymlicka seems to think most contemporary readers will agree) will likely feel compelled to agree with the conclusion that the right ought to be given priority, it is not so clear that we should agree with this claim, as I tried to show in the previous chapter. If by separate persons we mean persons who occupy a privileged spatio-temporal location, or who are at an essential distance from others, then we must surely agree that persons are separate. But if by separate persons we mean, as Kymlicka likely does, that persons are not essentially morally, logically and/or ontologically connected to others (although they may be given the contingency of social being), that persons are, in short, contracting atoms capable of finding

themselves in social bonds and making new bonds, then we should reject this claim altogether, whereby leaving little, if any, ground for the belief in the priority of the right over the good. If Levinas is correct, then selves are *separate* but *constituted in proximity*, which mitigates yet preserves that absolute separation. Because we are essentially separate and, as such, are essentially in proximity, our separateness cannot be construed in the liberal way, and so it is a mistake to conclude from this false version of separateness that indifference to Others' ethical projects is either ontologically or morally justifiable. Because we are in proximity, the content of Other's ethical projects matter for the self, and it is on the basis of an attention to this "mattering" that the self's ethical success or failure can be judged.

The person who thinks that some injustice is good for her (say, the indiscriminate killing of millions of other people) does not just have a conception of the good that is not right because it violates principles of justice and should thus not be given priority over what is just. More importantly, this person has an inadequate notion of what is good. There is no doubt that the right is important, and that justice is politically and morally essential because there are other Others. The claim here is that justice is good, rather than being at odds with it, and justice is a matter of *being just* not merely performing just actions.

Refocusing the Direction of Ethics: to the Other

In focusing on the adequacy of one's selfhood, we notice the next important modification: Talk of adequacy must be directed *to the Other*. If the self is its Other,

remaining separate while essentially related to that Other, and if ethical success or failure should be measured in all those instances where the Other intrudes, and if the Other always already intrudes because that intrusion is the source of the self's selfhood, then we will not be able to find the principles by which to evaluate the self's selfhood by looking to universal reason, or human nature; Kantian, Utilitarian and even Aristotelian guidelines (in spite of Aristotle's prioritizing of the good) will not help us here. We cannot, in short, rely on some principle intrinsic to the self in order to pass ethical judgement. In fact, as I will show in the following section, we cannot rely on principles at all, unless we are to refer – misleadingly! –to an unprincipled attention to the ethical encounter with a particular Other as a kind of principle. Principles exclude the radical particularity of the Other who faces and with whom I am. As such, ethical appeals to principles can be ethically disastrous. Rather, the only way to judge the success or failure of the self's selfhood is by asking the Other with whom the self is, the Other who is present in the self's ethical situation. We must direct the ethical inquiry to the Other instead of just asking the self to rationally anticipate the Other's response because, while the Other is the self, they maintain a distance, they remain separate. Since the Other is separate as an unknowable alterity, the self cannot *know* how the Other will evaluate the selfhood of the self unless the self inquires; this is so in spite of the presence of the Other as part of and constitutive of the self. This further means that the judge of ethics is an actual real-world Other, not some hypothetical Other who can be invoked abstractly and heuristically as a pseudo-arbiter. Since the Other is not every Other or the Other in general, but the Other with whom I am, the *particular* Other who calls, the question

of my success cannot be posed hypothetically or theoretically. Instead, I must actually ask *my* Others (who I am). Treating the Other as a generality would be to fall back into the philosophy of the Same by conceptualizing the Other as *identically* other to all Others, whereby eradicating the essential difference and distance between the self and the Other. This does not mean that moral philosophers should become sociologists who take surveys asking people, as Others, to evaluate their Others, as selves. Rather, it means that it is ethically incumbent upon each and every particular person to engage in an ethical conversation as a constant back-and-forth between the self and the Other, constantly checking and testing their adequacy as selves, and so incumbent on the philosopher to point this out.

While the account I am proposing seems dialogical, there is an ambiguity with regard to dialogue of which we must be wary. In *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, Levinas refers to dialogue as 'the non-indifference of the *you* to the *I*, a dis-inter-ested sentiment certainly capable of degenerating into hatred, but a chance for what we must – perhaps with prudence – call love and resemblance in love' (Levinas 1998b, 47). Dialogue is a non-indifferent communion between two, between the self and the Other, whereby the self suspends her own interest in hope of producing and promoting love and acknowledging the resemblance between the self and the Other in and through love and as beings capable of love. However, with dialogue there is always a chance that the communion degenerates into hatred. This is because dialogue runs the risk of turning into a glorified monologue. As a communion, dialogue is a coming together into the same, rather than an encounter that necessarily

preserves both the distance between the self and the Other and the Other's essential alterity.

Dialogue is often thought of as an attempt to rationally persuade another (e.g., Habermas 1990, 58). While this is ostensibly better than violently subduing the Other or controlling his behavior, dialogue is nonetheless open to violence in so far as it does not preserve distance and alterity, but promotes sameness and union through agreement and persuasion. My account does not advocate persuasion since persuasion implies an egoistic interest. In dialogue, the self and the Other try to persuade each other, which means that they try to convince each other to adopt their own private interests. Although in a good dialogue both parties are willing, in principle, to adopt the interlocutor's view, the goal is always agreement, a mutual adopting of the more rational view, the more rational interest. Instead, my view attempts to reconsider interest. I do not approach the Other in order to convince him to adopt my more rational view, I engage him in order to make sure I am being a good enough self; I engage him in order to ensure that the interest I have adopted as my own sufficiently includes his own interest. I do not try to persuade him; I try to learn from him. In effect, I seek the Other's grace. Let us recall that the Levinasian line I have adopted promotes an ethics of infinite responsibility. As such, I am already faulted ethically. While traditional ethics is about willful control in the sense of getting it right judged by an independent criterion of rightness and ethical success, what the ethics I propose focus on is my ethical being and doing as they are judged by the Other. My success as a self as Other, therefore, depends on the Other's gracious approval of my being and doing, not on any independent criteria of ethical success.

For these reasons, it is better to conceive of this "dialogue" as conversation, as a non-logical and non-persuasive encounter where the adequacy of the self's selfhood is in the balance rather than where an agonistic comparison of the self's and the Other's interests is negotiated. The goal is a 'collectivity that is not a communion' (Levinas 1987, 94).

This second shift faces two possible problems. First, we might be asked to provide an explicit account of the face. Since the ethics of the self as Other stems from a phenomenological description of the constitution of the self through a face-to-face encounter, it may be demanded that we articulate more clearly what the face is in order to have a sense of who counts as an Other with whom the self can be. This demand presents us with the following questions: Can there be an ethical obligation to a faceless being?; What kinds of beings have faces?; Is a face necessarily human?; Do all humans have a face?; What does a face "look" like?; In what sense is or is not the face empirical? If we cannot respond to these questions or provide a clear account of the Other's face, the account offered here seems to lose any practical value and all applicability. For instance, Dermot Moran introduces this kind of problem when he takes Levinas' vagueness regarding the face as a serious flaw in Levinasian ethics, claiming that '[Levinas] has no adequate discussion concerning the attribution of faces, no criterion for 'facehood' as it were.' Since the face plays such a crucial role in Levinas' ethics, and the ethics I am trying to lay out here, it follows that 'how one accords a face is crucial.' As a result, 'if there is no account of this, it is hardly a philosophy of the face at all' (Moran 2000, 350).

