

APPRAISAL

The Journal of the Society for Post-Critical and Personalist Studies

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Papers from the 11th International Conference on Persons

Roman Briggs

Personal integration and aestheticism: A sketch

James DiGiovanna

**You are not the person I knew: Eclecticism and
context in continuity of identity**

John Hofenbauer

**Are classical and medieval scientific ideals
rooted in a 'Community of Persons'?**

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**From the Absolute to the individual: Person and
pre-mortal existence in Boehme, Schelling and
Howison**

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The Confucian conception of person

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sophy of Alain Badiou**

Bruce Young

**Beyond Personality: C. S. Lewis' semi-
postmodern view of the human person**



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P All contributions should be in good, clear English, without jargon, and with end-notes and frequent sub-headings (at approx. every 700 wds).

P Please see inside rear cover regarding references to the works of Michael Polanyi.

P All contributions should be sent via e-mail or on disk.

P Please ask for the Style Sheet or save or print it from our web site: www.spcps.org.uk.

In particular, please write or rewrite all end-notes (no footnotes) and their indices (superscript) as **ordinary** text; and please give in Abstract (no more than 100 words), and a list of Key Words.

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Notes on new and not so recent contributors

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Dr John Hofbauer is an Associate Professor of Philosophy at Mount Saint Mary College in Newburgh, NY. He teaches Logic, Medical Ethics, Contemporary Philosophy, and Philosophy of Science, and has recently served as the Chair of the 11th International Conference on Persons in Provo, UT (2011). He has published a number of articles in peer-reviewed journals, made guest appearances on radio shows, and presented papers at multiple conferences. Currently he is the Chair of the Department of

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Dr James Mclachlan is Professor of Philosophy and Religion at Western Carolina University. He is the author of several books and articles on personalism, including: *The Desire to be God: Freedom and the Other in Sartre and Berdyaev*; *Philosophical and Religious Conceptions of the Person and Their Implications for Ethical, Political, and Social Thought*; 'Beyond the Self, Beyond Ontology: Levinas' Reading of Shestov's Reading of Kierkegaard'; 'Boehme, Schelling, Errol Flynn', and 'Jan Olaf Bennngtsson: On Bennngtsson's *The Worldview of Personalism*'; and 'George Holmes Howison: "The City of God" and Personal Idealism'.

Gordy Mower teaches and researches areas of early modern philosophy, especially Descartes and Hume, classical Chinese philosophy, and political philosophy at Brigham Young University. He is currently researching various aspects of Confucianism in the modern world, including Confucian insights about personhood and social relations. He is also currently investigating Descartes' sceptical improvement upon Montaigne with respect to the self. Some of his recent writing has been about Hume on suicide and on belief and Locke on property.

Joseph Spencer has degrees from Brigham Young University and San José State University, and is currently a graduate student in philosophy at the University of New Mexico. He has taught philosophy at Utah Valley University and is currently an adjunct instructor in philosophy at the University of New Mexico-Valencia. Spencer is the author of *An Other Testament: On Typology*, as well as various articles on philosophy and theology. He and Karen, his wife, live with their children in Albuquerque.

Bruce W. Young is an associate professor of English at Brigham Young University, where he has taught since 1983. Besides teaching at the Provo campus, he has taught at BYU-Hawaii and helped direct study abroad programs in London. Active in the Shakespeare Association of America, he has written on Shakespeare, Emmanuel Levinas, C. S. Lewis, and other topics and published articles, reviews, poetry, and personal essays. His book *Family Life in the Age of Shakespeare* was published in 2009.

EDITORIAL

This issue consists of papers from the 11th Conference on Persons, held in Povo, Utah, in August 2011. As with previous collections of papers, they cover a variety of topics. Although our usual policy is not to publish historical articles unless they have some clear reference to contemporary concerns, a few, as in this selection, will be welcomed if they spell out the conceptions of previous ages and other civilisations. We are very grateful to the organisers of the Conference, and especially Dr James Mclachlan, for their assistance.

I would like to remind members of the SPCPS (that is, all individual subscribers to *Appraisal*) that they may borrow books and journals from our small Library, provided they pay the costs of postage each way. A list of what is available is on our website, as also the contents of the latest copies of other journals with which we exchange issues. In particular the latest issues of *Tradition and Discovery* and *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia* contain groups of especially interesting articles: see p. 52. Recent double issues of the latter have been large and heavy, but the two latest ones have been printed separately and all articles save 3 are in English. Please contact David Britton, our Librarian, if you are interested.

Following the success of our recent special feature on Max Scheler, we are launching calls for articles on Science and Theology, which used to be featured quite often in our predecessor, *Convivium*, and Personalist Approaches to Psychiatry, Therapy and Counselling. One or two Polanyian articles on each theme would be especially welcome. Further details are on the website.

JOHN MACMURRAY
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PERSONAL INTEGRATION AND AESTHETICISM: A SKETCH

Roman Briggs

Abstract

I offer a detailed account of the background of the problem of the integrated self and its relation to value. I focus on the ways in which Darwinian and Freudian insights present issues for traditional conceptions of value and the self. I then offer a sketch of an account of how the (moral) self may be brought into partial cohesion through adherence to values, reasons, and actions which are evaluated in terms of aesthetic criteria. In so doing, I discuss Roy Schafer's *action language*.

Keywords

Aestheticism, Darwin, Freud, integration, integrity, self, Schafer, value.

1. Introduction

Much work in contemporary moral psychology has centred on Bernard Williams's *Objection from integrity*. Here, in §§1-2, I offer a detailed account of the background of the problem of the integrated self and its relation to (also problematic) value. I focus primarily on the ways in which Darwinian and Freudian insights have presented substantial issues for traditional conceptions of value and the unified, single self.

In §3, I offer a sketch of a theory of personal integration. I outline an account of how the (moral) self may be brought into partial cohesion, and then potentially preserved by adherence to values, reasons, and actions which are evaluated in terms of something like Foucauldian 'aesthetic criteria' of the self. I suggest that agents may make effective use of an analogue of a technique used by psychoanalyst, Roy Schafer: *action language*.

2. Problems for value and the integrated self: A brief history

With the advent of Darwinism and Freudianism, the human species became divested, firstly (via Darwin) of the notion that it was designed by God, and set apart from the remainder of Creation; designed to perform a particular function—to reflect and to act freely, in accord with this design—and to then, by the grace of a loving God, to live in communion with its Maker. Here, humanity also collectively came to realize that the values it had historically taken for granted were not *given* after all.

Secondly (via Freud) humanity was divested of the notion that the human being is essentially *a* person; and, certainly of the idea that the human being has or

is a *soul*, acting from known and reflected upon reasons. In response to Darwinian insights and their effect upon beliefs regarding (moral) values, treatment of this became a veritable cottage industry among public intellectuals living in the earlier part of the twentieth century. Although, the seriousness with which many of these academics took the majority's stalwart conservatism and its motivation is debatable. The problem addressed being: how humanity—which had traditionally, again, taken for granted value and meaning as given—might relearn how to live in a world in which

Man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and beliefs, are but the outcome of an accidental collocation of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave, that all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of Man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins.¹

The glibness—worse still, the flashes of playfulness and condescending to creationist disputants—with which Russell and others described the fate of humanity betray the fact that many secularists never really took seriously the idea that the world could be anything other than the 'purposeless' space, 'void of meaning,' which science assumes.² One may only write dispassionately (much less semi-satirically) of such things if he cannot, with any conviction, conceive of the alternative in question. Is [God] hiding? Is he afraid of us?³

Put another way: It is impossible to mourn the loss of what you never really believed that you had in the first place. So, for advocates of scientism, making light of what are taken to be archaic—absurd—belief systems, and the persons who cannot seem to conceive of life without them, comes easy; especially to those, like Russell, who are naturally given to derision.

Conversely, once you have had something of great importance (even if those in possession merely *believed* mistakenly that they possessed the thing), its loss is often devastating; and, from the perspective of the believer, the egghead—feet-off-the-ground and viciously

arrogant—must be characterized as the butt of the joke, and the account advanced by him reconstructed as a farce the likes of which only a fool (*Psalm 14:1*) could take seriously. In the name of defending its body of beliefs from external attack, each side of this argument has historically tended to insulate itself from its opponent—as well as from insecurities regarding the shortcomings of its own perspective, bubbling just below the consciousness of these very advocates.⁴ More often than not, again, this involves a depiction of one's opponent as the most ridiculous of straw men.

Given this stalemate and the animosity from which it grew, there is a sense in which adherents of scientism were then, and continue to be, in no position to understand humanity's pining for what it once believed to be a value-saturated universe; and so, to facilitate this transition towards secularism.⁵ This in mind, I suppose it now goes without saying that it would take more than the elegant prose of a committed naturalist—and, certainly more than that written by one prone to making light of the world lost to humanity, and of hurling deliberately poorly-disguised jabs in the direction of those who wish to restore it—to assuage the discomfort felt by the average Jane or John.⁶

With the loss of that world, humanity, in an important sense, lost its very identity. For the secularist, of course, this was a collective self—to borrow a phrase from Richard Rorty⁷—*well* lost; a self as alien to the advocate of scientism, as the secularist's self-conception was (and is) to the creationist. From the perspective of the conservative,^{7a} this collective self was everything.

For this and similar reasons, it is little wonder why reactionaries continue, to this day, to argue that what we really need is a return to 'traditional values' *en masse*. How many times in recent history have we been called to do just this by the conservative? But, it seems to me that these critics of what they (at times haphazardly) group pejoratively under the umbrella of postmodernity, fail to make an important distinction here between the effects of living in post-Darwinian and post-Freudian world, with the effects of making a successful shift collectively *to* a post-Darwinian and post-Freudian world. While these things are without question closely related, they are far from one and the same.

I part company with such conservatives on those issues which pertain to the postulated import of objectively existing, 'real' values. And, much of what follows will work from the assumption that humanity's hitherto failures at successfully coming to terms with living in a valueless world—again, in the ontological sense in which conservatives mean to use

the term—is not indicative of the impossibility of doing so.⁸ Chief among humanity's stumbling blocks with respect to this effort has been taking seriously the conservative's admonition to have us look back, time and time again.

While I certainly empathize with the feelings of forlornness being responded to by the conservative, I do not think the answer to this problem is regression in any form. Moreover, despite the fact that we can no longer hope to discover meaning and value *in* the world according to orthodox interpretations of what results from an acceptance of the prevailing post-Darwinian/Freudian worldview, it in no way follows from this that we cannot lead rich, meaningful lives in accord with individually- and socially-constructed values.

Similar to my position on the relative unimportance of ontologically real values, I want to suggest that despite the fact that we can no longer hope to sustain or develop anything like a completely cohesive self—understanding this impossibility to be part of what we were given by Freud—it, again, does not follow that we cannot work towards healing the more conspicuous and debilitating fissures that divide the psyche and disrupt agency.

Despite my substantial disagreement with conservatives regarding these matters, I hope to offer a sketch of an account, here, that may in some sense appease even the strong moral realist, of which he is certainly one example. At the same time, my account does not rely upon the necessity of accepting even the most deflated forms of realism.⁹ For these reasons, the position I sketch below may be appealed to by those that hold any of an extreme plurality of perspectives on morality and selfhood as something which may be used to supplement these accounts so far as understanding the relationship between (moral) value, (moral) identity, and (moral) motivation goes.

To turn now to the second loss introduced above, i.e., humanity's loss of belief in individual ownership of a unified soul or self which acts from known reasons. Like the first loss already detailed, this has important implications for explaining the postmodern Turn. This also takes us a further distance in explaining the conservative's actions as they show up against a backdrop of what has come to be known as the *culture wars*. To fill in a bit more what I have in mind: here, a much too reactionary and unreflective theism (and the menagerie of ideas regarding social norms, conceptions of personhood, and personal identity that accompany this) is pitted against what is, by all reasonable accounts, an utterly impossible moral relativism wherein *no* judgments may be made with respect to the actions or

evaluations of another individual or culture; an *I'm OK, you're OK ad nauseum*.

Assuming that the collection of students which makes up the enrolment of the average sophomore philosophy class represents a typical sample of those effectively influenced by this false choice, we may plot the stagnating trajectory of this debate by gauging what these persons have to say regarding the foundation (or lack thereof) of morality.

More often than not, those who choose to chime in on such topics seem to represent either an uncompromising commitment to religious fundamentalism which wholly informs their conception of morality; or a thorough-going relativism which flows from an often newly found, but fervent religious scepticism. (Some vacillating disturbingly between these two extremes, from one day to the next.) Those who do not retreat into religious fundamentalism—and who, as is generally the case, hold to some form of strong moral relativism—tend to base their position on what they take to be the non-existence of God; and, they often suggest, the impossibility of any kind of objectivity which follows from this vacuum.

Still, standing somewhere in between these feuding parties, there are those naturalistically-minded persons—the numbers, I am pleased to say, seem to be growing—who hold to the hope that humanity *can* come to possess stable values, moral and otherwise, and the most meaningful of lives, despite not being able to ground these in any source outside of the minds of the human species. These neo-rationalists, many times reliant for motivation upon the successes of science and the realization that the depiction of the naturalistic worldview as inherently evil is ill-founded, place their hopes in reason, itself.