In the light of Moran's comments, which are in part right and in part wrong, and the general worry that the invocation of the face helps us neither ethically nor philosophically because it is too vague, we must immediately remark that there is a significant difference between the claim that there is '*no adequate*' account of the attribution of the face and the claim that there is an '*inadequate*' account of this attribution. While Moran makes the former claim, the thrust of his comments, which reject Levinasian ethics on the basis of the omission of a "crucial" account of how the face can be "accorded", imply the latter. An account that is *in*adequate is an account that is not good enough, that does not capture that which is accounted as well as it could or should. Inadequacy implies the ideal of adequacy; it implies that adequacy is achievable. *Non*-adequacy, on the other hand, does not imply that adequacy is the goal. Instead, it suggests that adequacy is impossible. In the light of this distinction, I agree with Moran's explicit claim that Levinas' account of the face is *not* adequate, but it is not the case, *pace* Moran's implied claim, that Levinas' account of the face is *in*adequate. The account is not inadequate because *there is no adequate account* that Levinas somehow misses. Levinas' account of the face is not inadequate in the sense of getting something wrong, which could (and should) be gotten right, at least in principle. Rather, what I am referring to as Levinas' account of the face is not an account at all because *the face cannot be accounted.* In short, there is no adequate account of the face in Levinas' texts because the face is essentially non-adequation (Levinas 1969, 33-35). If the face intrudes on the self, if the face comes from the Other in its radical alterity, in its futurity and surprising ungraspability, then the face cannot be adequated. The problem is not that Levinas has not provided sufficient

criteria for the face; rather, the problem most readers will have is that there can be no such criteria. We want criteria because we want adequation, we want to grasp and have power over the Other, but this tendency is what Levinas resists and is precluded in the face-to-face, in the genuine encounter between the self and the Other.

What for Moran is a serious problem, is for Levinas a strength. To not try to render that which is unrenderable and to elucidate it instead is infinitely (literally) better than to do violence to the unrenderable by trying to capture it and render it with conceptual clarity and transparency.[2] Therefore, how one accords the face is *not* crucial. Instead, it is crucial that one recognize and respond to the face. It is true that because of Levinas' omission regarding the criteria of faceness his account is not a philosophy of the face, but, with this Levinas unrepentantly agrees, as his reaction to Phillipe Nemo's question about a phenomenology of the face suggests:

> 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 toward the Other as toward an object when you see a nose, eyes, a forehead, a chin, and you 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 his eyes one is not in a social relationship with the Other. The relation with the face *can surely be dominated by perception*, but what is specifically the face is *what cannot be reduced to that* (Levinas 1985, 85-86; emphasis added).

Whatever the face is, it cannot be something reducible to a perception. It is not a phenomenon to be grasped. This is why the description of the face-to-face is always beyond phenomenology, however much it resembles phenomenology; the encounter with the Other is beyond phenomenology because the encounter is the condition of being a perceiving self in the first place (see Levinas 1987, 54, 92). We notice, then, that the questions we posed regarding the face cannot be answered empirically by invoking perception. The face is not that which has eyes, a nose, a mouth, ears etc. The face is that which approaches from beyond the self's prior conceptual determinations; it is that from which something radically Other enters into an essentially ethical relation with the self. Can the face come to us from some being that is not "human"? Or, can some being that is ostensibly "human" not approach as an Other with a face? There is nothing precluding affirmative answers to both these questions, at least not *in principle* (since there are *no principles* here). That which approaches and calls on the self to respond has a face, whether there is a nose or not, and that which has a nose is only a face if it calls.

An interesting example of this ambiguity of the face might be the *Muselmann* of the Nazi concentration camp, the walking dead who were abhorred and avoided by their fellow prisoners. As Giorgio Agamben describes him in his attempt to bear witness to those lost souls who could not bear witness to and for themselves, the *Muselmann* represented the inhuman, the seemingly paradoxical loss of humanity (Agamben 1999). Similarly, according to Primo Levi, who had actually witnessed this paradoxical loss of humanity, the *Muselmänner* are 'an *anonymous* mass,

continually renewed and always identical, of *non-men*, divine spark dead within them, already too empty to really suffer' (Levi 1993, 90; emphasis added). The *Muselmann* is ostensibly alive, but is so dead to the world and to humanity that his face can no longer present itself *as a face*; it can no longer elicit moral obligation. The horror of the *Muselmann* is precisely this loss of faceness, the loss of ethical command. It is in the image of the *Muselmänner's* 'faceless presences' that we could 'enclose all the evil of our time' (90). The *Muselmänner* are human, but tragically no longer human enough, 'one hesitates to call them living: one hesitates to call their death death' (90); the *Muselmann* has entered his 'death throws' because he has lost his face and, by extension, has, in the silence of facelessness, lost the ability to call and demand a response.

The second problem this shift may face has to do with the degree to which the I remains an I at all. If the self is its Others, we face a problem and a tension regarding the continuity of the self. Do we run the risk not only of accepting violence to the self but of losing the selfness of the self altogether? If I *am* my-Other, how do I continue to be an I at all? And if I lose myself, then what sense is there of talking about ethics being directed to the Other, when everything just *is* other, when there is no self left to be judged ethically, to succeed or fail? There seems to be a reversal of the violence of the Ontological tradition here. Instead of subsuming the Other under the same, it seems that now we are subsuming the I (the Same) under the Other, whereby losing the particularity of the I. Even if we want to accept the ethical priority of the Other, and accept that the self is responsible for and to the Other, we might still want to resist the ontology I have presented, hoping that a better ontology

can more convincingly justify these ethics. We might want to reject the claim that the self is its Others altogether on the ground that in doing so the self is lost, which not only raises an ethical worry, but is radically incommensurable with our experience of individuated agency. In fact, Levinas addresses this concern in *Time and the Other* when he asks: 'How, in the alterity of a you, can I remain I, without being absorbed or losing myself in that you?' (Levinas 1987, 91). Levinas' answer lies in his account of fecundity, although, as we'll see, not necessarily in the actual fact of child-rearing.

Before turning to fecundity, however, there is another, more general, way of approaching this problem. In order for the Other to maintain its alterity, there must be a self there to preserve it. This comes out in Levinas' account of persecution and substitution. The self must accept persecution as a sacrifice for the Other; the self must take the Other's place when violence is imminent. The persecution that is accepted *for* the Other can only be accepted by an I, a self. As a result, my ipseity must be preserved, otherwise, the particular Other will be open to violence. This sacrifice is always a gift of sorts, a giving of bread from one's own mouth, and there must be a self with bread in its mouth in order for the bread to be given. While that Other is my inspiration, and enters into me whereby I come to be a self in the first place, I cannot be lost in that Other's otherness because then the Other is lost too. The Other's ethical priority requires that the self and its distance from the Other be preserved; the self is responsible for its self-preservation *for* the Other's sake. The Other counts on me to be me, to be my-self.