Following Kant, they argue that morality and agency may be made sense of in terms of reason and subsequent rational action, whether cashed out in terms of something like an individual practical imperative (*hypothetical* for those with Humean intuitions, *categorical* for Kantian purists), or in terms of something like an implicit (or ideal) social contract, the dictates of which may be found out by reason. Here, the lurking nihilism, erroneously believed by the conservative to necessarily grow out of a commitment to Darwinism, is shown to be unsubstantiated. And, science—while certainly not assumed to be the panacea that may treat all of society's ills—is shown to be an innocuous, if imperfect, tool for improving humanity's lot, rather than the value-consuming conflagration of provincial myth.

We *can*, it turns out, be committed naturalists *and* retain moral values. And, at least on some description, these values may be thought of as universal and categorically binding. So much—says the moral rationalist—for the hastily assumed notion that mass acceptance of Darwinism necessarily leads to relativism, much less nihilism.

Now, this is not to suggest that the *dig-in-your-heels* brand of conservative will simply roll over at this point, and concede that the rationalist's rejoinder has answered each of his worries. But, the fact that a compelling account can be provided for how we may construct objective values in a post-Darwinian world goes a long way towards winning this ideological battle. And, since in large part the arguments for a return to creationism have been grounded in the assumption that secularism is simply incompatible with allowing for (or explaining) the existence of objective values, accounts like the rationalist's take a great deal of pressure off of a budding acceptance of a naturalistic worldview.¹⁰

For this and related reasons, the lion's share of contemporary moral theories—and certainly all of those which are essentially Kantian in nature—assume that the existence of values in no way requires the existence of a command-issuing God; although, the existence of such values and their construction in no way suggests that God cannot exist.

So, at least as far as garden variety contemporary ethical theory goes, Darwinism, by itself, seems to pose much less of a threat to belief systems which hold that objective (moral) values exist than originally thought. Crisis averted. But, what can the rationalist say about the retention of agency and reasoned action in the face of Freudian insights? If the Darwinian shift led to collective suspicion on the part of the majority with respect to the existence of God, and so, universal values, the Freudian shift towards conceiving of human persons as divided, and unconsciously motivated has—insofar as we take certain aspects of Freud's account as seriously as we have taken those of Darwin's¹¹—should lead us to reconsider individual agency in the same respect.

Put another way: the rationalist has demonstrated to us that morality seemingly *can* survive a radical separation of God from moral values; and, even a debunking of a strong moral realist conception of moral values. However, in order for human persons to take part in the moral enterprise, some sense of unified agency must be had by the individual. In those cases in which the self is being actively divided by conscious and unconscious (for that matter, conscious and conscious) desires, a radical

fragmentation may occur. Here, the person's actions are no longer *hers* in the way that we generally use the possessive. More troubling still, we can no longer make sense of who or what *she* is, if anything. Where there is no sufficiently unified (moral) agency, there can be no moral action.

This leads to a pairing of surprising bed fellows: Both the moral rationalist and the conservative must agree that the significantly divided self described by Freud poses a major threat to moral agency. With the convergence of Darwinism and Freudianism, the ideological dissonance to which they tend to lead, and the inability of humanity at large to fully adapt to them, we find an increase in the prevalence of certain widespread psychic disorders which science alone cannot cure, and which, in many important respects, it is partially responsible for.¹²

This—what Freud has described as the subconscious usurpation of agency and the fragmentation of the individual's very self—is among the more widespread sources of malaise, today; and one which the climate of advanced technology and global capitalism seems only to have exacerbated.¹³ While, it seems to me, this problem cannot be disconnected from the acceptance of Darwin's post-creationist worldview and the loss of humanity's differentiation in kind from non-human animals, Freud's replacement of a wholly integrated soul with a naturalized and radically pluralistic self (or collection of selves) is a separate matter which calls for its own remedy; a remedy, however, which must take the naturalization of values seriously.

What I sketch below, much in the spirit of Freud, is something not completely unlike a version of his *talking cure*; but, with overt pragmatist overtones and a local normativity which grows out of reasons given by the agent's desire to create and sustain a certain self. The potential success of this effort—i.e., that of coming to create and preserve one's ideal self—will hinge upon the ability of the agent to overcome what many post-Freudians have characterized as a self whose components cannot be integrated in any significant way; either at the level of the personal self, or at the level of the moral self. In order to offer an account of personal integration, then, I must have something substantial to say to the critic who holds that talk of a cohesive self is a relic that we would do better to jettison, along with talk of things like sprites, monads, and homunculi.

At risk of blatantly dodging one rendering of this objection, I simply will not have much to say about what may or may not work when it comes to integrating the individual self's unconscious and conscious components and motivating reasons. First, this is because I simply do not have the necessary

expertise to do so; and so, will leave this yeoman's work to the trained psychoanalyst. Second, this is because a discussion of an integration of the unconscious and conscious would take us too far afield of the primary topic: the integration of the conscious (moral) self—certainly no small task, in itself.

Here, I will only be interested in the integration of the unconscious and the conscious mind insofar as this is a necessary condition for the integration of the components which make up the conscious-minded self. Still, I will continue to make reference to psychoanalytic theory; as, Freud's account of psychic fragmentation provides us with an invaluable model for considering the division of the mind, not only along the lines of the unconscious and the conscious but, as will be pertinent to this study, with respect to its fragmentation along the lines of conflicting conscious desires,¹⁴ conscious motivations, and conscious reasons, as well. With this, I return to the critic who argues that talk of the integrated self—even in reference to the conscious mind, exclusively—should be replaced with talk of an essentially varied self; better yet, talk of each human person having (or being) multiple *selves*.

While I concede this point to some extent—agreeing that it is simply unrealistic (undesirable?) to hope for a completely integrated and transparent self at every level—we need not jump to the conclusion that a kind of partial cohesion is out of the question. As stated, I take it that some degree of integration is necessary for the conference of (moral) selfhood, and certainly for personal responsibility. Below, I discuss in detail the nature of such a partially integrated (moral) self, and why I take this to be requisite for (moral) agency. Hereafter, any talk of the (moral) self should be taken as reference to the *conscious* (moral) self, unless otherwise indicated.

3. A critique of a critique of Darwinism/Freudianism

I have just suggested that while we may no longer realistically hope for the complete integration of the (moral) self, we must work towards achieving a partial integration if we are to retain (moral) agency. The conception of personal integrity I will sketch, then, is scalar in nature.

Before outlining what I have in mind here, I would like to briefly consider what I take to be a crucial mistake commonly made by the conservative regarding the role of Freudian theory in the fragmentation of the self. I make this short digression in order to demonstrate that I am not, as a certain type of conservative might lead us to believe,

making matters more complicated than they need to be.

The conservative's mistake involves the temptation to write off the kind of apparent psychic division which is at issue as little more than a state of affairs associated with embracing a certain corrupted and corrupting ideology. I am referring to the conservative's confusing, this time at the level of the individual, the person's ability to cope effectively when it comes to an ideological shift, with this psychological disorder being necessarily symptomatic of accepting the worldview in question.

As was the case with the unfounded assumption that the acceptance of Darwinism necessarily leads to nihilism, there is a certain type of conservative who has accused Freud of constructing a theory which in turn has *led to* the apparent division of selves and to each of the maladies which have followed from this; rather than, conversely, viewing him as the first clinician in the contemporary Age to offer a means of diagnosing and treating pre-existing psychological pathologies involving or constitutive of such psychic fragmentation.

In other words, here the conservative accuses he who constructs a new framework for studying and treating, in this case, selves and diseases of self, for creating the state of affairs (via the introduction of an innovative worldview and accompanying vocabulary) which itself has *led to* the very problems that it was intended to treat. The apparently divided self, on this view, is the result of *talk* of divided selves, and a consequent societal corruption which follows from taking such talk to heart. Once we set aside this way of talking and the beliefs which go with it, so the argument goes, and return to talking about selves as unified, immaterial substances the nature of which is reason, then such pathologies will disappear. (This is, I should say, a coarse rendering of the conservative's point; but what I have said is true to the basic thrust of this line of argument.)

The problems associated with the Age of Darwin (e.g., nihilism) are the results of accepting Darwinian theory, and living one's life according to that which follows from this. The problems associated with the Age of Freud (e.g., fragmentation of the self) are the results of accepting this theory, and living in accord with that which follows from this. If we would only—so the arguments goes—turn back the clock, cease to take seriously Darwinian and Freudian accounts, return to non-naturalistic vocabularies, the problems associated with these frameworks would dissipate and eventually disappear. We continue to hear this type of argument from the *Things-will-go-back-to-the-way-that-they-were-if-*

only-we-remove-all-copies-of-The Catcher in the Rye-from-the-shelves-of-the-public-library crowd; and, in a much more sophisticated and compelling formulation, from some ethicists working in contemporary moral psychology.

I hope I have said enough already that my qualified agreement with the conservative on this matter will not come as a complete surprise; and, enough to indicate that I also fundamentally disagree with him. As stated above, I *do* believe that the shift from a pre- to a post-Darwinian and post-Freudian worldview—the coming to talk about the self and the world in wholly naturalized terms, and to view these in a fundamentally different way—did have, in many important respects, an adverse effect on humanity's self-concept.

But, I quickly part company with the conservative when it comes to explaining why this so, and when it comes to recommending an appropriate response to these matters. According to one popular version of the conservative's critique, the anguish and collective sense of meaninglessness which accompanies these and other scientific theories is largely (wholly?) the result of the fact that humanity has foolishly supplanted an objectively true worldview (creationism, and its various ideological constellations) with as essentially false and spiritually-bankrupt conjunction of scientism and physicalism—the instantiation of which, in this case, is psychoanalytic theory.

I believe there is a better explanation for this, which, for the most part, may be accounted for by consideration of three important factors: first, that any significant change in ideas involving those things which confer meaning, value, and identity will bring about a markedly dizzying effect, initially. If the concepts in which we have traditionally grounded value are deflated significantly or taken away from us altogether, it should come as no surprise that we will become for a time extremely disoriented. This does not mean, however, that: either this disorientation is a necessary result of coming to accept the worldview, itself; or, that this disorientation is a permanent fixture with respect to the ways in which humanity experiences the world following the shift in question.¹⁵

Secondly—and for now I will merely gloss over this point—the distress resulting from coming to accept Darwinism and Freudianism is, in part, tied up with humanity's attempt to hold to a heteronomous conception of what it *is*. (Or of, by the standards imposed by traditional theistic accounts, what the human self *must be*.) By this, I refer to humanity's (however reluctant) acceptance of the new worldview in conjunction with holding on to certain

incompatible aspects of the old.¹⁶ For the purposes of this study, I have in mind such things as the majoritarian refusal to relinquish the idea that the healthy self is necessarily completely unified and completely transparent—i.e., that the self must be something, again, akin to the soul, as central to most instantiations of Pauline Christianity; or, to cite a secularized but theism-friendly analogue, Descartes' *res cogitans*.

Finally—and, in important ways connected with the problem just discussed—following a shift in worldview, humanity often seems reluctant to re-imagine concepts which are essential to its self-understanding, and which must be either reconfigured or forfeited. It stands, in its own collective mind, helpless with respect to reconciling previously held concepts with those which prop up the new worldview. For instance: many think, as stated before, that if there exists no value-creating Entity over and above the human species, then there can be no values *in* the world; and, if there are no values *in* the world, then there can be no values *simpliciter*.

This, and instances like it, betray either a lack of imagination on the part of the largest part of humanity, or its refusal to use imagination in these instances; or, most likely I believe, some combination of each of these. And, since living in accord with values is an essential part of what being a person is, then insofar as we cannot—or obdurately choose not to—square the existence of values with the prevailing worldview, then we stand collectively self-alienated.

Hereafter, I will focus primarily on the second decentring theory which I have been discussing: Freud's psychoanalytic theory (in its various instantiations), especially as it pertains to the diagnosis of a fragmented (moral) self; and, the implications for an analogue of this framework in the diagnosis of and treatment of what I refer to as the *disintegration* of the (moral) self.

Darwinism—and the collective suspicion regarding the existence of values which accompanies it—will, however, remain just on the periphery; since, as stated, it is my view that this account dovetails with Freud's theory both with respect to the debilitation and disintegration of the contemporary (moral) self and its agency, and, I argue, its potential deliverance and integration. Any further references to Darwinism will point exclusively to the ways in which acceptance of this view has led to the majority's misgivings about the existence of values.