This kind of preservation can be found in the event of fecundity. According to Levinas, fecundity is a situation where it is possible to remain an ego in otherness

(Levinas 1987, 90-91). In order to determine how the self's egoity can be preserved, Levinas wonders how the ego can become other while remaining self-identical. The answer is through fecundity, which is 'the relation with a stranger who, entirely while being Other, is myself, the relationship of the ego with a myself who is nonetheless a stranger to me' (91). The child is not the parent's work or property. Rather, the child comprises the parent's selfhood: 'I *am* in some way my child' (91). Nonetheless, the child remains separate. I am my child, but my child is not entirely me, otherwise I could not be in relation to some Other that is separate, but would be related only to myself. As such, the child is me, but is also and essentially an ego as well, a person; in other words, the Other as child is also a self. This introduces a kind of pluralist existing, a kind of duality: 'Existing itself becomes double' (92). In fecundity, the Other is the self, but both the parent and the child remain separate as two distinct egos. As such, the self is preserved.

Although in describing fecundity Levinas invokes filiality, or the parent-child relationship, and in particular the paternal relationship, we must not mistake this description as a claim about the ethical need to beget children in order to be responsible for the Other while preserving oneself, or less reasonably, that the only way to relate to the Other is by being a father. Because the Other is non-adequation, the language we use to elucidate these issues will always be somewhat metaphorical and imprecise (language is inadequate for a description of the non-adequate). Levinas warns his readers of this in the preface to *Time and the Other*: 'all descriptions of this "distance-proximity" could not be elsewise than approximate or metaphorical' (Levinas 1987, 32). With this in mind, we should not think of

fecundity as the biological relation between parent and child. Instead, fecundity is the relationship of the self with the Other in general, a relationship where both are preserved in spite of the Other being the self. To be in relation with the Other is to be fecund, it is to see the Other's possibilities as your own, it is to be 'beyond the possible' (Levinas 1985, 71). In fecundity the self goes beyond the possible because the power that was arrested with the intrusion of the Other has, with the filial relationship with the Other, been restored. The Other resisted the self's possibilities, but now the Other makes up the self's possibilities; its possibilities are the self's. However, these possibilities are not the self's possibilities in the original sense of the self's possibilities. We have not returned to some state before the presence of the Other where the self could maintain its power to have power, its ability to be able. That, of course, is impossible given that the self is constituted in and through this very powerlessness in the first place. Rather, now the self's possibilities are beyond the possible strictly speaking, because the self is not in control of or the master of those possibilities. The power of the self is, in some sense, being held in trust. The self's power has been restored by being handed over to the "child", to the Other who is the self's highest and greatest possibility. As Levinas puts it:

> The fact of seeing the possibilities of the other (*autre*) as your own possibilities, of being able to escape the closure of your identity and what is bestowed on you, toward something which is not bestowed on you and which nevertheless is yours – this is paternity. This future beyond my own being, this dimension constitutive of time, takes on a concrete content in paternity. *It*

is not necessary that those who have no children see in this fact any depreciation whatever; biological filiality is only the first shape filiality takes; but one can very well conceive filiality *as a relationship between human beings without the tie of biological kinship*. One can have a personal attitude with regard to the Other (*autrui*). *To consider the Other (autrui) as a son is precisely to establish with him those relations I call "beyond the possible"* (Levinas 1985, 70-71; emphasis added).

Refocused Themes: Responsibility and Love

The third implication of the ontology I have sketched is that we must set aside the primacy of the usual tropes of ethics. It is inappropriate to articulate duty, utility and virtue as such; these themes can only be ethically fruitful if reconsidered in terms of the self-Other relation and the co-constitution of the self as Other. Instead, we must focus our philosophical attention on slightly less common themes: responsibility and love. In effect, this shift presents itself as a resistance to principles in ethics and is, in John Caputo's sense, against ethics (see Caputo 1993, 2000, 2003). If, as I hope to demonstrate, responsibility and love are the right themes to consider in ethics, we must stop trying to articulate fundamental principles or deferring to principles when faced with an ethical situation that requires an ethical decision. As we will see, we cannot respond or love in a principled way.

The resistance to principles is, as Caputo notes, signaled at the very beginning of principled ethics by Aristotle who warns against precision in ethics (Caputo 2000,

181-183; 2003, 169-170). Aristotle's ethics do not list all possible ethical scenarios with the requisite principled (re)action in each situation. Rather, Aristotle attempts to give ethical and political guidelines, sketches of principles, not principles proper. Instead of seeking the perfect transparency that ethical principles could guarantee, we should be 'satisfied to indicate the truth roughly and in outline' (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1094b 10-25). We should demand as much precision in our study as the subject matter allows, and ethical behaviour, unlike mathematics, seems to not allow too much precision, as can be noticed from Aristotle's vague advice for following the mean that urges that we perform the right action, to the right person, in the right way, at the right time, for the right end, etc. (1109a 25-30). Ethical scenarios cannot be listed and anticipated because they are situations, and situations are, like the Other, surprising. They too come from the future, they are conceptually indeterminable, singular, ungraspable and unexpected. They are, in a word, *un*principled. Because the ethical scenario is not itself principled, the right response to the scenario cannot be principled either: 'The singular situations of daily life fly too close to the ground to be detected by the radar of ethical choice' (Caputo 2000, 173). As such, the turn to responsibility and love is the turn to the unprincipled particularity of ethical situations. In Alain Badiou's words, 'there is no ethics in general,' only 'ethics of processes by which we treat the possibilities of a situation' (Badiou 2001, 16), and what we are *faced* with in an ethical situation is a particular Other, a 'some-one' (Badiou 2001, 44-45), not a generic instance of a kind that can be dealt with through an unequivocal appeal to some principle.

As we have seen, we must begin to consider responsibility as respond-ability. I am not merely responsible for what I do politically or legally. Instead, I am responsible for what I do and who I am as a kind of response to a call. This response cannot be principled because principles determine the response before the response itself and even before the call. In order for a response to respond it *must not* be principled because a principled response is a commitment to the principle not to the Other who calls. In other words, the ethical judgement whereby the adequacy of the response is determined can never be a prejudgement.

This should not, however, be understood as, what Caputo calls, a 'capricious self-indulgence' or an ethical free-for-all. Instead, unprincipled responsibility is a 'life of heightened and intensified responsibility that undertakes an endless struggle with the difference of daily existence, with the idiosyncrasies of concrete situations' (Caputo 2003, 171). Of course, principles can be appealed to, but only provisionally. We can refer to the "principled" decision of prior similar situations, but should never do so with the dogmatic expectation that all situations will be repeated, or that all situations have already been played out. Such an expectation is radically incommensurate both with the ontology I have tried to develop (since I *am* constituted in newness and by unknowability, I cannot expect the situations I face as a self, which include the presence of unknowable and surprising Others, to be any less new or unknowable) and with the flux of everyday experience. We must face up to the particularity of situations, which is ensured by the particularity both of the self and the Other. We must respond to the singularity of each and every particular

situation we face, which can be entirely surprising and can *demand* an unprincipled response.