4. Towards an account of self-integration

As Charles Taylor has pointed out, psychoanalysts working in contemporary Western society are

dealing much less with those issues that made up the bulk of caseloads in the classical Freudian era (e.g., hysterias, phobias, and fixations), and more and more with patients complaining of feelings associated with the loss of a unified self, lack of purpose, and the disappearance of a given backdrop of values.¹⁷ Here, the subject is fragmented, and displaced by 'a plurality of subjects' along a 'conglomerate of psychological subspheres,' some known, some unknown to the conscious mind, with each vying for control of motivational efficacy in order that it may bring about its own desired end.¹⁸

Freud speaks to this decentring of the self—from his perspective perhaps 'the most wounding' to humanity's sense of purpose and place of all—in his discussion of the understandably cold reception given to psychoanalytic theory:

Although . . . humbled in his external relations [i.e., with respect to humanity's place in the universe and its place in the animal kingdom], man feels himself to be supreme within his own mind . . . [However,] this mind is not a simple thing; on the contrary, it is a hierarchy of superordinated and subordinated agencies, labyrinth of impulses striving independently of one another towards action, corresponding with a multiplicity of instincts and of relations with the external world, many of which are antagonistic to one another and compete.¹⁹

Following Darwin, humanity might well have been able to eventually carve out new spaces of meaning and value which comply with assumptions resulting from these shifts; perhaps involving a melding of newly adopted concepts and those left over from a prior Age which, for one reason or another, seem to be essential to humanity's making sense of itself as a collection of agents. Humanity might have eventually come to accept that it is not, in even the most local of respects, the centre of the universe; and, that despite the human person's ability to reason and reflect, members of our species are not different in kind from other, less sophisticated animals.

However, insofar as we make sense of ourselves in terms of rationality and reasoned deliberate action (as the Enlightenment would have us), Freud describes a psychic life which is so far removed from our intuitions that we find ourselves completely disoriented and estranged from what was perceived to be our very essence. Freud writes:

You behave like an absolute ruler who is content with the information supplied him by his highest officials and never goes among the people to hear their voice. Turn your eyes inward, look into your own depths, learn first to know yourself! . . . *The ego is not master in his own house.*²⁰

It is important to note that it is not the abnormal *per se* to which he is referring, but to the *human*

person, as such. The decentering of the self with respect to thought, motivation, and consequent action is not the result of some bizarre psychological disorder which is found only in rare cases. No, here Freud is describing the default condition of the average human person living in contemporary society. *I* am fragmented. *You* are fragmented. *All* civilized human persons are, and will continue to be, fragmented psychically. The only questions which remain are: To what extent? And, How may we go about (partially) integrating the self?

Although Freud generalizes to offer an account of the human condition, his findings, like those of all scientists, are based on the empirical investigation of individual persons, the inductive practices informed by such investigations, and the theory-construction which follows from this. The present study, though, will not concern itself with the concrete, particular self, nor, at its core, even with selfhood as such. This study will deal primarily with a double-abstraction: an abstraction, first, from the individual person's self, to selfhood in general; and second, an abstraction from selfhood to the self as it functions in moral space.

In working towards an integration of the self with the moral self, I suggest we reorient the manner in which we view our mental life by using something analogous to a method of psychoanalytic treatment; a treatment which aims at restoring the state of wholeness of the (moral) self. In treating the disintegrating (moral) self, I suggest we use as a model a clinical methodology popularized by the post-Freudian psychoanalyst, Roy Schafer: *action language*.²¹ Schafer details his approach here:

Psychoanalysts may be described as people who listen to the narrations of analysands and help them to transform these narrations into others that are more complete, coherent, convincing, and adaptively useful than those they have been accustomed to constructing.²²

Here, psychoanalysts are recast as 'retellers of narrations,'²³ and encouraged to shelve classical Freudian metapsychology with its talk of independently acting drives in favour of a vocabulary which emphasizes agency, so responsibility; responsibility, so integrity. Elsewhere, Schafer writes:

We shall regard each psychological process, event, experience, or behaviour as some kind of activity, henceforth to be called an action, and shall designate each action by an active verb stating its nature and by an adverb (or adverbial locution), when applicable, stating the mode of this action.²⁴

As stated above, the sketch I offer involves a double-abstraction: an abstraction from the individual self to selfhood, as such; secondly, from selfhood as

such, to moral selfhood. While Schafer has crafted his methodology in order to treat the particular self—to help reintegrate the individual self by means of using ownership and resultant responsibility as a kind of psychic cement—I argue that an approach very similar to this may be used to heal those conflicts which threaten to pull apart moral agency amid positive intuitions regarding impartialist moral theories and personal values which conflict with these.

In other words, I claim that by learning how to redescribe the contents of psychic life in terms of controlled actions, we restore a lost agency which has the promise, in turn, to help reintegrate the self in instances where such integration is desirable; and, to move towards becoming a self worthy of integrating and preserving. Here, moral events such as evaluation will become verbs in the strongest sense possible. (In this context, a Schaferian approach may be characterized as something like Freud meets Sartre meets Rorty.)

In this retelling, we construct a narrative which not only allows us to construe previously disclaimed actions (e.g., desiring) as our own, but in telling our own story, even if only figuratively, we are also providing for ourselves a lost sense of continuity essential to the establishment and retention of a partial integrity. Here, I suggest we make use of the work of narrative-theorists of identity.²⁵

In cases involving the disintegration of the self, and where this fragmentation involves initially competing moral and nonmoral motivators, I suggest a means by which these components may be integrated: The subsumption of competing parts of the self under the umbrella of a common body of motivating reasons; and, as a result, their unification. One result of this feature of the account I want to offer is that the self and the moral self may come to overlap with one another considerably; and, in some exceptional cases, coextend. This substantial overlap provides fertile ground for an extreme reconciliation between personal and moral projects.

This potential co-extension, however, will not result from defining personal integrity in terms of a consistency of action which lies within the realm of goodness according to commonsense morality. Instead, the personal, at least in principle, may wholly overlap with the moral because I will discuss normative cohesion in terms of something, again, like what Foucault has called an aesthetics of the self.

Put another way, I suggest we discuss and define integrity in terms of a conception of harmonious motivating reasons which flow out one's aesthetic criteria of what beautiful (so, desired) selfhood comes to.²⁶ While this may initially appear as though

it is a theory of moral value, reasons, and motivation which is viciously subjective in nature, I argue that at least in some sense the account I offer may appease even those with strong moral realist intuitions, as the aesthetic criteria used in determining what kind of person one wishes to become can be characterized as standards which pick out, say, universally good character traits.

These aesthetic criteria are not so subjective that they may not be described as, at least, *of the world*; that is, made up of the values recognized by humanity at the level of some community of agents, and endorsed collectively by its members. And, again, these situated criteria, while certainly differing from person to person and from community to community, may be used in a uniform way to evaluate (for those with moral realist intuitions) objectively good actions or characters, or (for those with moral anti-realist intuitions) subjectively or instrumentally good actions or characters.

Having suggested that I take seriously both the communal origin and radically situatedness of values, and respect for the individual to define herself in terms of allegiance to or defiance of these values, it may seem that in offering an account of evaluation I am treading the fence which separates the communitarian account of value from the liberal account of value in a precarious way. While this is true to some extent, the account I am offering finds itself more at home with a qualified conception of the latter at least insofar as the subjectivity of values and subsequent commitments is concerned.

While I hold that the values with which the individual finds herself in early adulthood cannot come from any other source than that of her own community, the aesthetic criteria she will use to evaluate *these* values—while also originating in an undeniable way from within her community—are best described as *her own*. She must make herself responsible for the criteria she will use to create (or recreate) herself.²⁷ If she finds herself beholden to aesthetic criteria concerning selfhood with which she has misgivings, the burden is on her to work towards replacing these criteria with others. In so doing, she has taken the first step towards cultivating a new (better, or more beautiful) self.

In some sense, then, the act of endorsing certain aesthetic criteria involves a dialectical movement where one places herself at odds with (or at least imagines herself outside of) her community, such that she may autonomously choose to endorse or reject traditional values.²⁸ This might be construed as on par with a Kantian-style kind of deliberation, shorn of any appeals to universalization or patient-centred side-constraints. Here, the content of

the imperatives that any agents give to herself will follow directly from the desire to construct and sustain a certain self. Here, agential autonomy will not necessarily involve the individual's disagreeing with or diverging from any of the values she inherits from her community (although it certainly may); but, will be the product of the manner in which she comes to agree or disagree with the values endorsed by her community.

4.

Above, I have provided an historical account of how the problem of integrity (as it is typically construed in the literature today) came to be so compelling. Here, I included much discussion of Darwinian and Freudian insights, and how those insights have moulded contemporary humanity's conception of both value and the self.

Following this, I offered a sketch of a theory of personal integration which suggested placing a greater emphasis on looking at the (moral) self through an aesthetic lens; I also suggested, in treating the integrity problem, that we make use of Schaferian action language. Much more, of course, needs to be said, here. But, as this is merely a first pass at laying down the basics of the account, I will save that for another day.

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Notes:

1. Bertrand Russell, 'A Free Man's Worship.' In *Mysticism and Logic*, by Bertrand Russell, 36-44. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 2004., p.37
2. *Ibid.*, p.37.
3. Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Gay Science: with a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*. Translated by Josefine Nauckhoff. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001., p.119.
4. Again, I definitely do not want to suggest that it is only theists who have taken this defensive posture. As stated, for every bombastic William Jennings Bryan there is an equally puffed-up Clarence Darrow nearby, ready to offer his retort.
5. Even those secularists who were genuinely sincere in trying to see humanity through this shift – Camus, for example – failed to fully *get it*, because, despite good intentions on their part, they were on the outside looking in when it came to understanding the traditional theist's plight.

Freud, himself, provides perhaps the best example of the academic who is simply religiously tone deaf. For instance, he writes of a friend who, while himself not a believer, accuses Freud of not properly acknowledging the feeling which leads many to lead spiritual lives: 'a peculiar feeling [associated with] 'eternity' . . . as of

something limitless, unbound – as it were, ‘oceanic.’” (p. 10-11, *Civilization and Its Discontents*. Translated by James Strachey. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1989.) Freud promptly goes on to confess that he simply cannot locate such feelings within himself.

However, conceding that the feeling exists in many and must be accounted for, he goes on to explain it in terms of a leftover and long sublimated sense of the person’s feeling of oneness with his mother (and, the world): ‘Normally, there is nothing of which we are more certain than the feeling of our self, of our own ego. This ego appears to us as something autonomous and unitary, marked off distinctly from everything else . . . Further reflection tells us that the adult’s ego-feeling cannot have been the same from the beginning. It must have gone through a process of development . . . An infant at the breast does not as yet distinguish his ego from the external world as the source of sensations flowing in upon him. He gradually learns to do so, in response to various promptings (Ibid., p.12-14).’

A handful of pages later, he has this to say of religious sentiment: ‘The whole thing is so patently infantile, so foreign to reality, that to anyone with a friendly attitude to humanity it is painful to think that the great majority of mortals will never be able to rise above this view of life. It is still more humiliating to discover how large a number of people living today, who cannot but see that this religion is not tenable, nevertheless try to defend it piece by piece in a series of pitiful rearguard actions (Ibid., p.22).’ He’s not exactly extending an olive branch to believers, here.

6. I have neither the space nor the arguments to substantiate this claim here – and nothing which follows will hinge upon this – but, from my perspective, it seems as though many instances of Russell-style analyses of new science and the human predicament were crafted with little else in mind than, first, to entertain intellectuals when in the mood to poke fun at what they took to be a world-weary theism; and, second, and more controversially, to make themselves feel more secure in their commitment to scientism by implicitly comparing the successes enjoyed by contemporary science with what they took to be the embarrassing failures of theism when it comes to explaining natural phenomena.

7. Richard Rorty. ‘The World Well Lost.’ In *Consequences of Pragmatism: Essays: 1972-1980*, by Richard Rorty, 3-18. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982.

7a. I should point out that by *conservative* I definitely do not intend to cast too wide of a net, here. I have in mind specifically a particular type of conservative, whose beliefs and resultant actions will, I hope, become apparent in this paper. I would like to thank Richard Allen for pointing out that I need to make this point explicitly, and to tread carefully when using labels such as this one.

8. Even if it were the case that the postmodern (post-Darwinian/post-Freudian) worldview leads necessarily to the assumption that value, human

freedom, etc. could not exist in a metaphysical sense, this would not support the conclusion that it must be the case that the postmodern (post-Darwinian/post-Freudian) worldview involves an essential flaw or leads to an absurdity. I do not find these kinds of *reductios* – or, conversely, their corresponding Kantian-style arguments, where freedom, values, etc., are postulated as necessary for ? – at all compelling. Having said that, I do concede to the advocate of value, freedom, etc., that these and like concepts are fundamental to experiencing the world *as* persons; and so, that we must make any scientific theory which we hope to accept somehow compatible with these concepts under *some* (however, in many cases, deflated) description. For the sake of brevity, I will refrain from going on about this here.

9. Here, I specifically have in mind theories like *procedural realism*, i.e., ‘the view that there are answers to moral questions; that is, that there are right and wrong ways to answer them (Christine Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007),’ as opposed to *substantive* or *strong moral realism*, ‘the view that there are answers to moral questions because there are moral facts or truths, which those questions ask about (Ibid., p.35).’

10. This, of course, is nothing new. Kant – perhaps anticipating the majority’s hesitancy to see the compatibility of a naturalized conception of the world with objective (moral) values – did as much as anyone in the history of the Western intellectual tradition to pave the way for contemporary moral rationalism as described here. And, while many theistically-inclined ethicists like to point out that Kant includes God among the practical postulates, I believe that the best reading of his moral philosophy is one which interprets it as essentially friendly to the contemporary secular worldview.

11. For the purposes of what I argue below, it is sufficient that we take seriously only those facets of Freudian psychoanalytic theory which call into question the complete transparency and complete unification of the individual self, and the coinciding transparency and unification of the individual consciousness.

We need not assume any of what Freud has to say about drive-theory, his infamous and long-disputed psycho-sexual theory of development, etc. While the latter, it has been widely argued, are components of Freud’s overarching theory which contemporary psychology need not (should not) concern itself with, the former continue to be mainstays, and uncontroversially so, among contemporary clinicians and experimental psychologists, alike; and, their validity will be assumed from here on out.

12. I do not, of course, intend to kill the messenger here as the conservative might; but merely to point out that the inundation of society with Darwinian and Freudian insights did play a part in bringing about a markedly difficult time of transition on the part of the majority of Westerners.

13. It should be noted that not all theorists take this sort of disintegration of the self – or, the resultant undermining of what has traditionally been thought of

as agency – as something to be remedied. Jacques Lacan, for instance, has argued that there can be no significant unification of the self or this self's purpose; persons are, on his view, *essentially* disintegrated. The felt need to do something about this disintegration is, then, symptomatic of humanity's lack of courage in accepting that the human person is essentially a *manqué* (or, *lack* of something substantial). On this view, there is no cohesive self to restore, nor could we ever construct one.

While I am somewhat sympathetic with his judging the need for the securing of a wholly cohesive self as a sign of inauthenticity, I do disagree with his suggestion that any attempt at, or hope for, partial integration leads in this direction. Below, I suggest that some degree of personal integration is a necessary component of agency; and, that (partially) unified agency is in part constitutive of personhood, itself. For more on Lacanian conceptions of the self, see Lacan's *Écrits: A Selection*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1977; 'Some Thoughts on the Ego.' *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 34 (1954): 11-17; and *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978.

14. By *desire*, I have in mind the dispositional conception endorsed by, among others, Michael Smith; Smith writes: 'Desires are states that have a certain *functional role*. That is, according to this conception, we should think of the desire to *f* as that state of a subject that grounds all sorts of dispositions: like the disposition to *f* in conditions *C*, the disposition to *f* in conditions *C'*, and so on (where, in order for conditions *C* and *C'* to obtain, the subject must have, *inter alia*, certain beliefs), (The Humean Theory of Motivation.' *Mind* – New Series 96, 381 (1987): 36-61., p.52, emphasis is the author's own).

I shall use *desire* exclusively throughout this treatment to refer to the kinds of mental content which may be described both as having the power (when taken in conjunction with certain beliefs) to motivate action – so, a necessary component of any account of how and why agents act – and having the propensity to come into conflict – so, to lead toward a kind of psychic fragmentation or disintegration of the self. I am not averse to the reader substituting other descriptions of the effects of such dispositions like in kind to what Donald Davidson has termed 'pro attitudes' here, however.

In *desire* I also include those dispositions to act which are not always being consciously deliberated about, i.e., background desires. Of the distinction between background desires and foreground desires, Philip Pettit and Michael Smith writes: 'A desire is present in the background of an agent's decision if and only if it is part of the motivating reason for it: the rationalizing set of beliefs and desires which produce the decision. A desire is present in the foreground of the decision if and only if the agent believed he had that desire and was moved by the belief that a justifying reason for the decision was that the option chosen promised to

satisfy the desire . . . The evidence of intuition and introspection – the phenomenology of deliberation – is squarely against the hypothesis that desire always has a foreground presence. We are no more inclined to think that the deliberating agent always considers his desire-states than we are to imagine he always considers his states of belief. ('Backgrounding Desire.' *Philosophical Review* 99, 4 (1990): 565-592., p.568; 574.)

This last point is illustrated nicely by an example given by Smith and Pettit: 'Consider . . . what we should ordinarily think of as a long term desire; say, a father's desire that his children do well. A father may actually feel the prick of this desire from time to time; in moments of reflection on their vulnerability, say. But such occasions are not the norm. Yet we certainly wouldn't ordinarily think that he loses this desire during those periods when he lacks such feelings, (Ibid., p.48).'

15. I try to imagine what the reaction must have been like among certain groupings of human beings when they first entertained the possibility of theism – much less monotheism. And, I cannot help but surmise that these changes were not without this same type of disorientation and distress. Perhaps even more severe among many.

16. Elizabeth Anscombe ('Modern Moral Philosophy.' *Philosophy* 43 (1958): 1-19.) has argued similarly about moral concepts, e.g., obligation, which originated (she assumes) from within a religious worldview; she writes: '[Moral concepts such as] obligation and duty . . . are survivals, or derivatives of survivals, from an earlier conception of ethics which no longer generally survives [i.e., divine command theory], and are only harmful without it (p.1) . . . The ordinary (and quite indispensable) terms 'should,' 'needs,' 'ought,' 'must' – acquired [a] special [moral] sense by being equated in the relevant contexts with 'is obliged,' or 'is bound,' or 'is required to,' in the sense in which one can be obliged or bound by law, or something can be acquired by law (p.5) . . . Naturally it is not possible to have [a law] conception [of ethics such as Kantianism or utilitarianism] unless you believe in God as law-giver; like Jews, Stoics, and Christians. But if such a conception is dominant for many centuries, and then is given up, it is a natural result that the concepts of 'obligation,' of being bound or required as by law, should remain as though they had lost their root; and if the word 'ought' has become invested in certain contexts with the sense of 'obligation,' it too will remain to be spoken with a special emphasis and a special feeling in these contexts. It is as if the notion 'criminal' were to remain when criminal law and criminal courts had been abolished and forgotten (p.6) . . . That legislation can be 'for oneself' I reject as absurd; whatever you do 'for yourself' may be admirable' but it is not legislating (p.13).'

She goes on to conclude that if we must adhere to an ethical theory (which, she points out early on, we should not – as, we do not have a sophisticated enough philosophy of psychology in place to assure us of the fact that our normative theories demand what

- is possible, p.1), we should adopt some kind of Aristotelian virtue ethic. While I am sympathetic with Anscombe's worries regarding the compatibility between the notion of moral obligation and secularism, I believe she moves much too quickly in suggesting that the two cannot be squared. It is simply not always the case that fruitful concepts which originate within antiquated worldviews must always be discarded. In some instances, these concepts can naturally evolve in ways that make them compatible with an innovative, standing worldview; in others, they can be intentionally redescribed in ways which make them so.
- Anscombe takes the idea of self-legislation to be 'absurd.' I do not share her intuitions, here. Assuming that, as she argues, the notion obligation did grow out of a divine command conception of ethics, I believe that modern secularists (Kant, in particular) have demonstrated in tremendous fashion that concepts leftover from disposed of theories may be successfully put to use within those that take the place of these. While it is likely that, like *obligation*, both *self* and *integrity* are concepts which were originally coined to do work within the confines of a divine command theory of ethics, there is no reason to assume that such concepts are incompatible with certain contemporary ethical positions.
17. Charles Taylor. *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989., p.19.
 18. Cornelius Castoriadis. 'The State of the Subject Today.' *American Imago* 46, 4 (1989): 371-412.
 19. Sigmund Freud. 'A Difficulty in the Path of Psycho-Analysis.' In *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud: Volume XVII: 1917-1919*, by Sigmund Freud et al., 137-144. London: The Hogarth Press, 1955., p.141.
 20. Freud, *Ibid.*, p.143, emphasis is the author's own.
 21. Roy Calogeras and Toni Alston. 'On 'Action Language' in Psychoanalysis.' *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 49, 4 (1980): 663-696., and the following by Roy Schafer: 'Claimed and Disclaimed Action.' In *A New Language for Psychoanalysis*, by Roy Schafer, 127-154. New York: Yale University Press, 1976a; 'Metapsychology and Action Language.' In *A New Language for Psychoanalysis*, by Roy Schafer, 3-15. New York: Yale University Press, 1976b; 'The Explanation of Actions.' In *A New Language for Psychoanalysis*, by Roy Schafer, 194-211. New York: Yale University Press, 1976c; 'The Native Tongue of Psychoanalysis.' In *A New Language for Psychoanalysis*, by Roy Schafer, 361-375. New York: Yale University Press, 1976d; 'Action and Narration in Psychoanalysis.' *New Literary History* 12, 1 (1980a): 61-85; 'Action Language and the Psychology of the Self.' *Annual of Psychoanalysis* (1980b): 83-92; 'Some Clinical Implications of Action Language.' *Journal of American Psychoanalytic Association* 30 (1982): 169-184.
 22. Roy Schafer, 1980a, p.63.
 23. *Ibid.* p.64.
 24. Roy Schafer, 1976c, p.9-10. It is worth noting that in replacing the classical Freudian metapsychology (e.g., talk of drives, psychic determinism, etc.) with his action language, Schafer is not necessarily making any metaphysical commitments. Of this, Louis Sass writes: 'Schafer often backs off from an explicit claim that his [action language] approach has more objective truth than does metapsychology; at these times, he often retreats to a more pragmatic justification, arguing that, if not more 'true,' action language is at least 'healthier' . . . Schafer seems to hold that action language is to be employed only insofar as it is therapeutic in a given situation.' It is in this same instrumentalist spirit that I employ an analogue to Schafer's approach in looking to treat the abstract (moral) self. Louis Sass, 'The Self and Its Vicissitudes: An 'Archeological' Study of the Psychoanalytic Avant-Garde.' *Social Research* 55, 4 (1988): 551-607.
 25. As far as the topic at hand goes, Mark Tappan provides a nice concise description of how the narrativity theory of the self may come into play below; he writes: 'The moral self is situated neither psychologically nor socially, but *dialogically* – as a function of the linguistically mediated exchanges between persons and the social world that are the hallmark of all lived experiences . . . the 'authorship' of the narratives ones tells about one's life is always a function of both self and other.' Mark B. Tappan. 'Authoring a Moral Self: A Dialogical Perspective.' *Journal of Constructivist Psychology* 12 (1999): 117-131.
 - As stated, I shall suggest that the moral agent may play the role of both self and other in terms of redescribing mental events in terms of action (so, reclaiming agency and taking responsibly for mental action), and coming to add to coherence to one's own life (so, cohesion to one's own self) through the narrative process.
 26. Michel Foucault. *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality: Volume Two*. New York: Random House, 1985., p.18.
 27. I am using *reflective endorsement* in the standard way, to point to the idea that normativity grows out the fact that, if one were to stop and reflect on x-ing, one would then approve of x-ing.
 28. The crucial notion here is agent *autonomy*, in the sense described by David Wong as 'the ability to step back from the moral commitments one has received from others and to evaluate them so as to make one's commitments 'one's own,' and not merely those received from others (p.100).' Wong goes on to point out that it has been a pet project of communitarians – Charles Taylor and Michael Sandel, for instance – to demonstrate the flaws in liberal intuitions regarding individual 'radical choice' situations; namely, that choices made devoid of *any* community context are essentially arbitrary; and, as among the things that the individual inherits from her community is language, this kind of individuation is impossible. David B. Wong. 'Cultural Pluralism and Moral Identity.' In *Personality, Identity, and Character: Explorations in Moral Psychology*, edited by Darcia Narvaez and Daniel K. Lapsely, 79-105. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

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YOU ARE AND ARE NOT THE PERSON I ONCE KNEW: ECLECTICISM AND CONTEXT IN CONTINUITY OF IDENTITY

James DiGiovanna

Abstract

The question of the continuity of personal identity is actually several distinct questions hinging on contextually sensitive uses of “same” and “person.” The conflict between the psychological and physical criteria, for example, can be resolved if we understand that these criteria apply to different questions. Further, change in identity over time must be taken as essential to persons, and an eclectic account allows us to accept discontinuity of identity for certain purposes, while preserving continuity for others.

Keywords

Contextualism, person, personal identity, self

My point in what follows will be to say that there is no single answer to the philosophical question of the continuity of identity; that is, the question of whether a person at time T1 is the same person as a person at time T2. What I propose is that this hinges on contextually sensitive uses of ‘same’ and ‘person,’ and that when we ask questions about sameness we are usually not asking purely metaphysical questions, as though there were some absolute and eternal answer to the question. Rather, we are asking for some specific purpose of identification, and thus something like Leibniz’s law, which would never allow us to say that X both is and is not identical to Y, need not apply here, because ‘identification’ is not being used in a simple numerical sense.¹

The history of the continuity of identity problem begins with practical considerations. In the case of Samuel Clarke’s discussion,² it has to do with how it would be possible to have an afterlife; in Locke’s work,³ the practical question concerns the forensic ramifications of continuity of identity. In other words, they were not asking what the criteria for the continuity of identity would be in all possible circumstances or for all possible purposes. Rather, they wanted to know what it would be for some practical end. Hume, however, in book I, part IV, section VI of the *Treatise*, seemed to be asking the question in and of itself, as though there were or were not some answer to the question of continuity of identity devoid of any pragmatic end in asking it. Though he divided the question into ‘personal identity as it regards our thoughts or imagination, and as it regards our passions or the concern we take in

ourselves,’ and admitted to be working only on the former, this is not a notion of identity as it pertains to some practical end (i.e. is this the person who owes me five dollars, the friend I once had, the teacher I was looking for), but one based, it seems, on some intrinsic quality.