According to Caputo, there are at least four problems with a principled approach to ethics, which he calls a 'principled irresponsibility', where the response is 'so dominated by principles as to allow the response to abdicate responsibility' (Caputo 2003, 171). First, principles can program a decision or determine the ethical response beforehand, whereby annulling both the responding of response and the deciding of decision. With principled action, a response is no longer a response and a decision is no longer a decision. We are left with a principled and determined action, or with the job of applying the principle; all that needs to be done is to determine what the requisite principle is, which does not require a decision to respond. Right and wrong are determined by the adherence or non-adherence to some principle or a successful or unsuccessful application of the principle. In either case, we are absolved from the work of responding, thus, we no longer need to answer the call directed to us; we only need to do what the principle dictates. Second, principles allow us to justify inaction or potentially immoral behaviour. Principles make possible the infamous "I was just following orders" approach to ethics. I can fail to respond to a call because doing so might conflict with some pre-chosen principle. I may very well regret the principle, realizing that it is too principled, but excuse my adherence to it on the basis of a duty or principled obligation to follow principles. As the equipment manager who believes me when I assure him that I returned the volleyball that his computer claims I have not yet returned, but who also admits to having his hands tied by the authority of his computer database might say, "the rules

are, after all, the rules!" Third, principles can end up being destructive. Principles do not signal any meta-principle that can adjudicate conflicts between principles. As Kant's rejection of the right to lie indicates, on a principled approach to ethics principles should never be violated, even when the reluctance to violate those principles will likely result in further (and worse) violations of principles (see Kant 1993, 63-67). The adherence to principles can result in a moral state of affairs that other principles (or even those very principles we followed in the first place) would and should prohibit. Finally, principles can be invoked to get our way. Faced with a multitude of principles, some of which may be mutually exclusive, we can strategically appeal to certain principles rather than others in order to justify our actions, which may both violate the other principles we strategically neglected and show a total insensitivity to the ethical situation we face: 'We start with the result that we want and work backwards to the principle, so that the principle is a thinly disguised weapon of the will to power' (Caputo 2003, 172).

By gesturing toward the ethical need to attend to responsibility over principles of ethics I am not recommending the total obliteration of ethical, moral or political principles. As stated above, the attention to situations is not a capricious "anything-goes" approach to ethics, a blatant ethical subjectivism. Rather, what this brief critique of principles is meant to show is that principles are not ethically original. The face-to-face situation of call and response is ethically original because it is on the basis of the ethical encounter that we come to be selves who can adhere to principles or not; in other words, it is with the situation where a self is called to respond to the Other's call that principles first appear.[3] Principles are not primary, they are the

result of ethical decisions made in the particularity of ethical situations of facing, or as Caputo puts it, principles are 'drawn off from the singularity of existence' (Caputo 2003, 170). Ethicists are like spectators who arrive late on the scene of an accident (see Caputo 2000, 172), gawking at the atrocity and accounting for the mistake after it happens, explaining how it happened and why it *shouldn't* have happened (i.e., what fault was committed and should subsequently be avoided; who should be held accountable – yet not respond-able – for the fault, etc.). The ethicist is always *en retard*, giving us principles after situations have already passed and ethical decisions have already been made.

While I suggested earlier that ethical dilemmas are not the only ethically relevant place to evaluate the self, we should now refine that previous claim by saying instead that *ethical dilemmas abound in the Other's call*, and the Other, as we've seen, is always already present. Since the Other always already calls and the self is always already called to respond, the self is always in an ethical dilemma: should I respond to this Other or to that Other and should I respond in this way or that way? If the self is constituted in the relationship with the Other and if that relationship can be described as a relationship of calling and essential response, then to not respond to a call or to respond inadequately in concrete situations is to violate the Other.[4] What's more, this is also a violation of the self, since the Other is the condition of the self's being a self and so in some sense makes-up the self, in which case, a violation of the one is a violation of the other. I owe it to my Other to not violate myself, and owe it to myself to not violate my Other. The need for responsibility is intrinsic to human being and to ethical success because it is the

condition of being in the first place. Every action or mode of being is a response, which can only be evaluated as a more or less adequate response, not as the fulfillment or failure to fulfill some predetermined principle. Again, this evaluation must be directed toward the Other who is radically other, it cannot take place abstractly or monologically.

There is, however, a difficulty in invoking responsibility in ethics. As Giorgio Agamben has noted, 'the concept of responsibility is ... irremediably contaminated by law' (Agamben 1999, 20). The word "responsibility" derives from the Latin *spondeo*, which means 'to become the guarantor of something for someone (or for oneself) with respect to someone' (21). This conception is originally juridical, not ethical, and is tied to *culpa*, culpability, the 'imputability of damage' (22). Since it seems that, conceptually and linguistically, responsibility is originally legal, it resists ethics, in which case, the account I am giving faces the problem of accounting for ethical responsibility, and in such a way that, since I have been making ontological claims throughout, ethical responsibility is given *ontological* priority over legal responsibility. In other words, what I hope to do is resuscitate responsibility for ethics. Agamben captures this problem neatly when he writes:

> But ethics is the sphere that recognizes neither guilt nor responsibility, it is, as Spinoza knew, the doctrine of the happy life. To assume guilt and responsibility – which can, at times, be necessary – is to leave the territory of ethics and enter that of law. Whoever has made this difficult step cannot presume to return through the door he just closed behind him (24).

The challenge I am trying to answer is that of reopening this door, if it is indeed closed. We can do so by returning to the notion of a guarantor, the *sponsor*, 'the person who substituted himself for the *reus*, promising, in the case of a breech of contract, to furnish the required service' (Agamben 1999, 22), to show that legal responsibility is originally ethical. What does the guarantor guarantee? In Agamben's example of the Roman marriage ceremony, the father guarantees his daughter, guarantees that she will be the groom's bride, and if she fails, that the groom and his family will be adequately compensated. What is being guaranteed in this case is not only some-thing, some property that will change hands. What is being guaranteed is some-one, the would-be bride. She is *not* being guaranteed *only* as a possession. She is being guaranteed as a person; her personhood is, in some sense, at stake in the guarantee. The guarantor guarantees that his daughter is *someone* who can *be* a bride. Evidently, a guarantor can guarantee something that is in no way someone. For instance, one can be responsible as the guarantor of something that is *only* a property. I sell you a good and I guarantee that the good will do what you expect that good to do. The responsibility is ostensibly the same in the second case as it was in the first, however, the second case also brings out a further dimension of guarantee. I guarantee the good you buy, *to you*; your personhood is also somehow at stake in my guarantee. Even in this second case is there another (an Other) to whom the guarantee is directed. Without multiple *particular* people interacting, or better, inter*being*, and requiring guarantees from each other, there is no sense of talking of responsibility, and this situation arises before any question of law. For example, I

cannot be responsible to my cup to fill it with coffee, but I can be, and *am*, responsible to my server for paying for the coffee and he is responsible for giving me coffee rather than tea. This second dimension can also be noticed in the first example. While the father is responsible as guarantor of his daughter, he is responsible *to* the future groom and his family. He guarantees his daughter, the groom and the groom's family as Others to and for whom he is responsible, thus guaranteeing them as persons. The point is that the legal responsibility is premised on an ethical and person-al responsibility to and for Others. While I am bound to this responsibility legally in virtue of laws, which proscribe any violation of the responsibility, the possibility of being responsible in this way is premised on the prior responsible stance of guaranteeing the person to whom I am responsible as an ethical, *not legal*, person, as a self and an Other.