Following Hume, many later philosophers have asked the question as though it can be answered without reference to some particular purpose; that is, they want to know if someone is the same person at two different points in time for all or any question of identity. This seems to be the question as asked by Shoemaker, Williams, Nagel, Merrick, etc., who consider cases and pump intuitions, but don’t generally ask *for what purpose* we are concerned with continuity of identity. Or, to the extent that they do ask, they assume there is one particular purpose that determines continuity of identity. Picking up the other side of Hume’s split, Swinburne assumes, for example, that the true question of identity has to do with which future person we naturally are most concerned⁴ with, and uses this as a criteria for an absolute notion of continuity of identity. Williams tacitly seems to take this as his underlying criteria, at least insofar as his cases ask us which future person we would prefer to be or not be based on our concern about pain and reward.⁵ Parfit and Shoemaker also make a case for our concern with pain/pleasure/reward/etc. of some future being as the basis for our intuitions about which future being is ourselves, but Parfit at least realizes that this is only the basis for our intuition, not a metaphysical or natural basis for determining who we are or will be.

While concern for future reward, interest in legal responsibility, questions about the possibility of surviving one’s own death, etc., are all interesting and valid questions to ask when attempting to determine which, if any, future person will be me, their answers don’t necessarily overlap (as Locke pointed out, it doesn’t matter how many souls inhabit this body, if the body has continuity of memory it’s guilty of crimes even when one soul departs and another enters, and a soul with no continuity of psychological elements moving from one body to another is no longer guilty of any crime from the prior body⁶). Further, there are other questions and pragmatic ends to be pursued when asking about continuity of identity, ends which are often ignored by philosophers (though less so by psychologists) and

which reflect meaningful uses of 'same person' that, I believe, are worth pursuing philosophically. If a woman says, 'you are not the man that I married,' for example, this needn't be purely rhetorical. Using the psychological criteria of identity, it may well be true that her husband is not the man she married if he has undergone an extreme change in personality and character.

It's commonly accepted in born-again Christian communities that people have discontinuity of identity with their pre-saved selves (thus 'born-again'.) In some Native American societies adulthood initiation rituals signalled the entrance of a new person into the tribe, often with a new name⁷. While there was a connection to the childhood-person, reputation, responsibility, and even character were expected to be different for the new person. Importantly, the social position of the pre- and post-change individual are deeply dissimilar, and if we accept that identity is at least partly constituted by our relations, privileges, status, and how we are addressed by others, (as, for example, some Akan philosophers, such as Kwasi Wiredu, hold)⁸ then it is true that in some sense a new person has arisen.

I would argue that we need to assess on a case-by-case basis which aspect of continuity of identity we're concerned with, and why we're concerned with them (i.e. what is the pragmatic end of asking if this is the same person). As a result, we will have to accept an eclectic set of answers to the identity question, as different purposes will call for different criteria. Further, each of these answers will be necessarily tied to notions of personhood, and differing answers to the question of what is essential in a person.

Concretely, if a person undergoes a radical change in character, say, becoming a law-abiding, family-honouring born-again Christian after having been a criminal, alcoholic, etc., there is more than some truth to his old friends saying to him, 'you're not the person we used to know.' And for the purposes of friendship relations, he may well and truly be treated as a different person.

Again, this is not simply figurative. If you were best friends with Keith before he was born again, and now Keith's behaviour, demeanour, goals, values, etc., had undergone as complete a transformation as possible, you'd be well justified in saying that Keith was no longer the person you were friends with. Keith's identity, in an important sense of 'identity', has changed.

But for the purpose of determining guilt for crimes he committed prior to the change, a police officer would be obliged to treat Keith as the same person he was before the conversion. And yet, in

sentencing, judges take into account changes in character, and so here, a reduced sentence might be the result of a judge determining that he is no longer *entirely* the person he was. We can thus have, in regard to this one person, three distinct answers to the question of sameness: for the friend, Keith is completely non-identical with his former friend; for the police officer, Keith is identical with the criminal (this would also be true for someone picking Keith out of a line-up); for the judge, Keith is partly identical. In each case, different criteria apply, different purposes are served, and different senses of sameness are at play.

Thus, I would hold that there is an inherent complexity of continuity of identity, and reject equating personal identity with numerical identity. Instead, change must be considered as an inherent part of the analysis of identity and personhood, and partial attributions of sameness may be accepted here without contradiction, since no claim will be made that the 'same' or 'different' in 'same person' or 'different person' has the same sense as in 'same number' or 'different number.' This may solve some problems in 'branching' cases, but also will be useful in analysis of real-world cases.

Take a branching case, as described by Shoemaker⁹: an individual has her brain split in two, and the two parts transplanted into separate bodies (this is essentially the same as the branching cases described by Parfit, Williams, etc.). So person A is split into B and C. Now which of B or C is the same person as A? The common answer (as given by Shoemaker and Parfit) is that, if there is branching, then there is no continuity of identity because that would violate transitivity of identity (i.e. it can't be that both B and C are A, because then B would have to be C). But that's only true if we take identity as always being of the numerical sort. And, in fact, a person at any two points in her life is not perfectly identical. With the branching cases, there should be no problem saying that B is the same person as A *for certain purposes*, and not for others. This would remain to be worked out, but I imagine that both B and C would be responsible for A's crimes, but that B and C would each be entitled to only half of A's property. Thus, for legal guilt, B and C are identical with A, and for purposes of debt and property, each is 50% identical with A.

No discussion of personal identity is complete without a science-fictional thought experiment. Here's mine: In which of these two cases is there greater continuity of identity?

(1). You are transported to another world; there is no hope of return to earth. On this planet you must constantly fight other sentient beings for survival.

Cannibalism is common, and often the only means of subsistence. Human relations are purely instrumental. Others can be trusted only to act in their own self-interest, and that interest is survival. You remain there for twenty years, your personality and ethics adapting for survival in this new environment, then return home.

(2). You suffer total personal memory loss. However, you are married, part of a large and intimate community who knows much about you. You retain most of your personal characteristics, and the community fills you in on your background: this is your spouse, these your children, your friends, those you had trouble getting along with, etc. They help you acclimate to your old life, and it's generally agreed that your personality has remained consistent; you have many of the same interests (though you're surprised you have them), show the same level of compassion, etc.

This calls for some experimental philosophy, but here's a guess as to how the answer will come out: in America, most people would pick (1). In India and China, most would pick number (2). I base this guess on Sripada and Stich's experiments in ethics¹⁰. They found that respondents in China and India gave answers more indicative of a collectivist notion of ethics, those in the United States and (though to a lesser extent) Europe and Australia gave individualist answers. Now suppose that this is consistent with the continuity of identity experiment (I've not performed it, and the actual results may not matter; the point is that there are two reasonable ways of answering the question.) This would indicate different senses of what is essential to selfhood, or what the necessary conditions for continuity of identity are.

Further, imagine the same experiment, but instead of it being posed in the first person, it's about 'your friend.' The question then is: in which case would you be more likely to think of your friend as the same person? My sense is that we'd get a different response (I'll be performing this part of the experiment in the coming months; I don't have the funds to test this in India and China yet!)

Again, if the results are different, it's not simply because we have different standards for the continuity of our own identity and the continuity of other's identity (though I think we do, and I think that's telling and important for dislodging the simple notion that there's only one answer in any given case to the question of continuity of identity), it's also because (I assume) when I ask, 'Am I the same person?' I'm asking for a different purpose from when I ask, 'Is he the same person?'

Thought experiment cases have been criticized for not being representative of real-world concerns. But there are interesting, real-world cases where we can ask, in spite of a physical continuity of bodily identity, whether the same person is present. In fact, case two above comes from the true story of Su Meck, who had a near total memory wipe due to a head injury, but who remained married and (over time) acted as a mother to the children she'd had before the injury. This raises questions about the role of others, communities, and social situations in creating identity, not just in its psychological sense, but in its metaphysical or philosophical sense.

In Su Meck's case, we can see this in the way two conflicting criteria for identity are at work. Meck remembers nothing of her life before the accident, but, with the help of a great deal of rehabilitation, continued in her role as wife, mother, and community member. From a third-person perspective, she was held to be the same person. That is, her family still identified her as Su Meck although they of course understood that some radical change had occurred. Still, by appearance, and perhaps by the 'physicalist criteria,' they treated her as continuous with the person she was, at least for certain purposes: their obligation to her, her place in their family, their hopes for her future and their future relations with her.

But from a first person perspective she had no continuity of identity with her earlier self; no memory or first-person narrative that internally established that she was the same person. Meck may have taken cues from outside sources as to who she was, but she could not identify herself by the standard internal means. She asked, 'Am I supposed to be this other person who I was, or am I supposed to be this new person?'¹¹ It's important that she describes herself from before the accident as 'this other person.' For Su Meck, continuity of identity was clearly broken; for her family's conception of her, it was, at least in part, retained.

In some ways, this represents two of the most important super-categories for continuity of identity: the internal and external. Amongst philosophers concerned with continuity of identity, the question is frequently posed in terms of the isolated individual's ability to recognize him or herself, or simply the isolated individual's actual status of being the same person, without regard to environment and relations to others. I would hold that these are important considerations, and necessary for developing certain notions of personhood and identity that are philosophically rich and important. But, this internalist notion is not exhaustive, and for many legal purposes where we would hold continuity of identity (for example, in determining who owns Su Meck's

property), it fails. Nor does the externalist account (usually a physicalist account) always hold up; Su Meck is right in saying that her prior self was 'another person.' Only in allowing that different purposes and contexts must guide our answer to what is not a single question, but multiple questions about multiple sorts of continuity of identity, can we capture the richness that is personhood and self-identity.

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Notes:

1. Chisholm makes a similar move in 'The Loose and Popular and Strict and Philosophical Senses of Identity,' where he claims that identity attributions are 'conventional.' I'm taking a slightly different tack here. I agree that they are conventional, but I'd hold that there is no one ruling convention; rather, there are different conventions for different contexts, and in some cases we have to make up conventions as we go along, guided by our pragmatic ends. Chisholm's essay appears in *Perception and Personal Identity*, ed. Norman S. Care and Robert H. Grimm. Press of Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, 1969. 82-106.
2. Samuel Clarke; Open Letter to Henry Dodwell; correspondence with Anthony Collins, 1706.
3. John Locke, 'Of Identity and Diversity', in the second edition of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*.

4. Swinburne, Richard, 'Personal Identity: The Dualist Theory.' *Metaphysics: The Big Questions*. Ed. Peter Ingwaden and Dean W. Zimmerman. Malden, MA: Blackwell. 368-383. 2010.
5. 'The Self and the Future,' in *Problems of the Self*, NY, Cambridge Press. 46-63. 1999.
6. See book II, Ch. 27, of *Essay Concerning Understanding*, especially sections 6 and 14-16.
7. See, for example, Mircea Eliade's *Rites and Symbols of Initiation*, 'In philosophical terms, initiation is a basic change in existential condition; the novice emerges from his ordeal endowed with a totally different basis from that which he possessed before.' p.10.
8. See, for example, 'African Conceptions of a Person,' by Didier Njirayamanda Kaphagawani, in *A Companion to African Philosophy*. Malden, MA, Blackwell Publishing. 2006. pp. 332-341.
9. Schoemaker, Sydney. 'Persons and Their Pasts.' *Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol 7, No. 4, Oct., 1970, pp. 284.
10. Chandra Sripada & Stephen Stich, 'A Framework for the Psychology of Norms,' in P. Carruthers, S. Laurence & S. Stich, eds., *The Innate Mind Vol. 2: Culture and Cognition*. Oxford University Press, 2006. Pp. 280-301.
11. *Washington Post*, May, 21, 2011, retrieved from http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/gaithersburg-woman-earns-college-degree-two-decades-after-complete-memory-loss/2011/05/19/AFWAMg8G_story.html
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ARE CLASSICAL AND MEDIEVAL SCIENTIFIC IDEALS ROOTED IN A 'COMMUNITY OF PERSONS'?

Reflections on Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics* in the context of Aquinas' *De Ente et Essentia* and his *Divisions and Methods of the Sciences*

John F. Hofenbauer

Abstract

This paper will explore some of the original gold standards of scientific knowledge, and, as such, it will discuss whether true scientific knowledge must defer to some kind of unique, personal foundation. It will begin with an Aristotelian understanding of what constitutes true, scientific knowledge, and then use these Aristotelian criteria to examine whether or not Aquinas' understanding of *Ipsum Esse Subsistens* provides the 'necessary nexus' to connect 'middles' in scientific thought to real causes in nature. It will also consider whether Aquinas source for true scientific knowledge—this *Ipsum Esse*—must also be a person, if it is deemed to be the scientific cause of all rationality, subjectivity, and agency.

Keywords

A posteriori theory, Aquinas, Aristotle, cause of perishability, divisions of science, essence-existence distinction, *Ipsum Esse Subsistens*, metaphysical cause of persons, philosophy of science, Plato.

This paper will explore some of the original gold standards of scientific knowledge, and, as such, it will discuss whether true scientific knowledge must defer to some kind of unique, personal foundation. It will begin with an analysis of the differences between a Platonic and an Aristotelian understanding of science, while looking forward to an Aristotelian understanding of what constitutes true, scientific knowledge. We will then use these Aristotelian scientific criteria to examine whether or not Aquinas' understanding of *Ipsum Esse Subsistens* the 'necessary nexus' to connect 'middles' in scientific thought to real causes in nature. It will also consider whether Aquinas' source for true scientific knowledge—understood as *Ipsum Esse Subsistens*—also be a person, if it is deemed to be the scientific cause of all rationality, subjectivity, and agency.

1. The classical understanding of science

Aristotle inherits from Plato the notion that science deals with fixed things—knowing invariant things (Forms) that are metaphysically separated entities. For Plato, sensible realities only mirror the

Forms—therefore, there cannot be any real induction, in the original sense of the term. Sensible realities awaken the mind, but they do not inform the mind, and yet the mind comes to recognize an invariant principle in that sensible reality. The mind, for Plato, is already a storehouse of archetypes, and sensible realities just provide an occasion to remember what the mind already knows. The senses are not a vehicle of knowledge for Plato, so Plato did not have a full-fledged theory of induction, which is so necessary for scientific discovery.

In Plato's theory of the 'divided line,' sensation below the divided line is marked by confusion. Sensations get organized into 'things' which are *doxa*-dominated (primarily by words), and these words represent mere opinion and not real knowledge. There may or may not be a correspondence between these words and the reality of the Forms. Mathematics are in the first region above the 'divided line,' for this area is where the geometers dwell (*The Republic*, in many respects, is based upon geometry). Plato counts math as a quasi-science, for it is capable of finding invariant relations between numbers. In Plato's time, there was a debate as to whether mathematics were Forms or not. Plato called mathematics 'principles of reasoning,' able to be known independently of sense-knowledge, but they were not Forms in and of themselves. Plato also recognized the hypothetical character of mathematics: in connecting a number with reality, it's the Form of the reality that dictates the truth of the property, not the number itself. Mathematics gives us a form of knowledge, but it does not give us a scientific knowledge of Forms.

For Plato, science has to start with a knowledge of the Forms (separated realities, rather than embodied ones), so science can only be deductive from a knowledge of the Forms—it cannot be inductive, as we indicated earlier. Science, here, seems to be like theology, because it only goes from the highest realities to the lowest. It also means that human knowledge can never move from ordinary experience to scientific knowledge. Also, if one already has a knowledge of the Forms, deduction becomes unnecessary, and Platonism gets reduced to mysticism. One has to purge himself of sensation

and become conscious of the Forms—true, scientific discovery is therefore not possible. Also, Plato never gave a sufficient explanation as to how a Form could cause plurality; nevertheless, he still requires that every material instantiation of a Form participate wholly in the Form of which it is a 'shadow.' Ultimately, the sensible cosmos could not be an object of science for Plato (sensible objects were considered to be 'arts' rather than objects for scientific discovery). Even the question as to whether 'being' was a Form remained unanswered.

This mysticism dissatisfied Aristotle, for he thought that it eliminated common sense and real experience. His first significant change was to embody the Forms into a concept of *substance*. He claimed that the human intellect was capable of intuitively grasping the 'form' that gives essential structure to the matter/form composite that comprises a 'substance.' With enough experience, the human intellect can then make *generalizations* about experience and ultimately *demonstrate* principles associated with that experience. For Aristotle, the cause of knowledge is twofold: 1) the reality outside the mind (form and matter), and 2) our understanding of that reality once the mind is informed by means of the senses. The senses are the connection between the human soul and reality, and they make induction possible. Inductive knowledge occurs when we move from sense experience and generalize—this generalization then gives us the possibility of deductive demonstration. For Aristotle, then, there are two ways to know things scientifically, and the more experience we have, the more knowledge is possible. Aristotle believed that there can be a plurality of sciences because there is a plurality of methods to acquire scientific knowledge, and there are, as well, a plurality of things outside the mind to know. He thought that it would be a mistake to lump all the sciences together as if there were not different methods to accommodate the different objects of science. When asked if he thought that there could be a 'master science,' he said yes, but only if 'being' could be counted as an essence. This belief is the reason why metaphysics, for Aristotle, cannot be a science, for it then would have to be a divine science that human beings could not enjoy.

Science, for Aristotle, comes in three parts: (1) speculative, (2) practical, and (3) productive. In speculative knowledge, one seeks knowledge of the truth of things for 'its own sake'—this seeking is done through propositions in which the mind knows simply for the sake of knowing. In practical knowledge, the science of morality, one links together true universal propositions with a desire to

use human freedom in beneficial ways. The proposition that 'stealing is wrong' has a universal character in a syllogism, but it is lower than speculative knowledge because it contains a contingent fact. The conclusion of a practical syllogism is action, which involves a choice, and a science of free choices can never be as rigorous as speculative knowledge—for contingent facts can never be universalized. A synthesis of two premises cannot be put in a book, for mere book knowledge does not necessarily cause good actions. More knowledge does not necessarily help in ethics, because the payoff is in the action. One can have all the knowledge in the world, but if one is weak, there is no decisive, morally correct action—and this phenomenon includes politics. The third kind of science is the knowledge of how to 'produce' something. For example, the technological application of mathematical or speculative disciplines to reality: these applications will always involve contingent facts (medicine, for example, which is partially science and partially art). The practical and productive are therefore somewhat scientific, but not wholly.

In the beginning of Book Beta of the *Posterior Analytics*, Aristotle posits four questions which correspond to the things we know:

- (1) *Quia*—which is the question regarding the connection between a property and a thing ('whether S is P');
- (2) *Propter Quid*—which is the question regarding the reason for that connection between the subject and the predicate ('why is S, P?'—because of what?);
- (3) *Si est*—which is the question regarding the existence of a thing ('whether S is'); and
- (4) *Quid est*—which is the question regarding the nature of a thing ('what' S is).

Which one is the scientific question? Can some modalities of knowledge be scientific and others not? Aristotle seems to say that the answers to questions three and four are pre-scientific questions, and that these answers precede the answers to questions one and two, which are the properly scientific questions. Without the answers to questions three and four, one can never get the answers to questions one and two. Deductive reasoning must move from satisfactory answers to questions three and four, before it can answer question numbers one and two. The mistake that Thomas Kuhn makes in his book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, is that he leaves the answers to questions three and four to the end of the book. Kuhn wants to lock science into the 1-2 question-response pattern, but he needs deeper roots. Instead of answering questions 3 and 4, he

brings in the notion of paradigms, without understanding the need for an epistemological realism to provide answers to these latter questions. For Aristotle, one is not going from ignorance to knowledge; rather, one goes from knowledge of essential foundations to a more highly nuanced arena of knowledge.

Aristotle also posits five criteria for science in *The Posterior Analytics*. Three of these criteria pertain to the objective domain:

- (1) to know something scientifically, one needs to know the cause of the fact (71, b10);
- (2) this cause must be the 'necessary nexus' (75, a13);
- (3) this cause must be a 'commensurate universal,' i.e., true in every case (71, b15; 73, a28).

Aristotle does not deny that one can know all sorts of historical facts—one just does not know them scientifically. Aristotle posits, as well, two subjective conditions:

- (4) that the act of knowledge be discursive, via a demonstrative syllogism (71, b18); and
- (5) that one reason from premises which are true, primary, immediate, and better known than the conclusion (71, b20).

The whole thrust of Aristotelian science is to know how 'middles' in thought are related to real causes in nature. These logical propositions are understood to be *really* representative of how things are outside the mind ontologically. Science does not scientifically demonstrate its own beginning, for it begins with existences and definitions which are essentially unproven. Science emerges out of intuition with regard to sensation, and induction proceeds from judgments which are made according to things received by the senses. The senses provide the image (the 'phantasm') from which the intellectual soul abstracts the universal essence (similar to the Platonic Form), although its content is of the particular. One must get to know the primary premises by induction, for there is no amount of scientific knowledge which is capable of a convincing proof otherwise (72, b24 and 100, b3-15). Aristotle ends the *Posterior Analytics* by claiming that the most certain things are pre-scientific (i.e., intuition apprehending the primary premises). In order for science to be empirical, plural points of departure must be admitted (77, a5 and 85, a30). If it is a science, it must have a single, syllogistic structure, but that does not mean that its content is single; for there cannot be any intelligible plurality if there is only one essence. Facts which form the starting points for different subjects are the most complex and the easiest to know, while the most simple and the most universal are the most difficult

to know. This method is contrary to Plato's, because Aristotle begins with the most complex, enabling science to be brought back under the divided line.

Regarding the differences between dialectical reasoning and demonstrative reasoning, dialectical reasoning juxtaposes various things we know, enabling us to justify two parts by a middle connective—thus, history and poetics are dialectical. These disciplines use metaphors, so this kind of knowledge does not really establish the 'necessary nexus' that Aristotle needs. There is knowledge taking place here, for it detects an inter-relationship between two things, but it is not understood to be scientific knowledge (72, a25).

But the truly scientific question is, 'because of what?' The scientist is looking for the M (the 'middle,' or cause of the fact). He takes the essential definition and, having already asked the *quia* (is this a fact?), proceeds to a query about the cause (material and efficient). If the criteria are met and the questions are answered adequately, then one has found a grounded, scientific explanation.

But what does one do with contingent, periodic events (73, b25), and those which are impossible not to be (the Unmoved Mover)? Can either of these be a matter of science, for the universal cause belongs, from necessity, to its objects? It would seem that both of these are out of the range of Aristotelian science, and one begins to wonder what can qualify as true, scientific knowledge. Below is a summary of some of these limitations.

2. *The limitations of Aristotelian science*

Aristotelian science seems to get stranded between two extremes: (1) the ordinary: for it cannot make a science out of the singular, and (2) the extraordinary: theology cannot be known of itself because it has no matter, and therefore abstraction is impossible. In reference to the singular, the matter/form composite of things is held together by the circular motion of the heavenly spheres (the 55 or so 'Moved Movers'), which in turn are put in motion by the Prime Mover, who in turn is moved *necessarily* by the Unmoved Mover. Since there is a necessity here, all singular, contingent things must be in constant perpetual motion, because the cause of motion cannot be separated from its effects. There cannot be any gaps in motion that would allow radically contingent events to take place. Everything that could possibly be conceptualized has already been thought. Perfect life cannot be separated from imperfect life because of the necessity of constant motion. Thus, with Aristotle, it seems like there is no incentive for scientific discovery, and this lack of incentive would tend to isolate astronomy as the only observational level science.

3. Aquinas' divisions and methods of the sciences

Aquinas understands 'natural philosophy' to be the lowest kind of scientific knowledge, and he positions natural philosophy within the first degree of abstraction, for it depends upon matter 'both for its being and for its being understood.' There are, however, two subdivisions for natural philosophy. The first division is 'dianoetic' knowledge, and dianoetic knowledge is defined as the ability of the intellect to abstract from sensibles the form or essence of a thing (ontological knowledge), for the human intellect can abstract 'wholes' from parts, and 'forms' from matter. The second division at the first level of abstraction is 'perinoetic' knowledge—here, one is only interested in sensible particulars, and sensible accidents, for this kind of knowledge stays on the periphery, or outskirts of a thing.

Mathematics constitutes the second degree of abstraction, for it 'depends upon matter for its being, but not for its being understood.' In mathematics, the knower extracts a 'form' (of numerical value) from the form of an existing being. There can also be intermediate sciences, such as those which refer mathematical principles back to dianoetic and perinoetic structures.

Theology constitutes the third degree of abstraction, the science of 'being qua being,' for it 'does not depend upon matter neither for its being, nor for its being understood.' This kind of knowledge is also called 'First Philosophy,' for it does not inquire into the form of a thing, nor the perinoetic part, nor the form of the form, but rather, as we said, into 'being as being.'

These three divisions delineate the point of view that the intellect takes with regard to objective reality. The scientific problem of a fly or a frog can be studied under any one of the three at one and the same time, but Aquinas claims that the only way to account for *cause* (Aristotle's 'necessary nexus' that is truly a 'commensurate universal') is to go to the third level. At times, modern science wants to limit itself to perinoetic knowledge. Aquinas claims that perinoetic knowledge is useless without dianoetic knowledge, because science would be reduced to simply cataloguing particulars, and no essential, universal forms (and ultimately, no scientific definitions) would be known. Aquinas believes that all three perspectives are required for any unified, scientific approach to reality. Aquinas has thus brought metaphysics into the domain of science, and the logical inference is that there is no reality not subject to science.

4. Summary: Aquinas' primary scientific objects

To summarize, the primary objects of science for Aquinas are 'the principles and causes of reality which it examines but does not make.' At the first level (physics, or 'first philosophy'), physical objects are abstracted from motion, and the *forma totus* (essence) is studied. It is not the form, not the matter, but the whole matter/form composite which is understood by the 'agent intellect's' spiritual power of understanding. At the second level (mathematics), numbers are abstracted from matter, and the 'form of the form' is studied. Outside the mind, maths relies on a *real*, accidental property that adheres to objective reality. At the third level (natural theology and philosophy), the scientist studies being itself, substance, quality, potency/act, one/many, and even the possibility of the 'necessary being' (God) as a 'community of persons.'