From this conception of responsibility as originally ethical, we are still able to make sense of the tie to culpability and, what Agamben calls, the 'imputability of damage'. Damage results before any legal commitment. It results from any non-response or inadequate response (a non-response being, as we saw earlier, essentially an inadequate response). By being irresponsible, I violate the Other as an Other. By not responding to her call, I treat the Other as an other incapable of calling; I convert her into a *Muselmann*, a human who has become inhuman and can no longer elicit ethical response; I convert her into a human thing, an object. It is the original ethical situation of call and response that makes damage something imputable, that makes me someone who can be culpable for not responding. Damage can be imputed, not because there is some law that can define some act or behaviour as damaging, but

because persons can be damaged or violated, *as persons*. As such, we can further assert that Agamben is mistaken to say that ethics does not recognize guilt. Rather, ethics opens up a necessary guilt, a necessary culpability to and for Others. As I am constituted through an ethical encounter, I am constituted as someone who is originally and forever guilty, and that guilt can only be alleviated by the Other's grace, through the Other's gratuitous forgiveness.

The sense of guaranteeing a person can also be noticed in the everyday. Take, for instance, the common expression "see you later".[5] As I take my leave of you I remind you that I will again see you, that I guarantee that you are here now, and that I will once again return to guarantee you and confirm you. I see you now, now you are you because I see you, and I guarantee that you are you, which you will be again, because I am an I capable of guarantee; I bear witness to you. This guarantee also has the effect of guaranteeing all the you's you will be in between. I guarantee your presence now, but do not leave as though you will cease to be. I will see you again because I avow that you are here now and will be up to and including the point when I see you again, at which point I will likely guarantee (and *should* guarantee) that I will see you again later. Here we find a modification of the Marcelian view of testimony. It is still I who bear witness, putting myself on the line as it were, and I testify to another, but now we see that what I bear witness to is you, not just myself. I bear witness to the Other to whom I am responsible as a guarantor. I am responsible to the Other because only I can guarantee the Other's preservation as an Other, the Other's alterity. Of course, another Other may come along who is willing to perform this guarantee in my place, but of this I cannot – can *never* – be certain. I cannot

count on anyone else to guarantee the Other. What's more it is *I* who have been called to do so, not another Other. I can shirk my responsibility in this case, and doing so may have no negative consequences if another Other comes along to pick up the slack, but doing so is precisely what it means for me to be immoral.

Since the self is co-constituted with and by the encounter with the Other, and since that encounter is an ethical one whereby the self is called on to respond to the Other, any violation of the encounter is both a violation of the Other and a violation of the self. The question of egoism and altruism is hereby pushed aside. To be egoistic is to be altruistic, to be self-regarding is to be Other-regarding, it is to be *for* the Other, to be responsible. It is an ethical and an ontological mistake to adopt an ethics that conceives of the self's interests independently of the Other's interest. This view has an historical origin (if not *the* historical origin) in Aristotle's account of friendship. According to Aristotle, the true friend comes to be another oneself, a second self.[6] The second self is not, however, an alter ego. The friend is another oneself in so far as the friend's friendship is constitutive of the self's good. While the 'friend is ... someone who wishes and does goods or apparent goods to his friends *for the friend's own sake*' (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1166a 1-5; emphasis added), the friend's interest *is* the self's interest since 'friendship resembles one's friendship to oneself' (1166b1). It is only in this way that we can make sense of Aristotle's comments that in self-sacrifice both the friend's and the self's interests are met. The friend's interest is met because the sacrifice gives her something from which she will benefit. The self's interest is met because the self does good, which is excellent and promotes happiness, which is the self's chief target and goal; it is in the self's interest to

promote the friend's interest (1168a 30-1169b1). Friendship in Aristotle is neither egoistic nor altruistic because it is in some important sense both. If one has true friends, it is essential to share a life with those friends, and this cannot just mean a coordination of activities. Rather, sharing a life implies sharing interests, which is stronger than having common interests. Two "friends" may both enjoy drinking beer, and believe that it is in their interest to drink as much beer as possible without getting ill. These "friends" may spend their time drinking beer together, and in this way, they share a life because they happen to share a common interest. However, when push comes to shove and only one pint of beer remains, each friend will likely want the beer for himself; this is so because neither friend considers the other's interest as his own. Instead, sharing a life means adopting the friend's interests *as your own.* As such, there is an important similarity between our relations with friends and our relations with ourselves, and this is so precisely because the interests are the same: 'Friendship is community, and we are related to our friend as we are related to ourselves' (1171b 30-35).

'Let us conclude with love, by talking about love, for what else, after all, is worth talking about?' (Caputo 2003, 179). While I've said nothing about love thus far, I will leave with the very brief intimation[7] that the responsible stance toward another as part of the self that I have been articulating is precisely what love is, and as such, love (neither duty, nor utility, nor eudaemonia, nor any *conceivable* or *knowable* ethical principle[8]) is the basic "principle" (the unprincipled principle) of ethics; it is 'the principle without principle, the principle for what is not subject to principle' (Caputo 1993, 121). I will turn to this topic by reinvoking the main

character of this project, Emmanuel Levinas, whose writing at all times says the unsaybility of love, and ends by performing love better than most of our deliberate performances of love ever do.

Claiming that 'in civilized life there are traces of this relationship with the other', Levinas suggests that love (eros) is one such trace of the original and constitutive event of coming to be with the Other (Levinas 1987, 84ff). This is a situation where alterity appears in its purity, as a positive alterity. Here the Other, the Beloved, appears as something wholly other, as something whose very essence is alterity, but, which, unlike the total alterity of death, can be engaged. While I cannot relate with death because when it arrives I depart, I cease to be an I, I can and do relate with alterity in the presence of the person I love. Levinas characterizes this pure alterity of the Beloved as the absolutely contrary contrary.[9] As such, sexual difference is neither a specific difference, nor a contradiction, nor the duality of complimentary terms (i.e., a fusion of predefined terms). It is not, in short, a biological difference. This implies that sexual difference obtains even between persons who are biologically same. Sexual difference is, instead, a formal structure, it is 'an insurmountable duality of beings' (86). The loving relationship where this sexual difference is brought into relation is not a coming together, a becoming one whereby the difference is overcome in favour of a perfect unity. Erotic love is not that love described by Aristophanes in *the Symposium*, where two lovers, who are predetermined to be lovers, seek each other out in order to find and secure their true and ideal perfect unity. Rather, love preserves alterity, it is a *being two*; it is a gift of the self to and for the Other, never a gift of the self just for the self, as in the case of

Aristophanes' lovers who give themselves to their Beloved in order to achieve their own perfection in sexual unity. Instead, sexual union is always a sexual disunity, a preservation of otherness. Love is, consequently, not a knowing, nor can it be explicated on the model of knowing or perceiving. It is a hiding from light, a modesty. I do not and cannot know my Beloved. My Beloved always hides from me, but not coyly in order to prolong the game that inevitably ends with possession. Modesty is not a postponement of unity, it is a resistance to unity, an *essential hiding*, an essential unpossessibility, an essential unknowability; it is *mystery*. To "have" or "know" the Other in love is to posit and maintain alterity: 'The other bears alterity as an essence' (87-88).