5. Aquinas: Capacities of the human intellect

For Aquinas, one capacity of the human intellect is the capacity for 'judgment' (*separatio* between 'is' and 'is not'): here, the intellect affirms or negates the existence of things outside the mind. Existence cannot be conceived, but judgment can be done because there is a distinction between essence and existence (more on this distinction later). The highest science (the science of 'being qua being') concerns that which is not conceptualizable (existence itself), and Aquinas believes that there can actually be a science of this distinction between the nature (form or essence) of a thing and its actual existence. The lowest science (physics or 'first philosophy') concerns that which is conceptualizable, and that which is readily available to the senses. The distinction between essence and existence (Aquinas' argument for this distinction is below) as well as the distinction between these powers of the human intellect, allows being to become a direct object of scientific inquiry, for 'is-ing' does not depend upon matter—rather, matter depends upon it. Accidents depend upon matter, which in turn depends upon form, which in turn, depends upon the act of existing, contingent *esse*.

6. Aquinas and the science of the distinction between essence and existence (inductive/a posteriori argument)

The first premise: the essence (nature) of contingent (non-necessary) things cannot explain their existence, and, given the fact that a created being cannot be self-caused, a distinction must be made between the essence of a thing and its original and continued existence.

The second premise: the existence of contingent things can be explained by the theoretical positing an uncreated necessary being (a transcendent community of persons?) that does not have such a distinction between its essence and its existence. Its existence must be identical to its essence and it must not only be the source of the existence of all contingent beings, but it must also maintain these contingent beings in existence from moment to moment.

The third premise: this uncreated, necessary being (or community of divine persons) must have always existed (i.e., it must be uncaused) and the quality of its existence must be at least equal to or greater than the quality of the existence of the created beings, including personal beings, which it maintains from moment to moment.

The conclusion: contingent things are radically dependent (not only for their coming into being, but also for their continued existence) upon this theoretical, and perhaps personal, 'uncaused cause,' whose essence is identical with its existence.

7. Aquinas' response to Aristotelian science

As we indicated earlier, being ('is-ing') for Aquinas is not dependent on eternal matter; rather, matter depends upon it. All contingent things/events depend upon this *Ipsium Esse Subsistens*, and this necessity becomes the Aristotelian *propter quid* for every scientific fact. Aquinas' 'necessary being,' as *Ipsium Esse Subsistens*, can take its time with matter, because creation is *not necessary* (because it is the product of a personal, conscious decision), even though Aquinas' 'necessary being' has the capacity to create *ex nihilo*. This capacity exists because there is a free will at work here, possibly rooted in a *community* of conscious persons. The theoretical positing of a community of divine persons, as the uncaused cause of all reality, is, of course, purely theoretical speculation that goes beyond the limits of natural theology, or first philosophy. If one wished to go beyond the limits of natural theology, the Biblical

book of Genesis is fairly explicit about this primordial community in the passage attributed to God the Father: 'Let us man in our' When confronted, such as we are, with the outer edges of the limits of human rationality, Aquinas is firm in his conviction that natural theology (first philosophy) must yield to any relevant doctrines associated with divine revelation.

8. Summaries and conclusions

The Act of Being is not dependent upon matter, and sheer *Esse* is able to give *propter quids* for the rest of science. If the scientific maxim that the cause is always greater than, or equal to, the effect, is not to be violated, then the necessary being, as *Ipsium Esse Subsistens*, should be able to give *propter quid* explanations for the fine-tuning of the universe, for life, for personhood, for rationality, for consciousness, for agency, as well as for the basic existence of even the most primitive forms of matter. Finally, Aquinas employs the 'principle of subalternation,' meaning that, when in doubt, the third degree of scientific knowledge should give way to faith and the dogmas of revealed theology and divine revelation, just as the first degree of scientific knowledge should give way to the third degree of scientific knowledge.

Postscript

Much of the original inspiration for this essay can be attributed to the thoughts, musings, and memorable rants of Russell Hittinger, who was my professor at Christendom College, in Front Royal, VA, during my undergraduate days in the late 1980's. Certain selections of this essay are based upon notes taken during his Philosophy of Science course.

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FROM THE ABSOLUTE TO THE INDIVIDUAL: PERSON AND PRE-MORTAL EXISTENCE IN BOEHME, SCHELLING, AND HOWISON

James Mclachlan

Abstract

Despite its many strengths Terryl Givens's *When Souls Had Wings: Pre-Mortal Existence in Western Thought* folds heterodox thinkers like Boehme and Schelling into the larger tradition of pre-existence in which the pre-existing human soul falls into time from timeless eternity, and where God, in His perfection, is exempt from the trials of change and evolution. Boehme and Schelling actually provide us with a different interpretation of the pre-existence that is not present in the Platonic strain of pre-existence.

Key Words

Berdyayev Nicolas; Boehme, Jacob; freedom; Givens, Terryl; Howison, George H.; pre-mortal existence; Schelling, F.W.J.; theodicy

1. When souls had wings

Terryl Givens begins his excellent history of the idea of pre-mortal existence with quotations from Thomas More, Plato, and Origen, all statements of the Platonic concern of the eternal soul's fall from a perfection into an imperfect material body. Along the way we meet thinkers in the Platonic tradition like Philo, Traherne, and Henry Moore who posit a positive fall in which the soul is perfected through the experience of embodiment in matter. Givens shows that the majority tradition in the history of doctrines of the pre-mortal existence of human souls has been Platonic; in the sense that the soul itself participates in the eternal that is beyond time.

When Souls Had Wings: Pre-Mortal Existence in Western Thought is an impressive accomplishment. It relates the history of an idea that has been largely neglected over years of scholarship. In the tradition of Arthus Lovejoy's *The Great Chain of Being*, it covers 4000 years of pre-existence concepts through a vast array of thinkers, writers, religious mystics, and prophets.

This paper is not a critique of what Givens has accomplished, rather, it is an exploration of other avenues of thought which add to our understanding of non-orthodox Christian conceptions of the pre-existence. I shall disagree with Givens' readings particularly of Boehme and Schelling. When Givens Platonizes their thought, he folds them into the larger tradition of pre-existence in which the pre-existing human soul falls into time from timeless eternity, and

where God, in His perfection, is exempt from the trials of change and evolution. Boehme and Schelling actually provide us with a different interpretation of the pre-existence that is not present in the Platonic strain of pre-existence ideas that hold centre stage in *When Souls Had Wings*.

This heterodox tradition originates with the seventeenth century mystic Jacob Boehme who offered a different conception of the doctrine of pre-existence that is anti-Platonic and anti-ontological. It is anti-ontological, or meta-ontological because in this tradition freedom precedes Being. In creation, which is ongoing, both God and humanity come to be, moving from chaos to order. This tradition differs in significant ways from the Neo-Platonic Christian ideal of pre-existence that is essential to Origen and also almost every one who follows the Gnostic strains that emerge again and again over the doctrine's 2,500 year history since Plato. The heterodox tradition, Boehme conceives, abandons traditional notions of perfection. Where Plato sees the world as the dim material reflection of timeless perfect eternity, Boehme and Schelling see a God creating Him/Herself in relation to the world. While the Platonic thinkers Philo, Origen, Traherne, Henry Moore, and Anne Conway tell a positive story of the fall and see the perfection of humanity through its pilgrimage in the world, Boehme and Schelling also include God in this pilgrimage.

2. Pre-existence and the problem of theodicy

Pre-existence has been used as a means to deal with the problem of evil and suffering. It has sometimes been used like classical Hindu theories of karma to explain why some of our brothers and sisters sit in the dark part of the picture. In *The Laws of Manu*, using the concept of reincarnation instruct us that if a person of the highest caste, a Brahman, were to fall 'from his duty' he would become 'an Ulkamukha Preta (comet-mouth ghost), who 'feeds on what has been vomited.' Or a Kshatriya would become a 'Kataputana (false stinking ghost), who eats impure substances and corpses.' A Vaisya would become 'Maitrakshagyotika Preta (sees by an eye in its anus), who feeds on pus', and a fallen Sudra, would in the next life, be transformed into 'Kailasaka (Preta who feeds on moths).¹ Therefore, if you were ever to meet a pus eating ghost that sees out of its

anus, you would know that he was responsible for his plight because of his actions in a previous life. The same can be said of the powerful, or the holy, as well as the wretched.

Early Christians used pre-existence to answer questions about inequality: to justify gross inequality in the distribution of goods and ills, joy and pain, in the world since the fall. Origen most clearly laid out the doctrine of pre-mortal existence for Christians in the third century. Origen was able to take the Platonic philosophical traditions already Christianized over two centuries and elucidate a Christian Neo-Platonic vision of God's creation that included the eternity of souls in God, the *ex nihilo* creation of the world, the fall from perfect unity, and the eventual return to harmony with the One God. Givens quotes Aneas of Gaza who lays out the argument that the pre-existence of souls explains injustices:

If we deny the pre-existence of souls, how is it possible for the wicked to prosper and for the righteous ones to live in idle circumstances? How can one accept the fact that people are born blind or that some die immediately after they are born, while others reach a very old age.²

In Aneas' day the doctrine of pre-existence was in retreat. The key opponent of pre-existence was Augustine. After many years of considering the problem of suffering Augustine came to an aesthetic solution to the problem of evil. He asserts that after a long struggle the faithful will receive a vision of the beauty the whole of creation which will answer all questions about the seeming injustices of this world:

To us is promised a vision of beauty—the beauty of whose imitation all other things are beautiful, and by comparison which all other things are unsightly' whosoever will have glimpsed this beauty—and he will see it, who lives well, prays well, studies well—how will it ever trouble him why one man, desiring to have children, has them not, while another man casts out his own offspring as being unduly numerous; why one man hates children before they are born, and another man loves them after birth, or how it is not absurd that nothing will come to pass which is not with God—and therefore it is inevitable that all things come into being in accordance with order—and nevertheless God is not petitioned in vain?³

It sounds almost like a direct reply to Aneas' argument for the doctrine. According to Augustine if we study well and pray well, we shall have a vision of beauty that will answer all our questions about why one man is born blind, or why another desire children but has none, where another who wants no children has many. In short not only our concerns about the horrible suffering of creatures but those

about the terrible and unjust distribution of that suffering will vanish, swallowed up in the vision of God.

Augustine's aesthetic solution to the problem of suffering is based on a Christian Platonist view of being and its ultimate perfection. Plato's notion of perfection is presented in his discourse on love and beauty in *The Symposium*:

But what if a man had eyes to see the true beauty—the divine beauty, I mean pure and clear and unalloyed, not clogged with the pollutions of mortality and all the colors and vanities of human life—thither looking, and holding converse with the true beauty simple and divine? Remember how in that communion only, beholding beauty with the eye of the mind, he will be enabled to bring forth, not images of beauty, but realities for he has hold not of an image but of a reality, and bringing forth and nourishing true virtue to become the friend of God and be immortal, if mortal man may.⁴

Here is eternity with no risk and no attachment to a particular, finite person. The philosopher, as he moves toward the love of perfect beauty, loves that fair youth for the eternal form of beauty imprinted in him, and loves not the youth himself. One moves to the appreciation of the eternal, unchanging, form behind the changing, physical body to an appreciation of the eternal form represented in the character of the individual. Finally, the lover of wisdom looks past all finite forms to contemplate the eternal One. Plato's desire is for the eternal absolute purity beyond individuals, not 'clogged with the pollutions of mortality.' One loves nothing but the ideal untouched by the world and the world is only real so far as it participates in the ideal. Here we don't love another as an individual but for the eternal within them. We escape the pollutions of mortality in the immaculate beauty of eternity.

This Platonic conception of the ideal is Augustine's aesthetic solution to the problem of evil. God who sees the whole outside of time and space sees that it is all good, the light and the darkness together complete the beauty of the composition. 'We are like people ignorant of painting who complain that the colours are not beautiful everywhere in the picture: but the Artist has laid on the appropriate tint to every spot.'⁵ Where Augustine does allow for the existence of darkness in the picture like Plato, we only see the perfection of the whole when we rise to the perspective of the unchanging eternity. From God's point of view, the point of view of eternity, there is no such thing as evil. Suffering is an illusion of this world of shadows. When we obtain this vision we will see that just as a beautiful painting must contain contrasts of light and darkness so must God's masterwork, the creation.⁶

No earthly love can compare with the glories of the perfect heavenly realm. Dante at the end of his journey arrives in paradise and is greeted by his earthly love Beatrice but when he gets to the highest point in paradise he turns from her as she turns from him and contemplates the perfect beauty of God. Dante, enraptured by the beatific vision proclaims: 'O light eternal, who alone abidest in Thyself, alone knowest Thyself, and, known to Thyself and knowing, lovest and smilest on Thyself!'⁷

In his epilogue Givens cites Elizabeth Clark's final lines from her *The Origenist Controversy*, approvingly, that the move away from Origen to Augustine ensured the supremacy 'of a Christian theology whose central concerns were human sinfulness, not human potentiality; divine determination, not human freedom and responsibility; God's mystery, not God's justice.'⁸ Origen was the champion of the doctrine of pre-mortal existence in the ancient world. He is also the champion of universalism, that all of God's creation, including the rebellious Lucifer, will return to the final cosmic harmony of the eternal vision of God. Givens and Clark both see Augustine's and Western Christianity's rejection of Origen's doctrines detrimental to beliefs in justice, responsibility, and freedom in the Christian tradition. The question is just how superior is Origen's vision to Augustine's since both not only retain a commitment to creation *ex nihilo* but in addition a commitment to Platonic notion of perfection. True in Origen's version we have a much nicer end, no justification of hell, and everyone ultimately gets back to heaven, even Satan and Ivan Karamazov, whether they want to or not because the divine harmony is irresistible. But ultimately the whole of human history adds nothing to being itself. It is what it is from eternity.