The caress, which '*expresses* love, but suffers from the inability to tell it' (Levinas 1969, 258) and 'weds without consum(mat)ing' (Irigaray 1993, 186), shows this essential difference and alterity. The caress is 'a mode of the subject's being, where the subject who is in contact with another goes beyond this contact' (Levinas 1987, 89). That which is caressed is touched but never grasped. I touch my Beloved's hand, but I don't have the hand, I don't grasp it, or know it, or understand it in the same way I do a cup I clutch. Implied in the actual caress is a seeking that never gets hold of that for which it seeks; it is a perpetual seeking without seizing. The touching of the caress is not a perception. In other words, the caress is a sensibility that transcends the sensible, that cannot be reduced to perception or experiential categories. The seeking caress does not know what it seeks; it does not already have a concept of that for which it searches, nor can it essentially determine that for which it searches. Instead, it searches as 'a movement unto the invisible'

(Levinas 1969, 258). The caress is like a game 'with something other, always other, always inaccessible, and always still to come (à venir). The caress is the anticipation of this pure future (avenir), without content' (Levinas 1987, 89). One approaches the ethical origin of the self in and through love.

What I have referred to as an approach towards the ethical event through love cannot be understood as an achievement or an accomplishment of the event, since to achieve the event would be to lose it, to violate the ethical encounter with the Other. Levinas warns against this in *Totality and Infinity* when he writes: 'The metaphysical event of transcendence – the welcome of the Other, hospitality – Desire and language – is not accomplished as love'. Instead, 'the transcendence of discourse is bound to love' (Levinas 1969, 254). Neither love nor the ethical encounter are accomplishable because to accomplish would be to render same or make transparent. Ethics and love, which are bound together, essentially resist accomplishment; they are, in effect, an essential resistance to accomplishment. As such, love is a being two, an *entre-nous*, a transcendence and preservation of alterity, never a coming to be in unity, never an obliteration of either partner into a sameness. What's more, the resistance to accomplishment in love gestures toward the original event of constitution: 'It designates a movement by which a being seeks *that to which it was bound before even having taken the initiative of the search* and despite the exteriority in which it finds it' (Levinas 1969, 254; emphasis added). Therefore, in love I return to myself as a self constituted in the ethical encounter that is essentially bound to love, I return to myself as I am constituted in love with the Other. It is, thus, a love of self as its

Other: 'To love is also to love oneself in love, and thus to return to oneself' (Levinas 1969, 266).

While I have explicitly made reference to erotic/sexual love here, this does not mean that the place of love in this ethical discussion is inevitably erotic. To recall Levinas, the erotic relationship is a *trace* of the relationship with the Other, it is not the consummation or the achievement of that relationship. It is a trace, a particularly interesting trace given our own tradition of erotic discourse on love that favors unity over alterity, but not the only trace. As such, the appeal to eros is quite fitting in a project that follows Levinas in his resistance to a philosophical tradition that seems to be guilty of the same tendency. Erotic love is one species of love, is one way of lovingly attending to the ethical event of being. Fecundity is another way. Yet another is friendship, which, as we saw, demonstrates responsibility, which goes hand in hand with love in this redirected ethics. Whatever form it takes, love is that attention and openness to the ethical encounter.

Just as responsibility did, love also opposes principles. If love is to be sufficiently loving it *must* be unprincipled. This is apparent when we notice that love is unconditional; it is a gift; it is a giving that is always excessive. To give is always to give without return, or at least without an anticipated or expected return.[10] As such, the gift of love cannot be a dutiful obligation. We may be (and are, as I have suggested) called to love because in love we attend to the event of being with the Other and open up the possibility of ethical success, but the gift of love cannot be something we are bound to by a political or moral duty; love cannot and should not be legislated. Love cannot simultaneously be a duty and a gift. As Caputo puts is, 'to

give a gift (like love) is to do precisely what I do not have to do or to do something for which I do not expect a payback' (Caputo 2000, 185). Giving and loving always go beyond programmatic ethics and duty; they go beyond and resist principles.

Nevertheless, there is an important sense in which we are obliged to love. Just as the situation of the Other's call obliges us to respond, yet with an obligation that cannot be principled or determined beforehand, we are also obliged to love the Other, to respond to the Other's call lovingly, yet again in a way that cannot be principled. As Caputo puts it, obligation is a fact, it happens (Caputo 1993, 6-7). Obligation is not something I bring about or which is prescribed to me by moral or political duty. Rather, it arises in the concrete situation of facing the Other:

> To say that obligations "happen" is to say that obligation is not anything I have brought about, not anything I have negotiated, but rather something that happens to me. Obligations do not ask for my consent. Obligation is not like a contract I have signed after having had a chance first to review it carefully and to have consulted my lawyer. It is not anything I have agreed to be a party to. It binds me (Caputo 1993, 7).

At the same time as it is an excess, love is always deficient, which also shows love's resistance to principles. If I do what a principle prescribes, then I cannot, seemingly by definition, be doing anything deficiently. In loving we can never love enough. While we are obliged to love excessively, seemingly against our will and power, we also always fail to love adequately; we always fail in our obligation to

love, an obligation that happens to us. As we saw in the previous chapter, ethical success implies a simultaneous ethical failure. Similarly, the excessiveness of actual and genuine love also signals its own inadequacy. To love is to fail and succeed in the ethical situation. I can never love enough because love is that which cannot be measured; it is more than what principles expect but less than itself. Love is unaccomplishable because it is never enough and it is never enough because it is unaccomplishable.

We don't need philosophy to show us the ambiguity of love. We only need to look at the (f)act of loving itself. Take a young child's attempt to articulate her love. We laugh at the innocence of the child who seems to confuse her words when she tells her parents, "I love you too much". We assume that the child's "too much" is a linguistically unaccomplished way of saying "a lot", or "very much". The child has likely chosen these words due to linguistic inexperience, but her inexperience is also an "ethical/social" inexperience. Her turn of phrase shows a lack of acquaintance with principled ethics, although she is certainly well acquainted with the ethics of love I am trying to uncover. The child *does* love "too much", not just "very much". Her love is excessive, it exceeds her and her ability to communicate, since the articulation of her excess falls on deaf ears.[11] The same child also shows love's deficiency. She does not simply state her love or show it once and for all (perhaps with a dreadful breakfast in bed) and leave it at that. She states and restates the "too much" as though repetition will somehow make it enough. Yet even repetition is never enough, so she continues to love "too much" (perhaps with countless more dreadful breakfasts). The child's love shows that love is possible and necessary, yet

also impossible – it is here, always only here, but somehow also beyond, never here enough. Echoing the child's "too much", Jean-Luc Nancy articulates the ambiguity (and inarticulacy) of love nicely in "Shattered Love" when he writes:

> Love is thus not here, and it is not elsewhere. One can neither attain it nor free oneself from it, and this is at bottom exactly what it is: the excess or the lack of this completion[12], which is represented as the truth of love. In other words, and as it has been extensively said, extensively represented, and extensively theorized for some two centuries: the impossible (Nancy 1991, 93).

If the self is constituted by an event and a confrontation with an Other who arrests the self's power, then that arrest must be considered. We need to philosophize about this resistance, this arrest, not about power and knowledge. In short, we need to do philosophy, not as a love of wisdom, but as a 'wisdom of love', a 'wisdom in the guise of love', as a movement toward the mystery that never reaches what is approached: 'philosophy as a love of love' and 'a wisdom taught by the face of the other man' (Levinas 1998a, 200). Jeffrey Dudiak has argued that Levinas' discourse is philosophical precisely because, in its resistance to thematization and to the violent conceptual rendering of the Other, it is a wisdom of love. According to Dudiak:

> Levinas's philosophy is, it is true, qua philosophy, an attempt to thematize [the ethical saying], but is also, again qua philosophy, an attempt to reduce the

> inevitable betrayal of this thematization in an attempt that while yet philosophical could not be motivated by philosophy itself, but only by love, that is, where philosophy as the love of wisdom is converted into the wisdom of love in the service of love (Dudiak 2001, 349-350).

Although there are certainly differences between Levinas and Plato, who, according to Levinas, inaugurates, along with Parmenides, the tradition of Ontology as the philosophy of Sameness, we can notice a semblance of this wisdom of love even in Plato's Socrates, the epitome of the lover of wisdom. In *the Symposium* Love is characterized by Diotima as a lover of wisdom, as a philosopher. Like philosophy, love (eros) loves wisdom: 'Wisdom is one of the most beautiful of things, and Love is love of beauty, so it follows that Love must be a lover of wisdom, and consequently in a state half-way between wisdom and ignorance' (Plato 1951, 83). Loving is not a knowing, a grasping or having; it is a loving of knowing, a loving of wisdom. The love of wisdom does not seek to have wisdom, it loves that which it cannot have, and loves it in so far as it does not have it. Love remains half-way. If the philosopher gets wisdom, she stops loving it and ceases to be a lover of wisdom, a philosopher. To have wisdom is to cease philosophizing, it is to accomplish what Hegel wanted to accomplish, to turn the love of wisdom into wisdom proper. Philosophy does not have wisdom or knowledge; it loves wisdom and knowledge by attending to loving – which is a loving of beauty, including preeminently beautiful wisdom – it is a wise attention to love, it is a love of love, a love of the wisdom of love. To be a

philosopher is not only to be a lover of wisdom, but it is to be in love, to be loving. Philosophy is a kind of erosophy (an eros sophia), or better, an erosphilosophia.

If to love wisdom is to love, Levinas' philosophy should be seen as a 'performance of love' (Dudiak 2001, 350) and, I am suggesting, philosophy should more often aspire to perform love, to expose itself, its discourse[13], to the Other for whom and with whom the philosopher is. I will end with what I take to be an attempt at the wisdom of love: Paul Celan's "*love*" poem "Praise of Distance" (Celan 2001, 25).[14] Here, poetry (as the saying of the unsayable) meets philosophy, accomplishing itself as a wisdom of love without being a knowing, a grasping or controlling. The poet's power has been arrested. Celan describes a love much different from the self-interested romantic love we are accustomed to in "love" poetry; his love bespeaks a simultaneous distance and proximity, a preservation of oneself through the loss of oneself in another.

In the springs of your eyes
Live the Madsea fishermen's nets.
In the springs of your eyes
The sea keeps its promise.

Celan's lover's eyes have springs. The eyes are not *like* springs; the metaphor is not a simple simile or analogy. Rather, the metaphor is the truthful articulation of an un-articulable encounter. Celan is describing something important and essential about his lover's eyes: that they contain springs. Nonetheless, the claim is not a

cognitive one, it is not a description of a thing and its properties. This image should signal the flowing of water, but also the surging forth of that water; the eyes are not just *like* bodies of water with all the connotations water brings (life, purity, cleansing), but *are* rapidly moving bodies of water, constantly flowing and changing, like Heraclitus' famous river. The eyes of the lover and the lover herself cannot be pinned down, cannot be comprehended, cannot be conceptually rendered without remainder because they spring forth, they surge and in surging are essentially in flux, resisting articulation. We should thus notice that the image is a violent one: the spring springs forth out of the eyes towards that which is before those eyes (presumably another set of eyes). There is a communion of sorts being initiated by this violent surging of the spring, but a communion that can only be rendered metaphorically.

In these eyes *live* the Madsea fisherman's nets; the nets are organic, not just things or tools used to catch fish, not just things with properties. That which catches fish is alive; the living fish will be ensnared by a living net. While the nets live in the springs of the eyes, the Madsea is not there, the Madsea and its fishermen are outside the eyes. However, it is in those eyes with their springs that the sea's promise to supply fish is contained. The very being of those nets in the eyes guarantees their success. While the sea provides the fish and must promise to do so, the fact that the nets live in the springs suggests that their being is not in vain. This implies an original relationship between the sea and the springs, the fish and the nets, the outside living world and the eyes of the lover.

Here, as a heart

That abode among humans,

I throw off my clothes and the glare of an oath:

Where is "here"? It is that space of facing where those eyes with the springs, with the living nets ready to catch that which has been promised to them, which is promised immediately in its very being, face the poet; "here" is the space of the face-to-face, that abode among humans (the *entre-nous*), that place that situates and grounds humans (who are-with, who are loving – to be-with is to be loving). Celan notices his lover's eyes and it is in that encounter, that face-to-face, that he is here, as a heart. He faces those eyes not as a man with concrete qualities, not as Paul Celan, yet always Paul Celan. Surely Paul Celan is there and important, but even more importantly, he faces those eyes as a heart, a loving open heart. The heart is not the abode, but as a heart, the poet abides. This seems to imply that humans are not at home when they are filled with the countenances and circumstances of their everydayness, they are most at home when they are stripped naked (an image Levinas uses often), when their political and civic obligations (their glaring oaths) are stripped away, when they are in their essential nudity, a fragile and vulnerable nudity, a nudity which comes about in the act of facing the eyes of the lover, and a nudity that makes possible the ensuing countenances.

Blacker in black, am I more naked.

Apostate only am I true

I am you, when I am I.

Here we find a series of "ontological" claims about the "I" of the poem. The depiction of this I, which is of a particular nature, nonetheless suggests a more general structure of description of I-ness; although the ontological claims refer to this specific I, it is reasonable to suggest that I-ness in general, but always as particular loving I's, can be described in similar terms, since the poem seeks to communicate understandably to other I's, to other particular readers, and speaks directly to a you who is presumably also an I. The first claim suggests what it takes for this I to be more I, to be more naked and less contingent: the I is more I, more naked, when it is blacker in black, when it is less articulate as a contingent I, when it is just I, not Paul Celan with all the baggage that carries. The other two claims are conditional. Celan does not merely say what the I is, but what conditions must be met in order for the I to be more true and/or more truly itself. This further suggests that I-ness in general is not fulfilled as a matter of course, but comes about through some kind of activity, namely, apostasy, through the abandonment and withdrawal from the concrete manifestation of that self, of the self's egoism. The faith that is given up is the faith in the socialized and concrete self. What is abandoned is the faith in oneself, in one's immediacy; what is given up is one's selfishness.[15] Once this faith is abandoned, then the "true" self can emerge. Through such activity the I is true, and as true, the I becomes itself, a true I, yet in so doing, it equally becomes its Other (the lover into whose eyes it looks), it is you as well as I. The poet is the poet because he is his lover. As soon as the I is fulfilled it becomes its you, yet the fulfillment of this self

already implies the taking up of its you position in apostasy. Thus, this conditional is more like a bi-conditional: I am I if and only if I am you. Once I become I, I become you, yet I become I by becoming you.

In the springs of your eyes
I drift on and dream of spoils.

The image here is of the self resting in the Other, drifting in that spring with its living nets, presumably becoming ensnared in those nets. The self has been caught by the Other. What spoils is this captured self dreaming of? Recall that the fish are out in the sea, outside the springs. Although the self drifts in these springs, the self is also outside, there is a separation and a distance between the lover and the I, yet always also a proximity, a closeness. The self is the spoils, caught by the lover's eyes, yet, in being caught, also catching itself, catching up with its true self.

A net snared a net:
embracing we sever.

The I has been caught, it is a fish, yet simultaneously a net. The I and the Other are quite a lot alike, showing once again the general validity of the statements about the I. Presumably both are fish and net, both are that which is caught and that which catches. Two nets entangled beyond repair, yet not beyond recognition: they are joined, yet remain separate and identifiable. The self is this Other who it

embraces, yet who is always separate. It is no longer clear what is caught and what is catching, what suffers love and what brings it about, what is self and what is Other, but this is the essence of being an I, and more specifically, of being an I *in love*, which is how one becomes an I in the first place:

> In the springs of your eyes
>
> *A hanged man strangles the rope* (Celan 2001, 24-25; emphasis added).

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[1] For example, I recognize that anyone who has not been convinced by the ontological descriptions I have offered in the previous chapters will likely not be compelled by the ethics I propose in this chapter. Nonetheless, I expect that the ethics will be intelligible to anyone who has found the ontology intelligible if not compelling. More generally, intelligent and sympathetic interlocutors who do not share an ontology may find their ethical debate strained, but neither impossible nor useless.

[2] It is worth noting that Levinas sought opportunities that could facilitate this attempt to elucidate rather than capture that which cannot be grasped. In *Time and the Other*, he reminds his readers of the context in which the text was conceived: namely, a post-liberation intellectual freedom epitomized by Jean Wahl's college in Paris. This was an environment which 'promised new philosophical possibilities', which 'took some liberties with the academic rules', and which succeeded in providing, in Gabriel Marcel's words, ideas 'to be excavated', 'to be deepened', 'to be explored' (Levinas 1987, 34). For Levinas, these attempts are not intellectually gratuitous, seeking free thought for its own sake. Rather, these new possibilities afforded by the post-war atmosphere of Wahl's college are integral to thinking the mystery and saying the unsayable. It is likely that the college was not the only or first space in which Levinas could consider the mystery of the Other, since his concern with the Other was likely informed by his own war time experiences rather than his post-war liberty, as Marcel's were conditioned by his own difficult experiences during the first World War (see Solomon 1974, 124). The context of Wahl's college was not an opportunity to encounter the Other as much as it was an opportunity to bring that encounter to bear on intellectual pursuits, to encounter this encounter by 'excavating', 'deepening' and 'exploring'.

[3] It is on the issue of ethical or ontological origins that the account I am developing differs from Caputo's, whose anti-ethics is entirely skeptical of original philosophy. Consider for example the following passage: 'I confess to having lost all contact with the First Beginning and everything Originary. I have given up hope of catching a glimpse of the last god's passing by in this end-time when the first gods have flown. I do not expect to be on hand for the Other Beginning, which can be granted if and only if one can maintain communications with the First Beginning. ... Though I wait daily by my phone, though I keep my ear close to the ground, I cannot, for the life of me, hear the call of Being' (Caputo 1993, 2).

[4] The difference between not responding and responding inadequately is only a relative one, since, as we saw in the previous chapter, to refuse to respond is already to respond, albeit inconsistently.

[5] Looking to this common expression is an example of turning to the familiar and banal in order both to notice that the common place is always ethical and to pass ethical judgement. A refusal to "see you later" is an ethical failure.

[6] I realize that, given the account of agency I developed earlier, the use of the word "self" in the present context is both misleading and anachronistic. I use the term here only for expedience. Because we have arrived at the point in the discussion where the language of selfhood has been

defended and adopted, the conscious misuse of language here should be excused as it is only appealed to in order to further explicate and develop the sense of responsibility (which, incidentally, need not be tied exclusively to the language of selfhood in particular) at issue.

[7] While my account of love may end up being less developed and articulate than it could be, whatever intimations I make will be *necessarily* brief. This is so because any account of love will only be an intimation, and so will always be too brief. Because love is, as we will see, always somehow "too much", whatever account one tries to give will always somehow be "not enough".

[8] Love cannot be known or conceived because it arises in the ethical encounter with that which cannot be known or conceived.

[9] I have deliberately avoided using the (in)famous term Levinas uses in this context: the feminine. The worry that Levinas' use of "the feminine" as a stand-in for the welcome of the Other and for otherness in general (what we might want to refer to as (m)otherness) means that Levinas is guilty of perpetuating the degradation of the woman as other is misconceived because Levinas, unlike the traditional philosophers who see otherness pejoratively, gives precedence to the Other, and so to the feminine. Nonetheless, the gendering of otherness and sameness remains problematic, especially since the non-feminine is what is taken for granted, it is subjectivity and as such is what is and has power, it is essentially virile. Like so many other issues, taking this problem up would take us too far away from the trajectory of this work. For a serious discussion of this issue, and a more competent one than I could offer, see Stella Sandford's survey of and attempted resolution to this debate (Sandford 2002).

[10] That love is oftentimes returned represents one of the most important good fortunes of human sociality; it is the miracle that flies in the face of the unconditionality of love and makes life bearable.

[11] Another similar case would be the child who tries to indicate the measure of her love by stretching out her hands as wide as possible. Here the child shows that her love is more than she is, it extends beyond her. In both cases, the child is trying to articulate the excessiveness of her love.

[12] We should slightly amend Nancy's claim. Not only is love the excess *or* the lack of completion, it is *both* the excess *and* the lack of completion. Love goes beyond its own completion and also always falls short.

[13] In this context, discourse should be understood as a 'non-allergic, ethical relation with alterity' (Dudiak 2001, 352).

[14] It is not without significance that this poem is cited by Levinas as the epigraph to his famous 'Substitution' chapter from *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence*. Nor is it without significance that I have looked to this poem to find an insight into the loving encounter with the Other. There is "something" (something thinkable but not knowable) about this poem that both Levinas and I think "fits". While I am not a Celan expert, I take some solace in Gadamer's reminder that a reader interested in understanding or interpreting Celan need not be 'scholarly' or 'learned'. Instead, the reader 'must simply try to keep listening' (Gadamer 1997, 67).

[15] There is surely room for a comparison, which I will not attempt here (in part due to my incompetence as a commentator on poetry, and in part due to the fact that doing so would go too far afield), between Celan's apostasy and the Kierkegaardian ideal of 'dying to' (see for example, Kierkegaard 1980, 6; 1990, 76ff).

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