3. Heterodox personalism: Boehme, Schelling, and non-Platonist pre-existence

Givens sees the most important influence on Boehme as Neo-Platonism and this may be so in some respects, but Jacob Boehme moves away from Platonic notions of the divine perfection.⁹ One of Givens' key sources for Boehme interpretation is Nicholas Berdyaev's essay on Boehme that was the introduction to Boehme's key work on creation *Mysterium Magnum*. Berdyaev interpreted Boehme's seminal doctrine of the *Ungrund* as the pre-ontological abyss. It is prior being and also not a perfection at the basis of the universe but rather chaos as primordial freedom the source of the possibility of good and evil.

The mysterious teaching of Boehme about the *Ungrund*, about the abyss, without foundation, dark and irrational, prior to being, is an attempt to provide

and answer to the basic question of all questions, the question concerning the origin of the world and the arising of evil. The whole teaching of Boehme about the *Ungrund* is so interwoven with the teaching concerning freedom, that it is impossible to separate them, for this is all part and parcel of the same teaching. And I am inclined to interpret the *Ungrund* as a primordial freedom. . . indeterminate even by God.¹⁰

This shows Boehme's and Berdyaev's understanding of the primordial abyss, that is the source of being to be what Berdyaev calls primordial freedom. This is a break with Neo-Platonism which sees its One as Being itself, absolute and perfect. Where, as here, the abyss is the chaos of freedom that is not yet being, there are no forms independent of the chaos but, rather, they also emerge. Both Platonism and Neo-Platonism in all their forms seek to return to the perfection of pre-existing Being. The Christians Origen and Augustine do this as well. For Origen it is the Harmony of creation before the fall of all the pre-existing beings in perfect Being, in eternity. For Augustine, though he rejects pre-mortal existence, he still argues for a Platonic return to the pre-lapsarian state. The universe is perfect as God creates it. Human and demonic 'freedom' are what destroy its perfection.¹¹ For Boehme and Berdyaev, on the other hand, the abyss, the *Ungrund*, is only the chaotic freedom that is logically prior to creation, the desire for creation, the desire of no-thing to become something. This is already radically different from Christian Neo-Platonism but they add to this a second and even more radical element. This kind of chaos, this non-rational given, is also in God. Thus God too must develop, must evolve. It reflects a movement from the unity of the primal chaos before God's creative acts, to an alienated conflictual multiplicity of this world, and finally a freely chosen conscious unity in multiplicity or sociality of love in both this world and the world to come. The problem with the eternal bliss of the One is that it is dead. Thus it may be unified but it is not something to which one would want to return. One finds joy in the relation with others in sociality that only comes after the fall.

For Boehme God as the Eternal One, as the Absolute, is nothing. Without the creature, without nature, without real others there is no determination about God, there is nothing to say about God. God is not will, not body, not space. One could say that God is not even God but rather the absolute, the groundless, the *Ungrund*. If one called such a being perfect it would have to be the perfection of perfect vagueness, perfectly boring, perfectly empty. For God to 'be,' to become actual, requires determination, finitude. God's infinity is possibility but

it is also vagueness. This boring oneness is, of course, also bliss. 'God, in Himself is neither being nor becoming, He is absolutely nothing, He is not even kind or cruel, not good or evil.'¹² Boehme writes that the only name that can be given to it is the Absolute, *the Ungrund*, the abyss without bottom. An abyss in which one can find neither foundation or a reason for things. This absolute beginning, absolute unity is not something to which we would wish to return.¹³ The beginning is pure undetermined will; this gives Boehme's thinking a voluntaristic character new in Western thought.

Givens misses that important point made by that other great historian of ideas Arthur O. Lovejoy. In his conclusion to *The Great Chain of Being* Lovejoy claims Schelling's presents an evolutionary theology that at last turned the Platonic scheme of the universe upside down.¹⁴ It is a view in which even God is affected by time and relation and in which even the Ideal Person develops, 'is alive.' This notion militates against the 'devolutionist' metaphysics of Plato and Plotinus that is Christianized by Augustine and Origen.¹⁵

Lovejoy refers to this difference placing it in the controversy fought out by Jacobi and Schelling in 1812 when Jacobi, Schelling's one time inspiration, became his sharp adversary. Jacobi reacted against Schelling's evolutionary ideal of the person and God arguing that the creator was perfect and could not evolve.¹⁶ This evoked an impassioned and angry response from Schelling who claimed that if one held that the more perfected pre-existed eternally as pure act and not as potential then why would it have created a world with all its suffering and frustration in the first place.

... is difficult for many reasons, but first of all for the very simple one that, if it were in actual possession of the highest perfection [or completeness], it would have had no reason (*Grund*) for the creation and production of so many other things, through which it—being incapable of attaining a higher degree of perfection—could only fall to a lower one.¹⁷

Schelling continues that God is not what God was at the beginning. God as the Omega is more than God as Alpha.

I posit God as the first and the last, as the Alpha and the Omega; but as Alpha he is not what he is as Omega, and in so far as he is only the one—God 'in an eminent sense' – he can not be the other God, in the same sense, or, in strictness, be called God. For in that case, let it be expressly said, the unevolved (*unentfaltete*) God, *Deus implicitus*, would already be what as Omega, the *Deus explicitus* is.¹⁸

Schelling followed Boehme in the important idea that God had to be a person. He goes as far to say

that we must think of God in anthropomorphic terms. There is a crucial difference between Boehme and Schelling on the one hand and the Platonists like Origen on the other, and even other heretodox Christian as for example the Gnostics. Boehme and Schelling see an evolution in God and that this an advance away from the primal One, the absolute unity. Boehme's key intuition is that God is a person.¹⁹ To be a person is to be in some sense finite, to be limited by and related to another and that this is an improvement on the unity of oneness. Thus God must be related other beings like Him/Her.

Schelling made this movement from the egoistic bliss of the vague to plurality and love into a general metaphysical principle. Schelling's analysis of the birth of God as the ideal person begins with the break from the general, from the absolute. God moves from the ground to existence from the chaos of possibility to actuality. These are Schelling's two dialectical opposites, ground and existence. They are a desire for expression as individuality but also the need for community. The move to actuality, to existing in the world, is also the positing of limitation and finitude which essential to personality. One is limited by the other and the existence of the other is what creates the possibility of love.

But the groundless divides itself into the two equally eternal beginnings only in order that the two which could not be in it as groundless at the same time or there be one, should become one through love; that is, it divides itself only that there may be life and love and personal existence.²⁰

God can only reveal Her/Himself in creatures who resemble Her/Him, in free, self-activating beings for whose existence there is no reason save God, but who are as God is.²¹ Thus things once created are alive in themselves, Schelling claims they have the divinity in them. Schelling's line 'He speaks, and they are there' is interesting from what he has said about God's self-revelation. To speak is to speak to another. God requires humanity.²²

4. George Holmes Howison: Pre-mortal existence as choice

But what kind of picture of God does this give us. If God is involved in the moral struggle should we be suspicious of God and afraid that God may 'break bad.' Givens notes that one of the odd aspects of Kant's theory of our disposition for good or evil is that that we are the authors of it but 'outside of time.'

To have a good or evil disposition as an inborn natural constitution does not here mean that it has not been acquired by the man who harbors it, that he is not the author of it, but rather, that it has not been acquired in time. . . Yet this disposition itself must

have been adopted by free choice other wise it could not be imputed.²³

What could this mean: a free choice not made in time that sums up the meaning of one's life? Schelling and Berdyaev make similar statements that the meaning of our existence is a choice taken outside of history, what Berdyaev calls 'existential' opposed to 'historical time.' The American Personalist philosopher and committed Kantian, George Holmes Howison can help us here in relation to the doctrine of pre-existence because he speaks about it explicitly. Howison taught philosophy at the University of California at the turn of the 20th century. One of his students and philosophical disciples was the Mormon philosopher William H. Chamberlin. Howison claimed that reviews claimed that his 1901 magnum opus *The Limits of Evolution* was misunderstood by a reviewer for the *New York Times*. In an appendix entitled 'The System Not The Theory of Pre-existence', Howison attempts to dodge the charge that the description of reality which is a sort of divine democracy between eternal persons, us, and the ideal eternal person, God, didn't presuppose pre-existence. The *Times* reviewer's 'mistake,' and Howison admitted this, seemed quite comprehensible given statements like the following about Howison's idea of God. 'These many minds form the eternal "unconditionally real" world. They constitute the "City of God."' ²⁴ But Howison claimed that eternal persons meant the logical priority of choice, or freedom, in the creation of the self, not a temporal one.²⁵ But what does he mean by this? One way to think about it, and this notion emerges over and over after Kant's idea of chosen predisposition, in Schelling's choice for good and evil, in Kierkegaard's existential choice, Berdyaev's existential time or in Martin Buber's nicely phrased 'choice at the point of our being.' It is to prioritise freedom, to place it outside of the causal stream of historical time. So our life and all our choices come down to one great choice which is whether choose relation to the other and existence, remain on the fence which is still a choice, or to choose narcissistic choice of the self alone, opposed to all others. The first was Christ's choice that determined the meaning of his entire life and last was Lucifer's. One might say it is the sum of all our choices. It's not yet clear for you and me but when we look back from the judgment we will come to know ourselves for who we are. Thus the Ungrund, the pre-mortal existence under this idea is a primal indifference and we need to choose to be. Slavoj Zizek explains this choice by saying that for Schelling human persons, like God, have to disengage themselves from the primal indifference.

Man's act of decision, his step from the pure potentiality essentiality of a will which wants nothing to an actual will, is therefore a *repetition* of God's act: in a primordial act, God Himself had to 'choose Himself'. His eternal character - to contract existence, to reveal Himself. In the same sense in which history is man's ordeal - the terrain in which humanity has to probe its creativity, to actualize its potential - nature itself is God's ordeal, the terrain in which *He* has to disclose Himself, to put His creativity to the test.²⁶

The innocence of the pre-existent state is also a moment of complete boredom, it is the meaningless changelessness of an eternity without a decision.²⁷ It is as if Dante when he finally arrived at the beatific vision of God as changeless perfect eternity had really not made it to heaven but found himself frozen in hell with Satan. Perfection demanded he keep looking at Beatrice, and not only a Beatrice but all those other beings, that he take a decision to love others, not just divine perfect beauty.

Thus the idea of Pre-existence may give a response to the problem of evil and suffering but not the Platonic one of a perfect harmony from which we've fallen to which we wish to return. We live in a universe that is open, chaotic, and free. Such freedom is tied to tragedy because both through human choice and because of the chaotic nature of reality. But eschatologically the possibility of overcoming the chaos is real.

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Notes:

1. *Laws of Manu*: 12:71-72.
2. Givens tells us that Aeneas was himself an opponent of the view. Givens, p. 123.
3. Augustine, *De Ordine*, p. 51.
4. Plato, *The Symposium* in *The Works of Plato*. Benjamin Jowett, tr. (New York: The Dial Press, 1936) pp. 342-343.
5. Augustine of Hippo, *The Enchiridion on Faith Hope and Love*, (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1996) iii, 2, II.
6. Augustine see this as a great harmony that brings together light, dark, high and low elements. 'To thee there is no such thing as evil, and even in thy whole creation taken as a whole, there is not; because there is nothing from beyond it that can burst in and destroy the order which thou hast appointed for it. But in the parts of creation, some things, because they do not harmonize with others, are considered evil. Yet, those same things harmonize with others and are good, and in themselves are good. . . . I no longer desired a better world, because my thoughts ranged over all, and with sounder judgment I reflected that the things above were better than those below, yet that all creation together was better than the higher things alone'.

- Augustine of Hippo. *Confessions*. Tr. Henry Chadwick. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) 7:13.
7. Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy, III Paradiso*, tr. Charles Singleton, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975 Canto XXXIII: 123, p. 379.
 8. Givens, p. 322.
 9. Givens, p. 145.
 10. Nicholas Berdyaev, 'Deux études sur Jacob Boehme' in Jacob Boehme, *Mysterium Magnum*, Tome I (Paris: Aubier, 1945), p. 39. Cited in Givens, p. 146.
 11. This is where Augustine must introduce predestination. Even the fall is a part of the eternal perfection of the great chain of being. Evil only exists from our point of view. From God's eternal point of view it is just contrast is the perfect masterwork of the universe.
 12. Alexandre Koyre, *Le Philosophie de Jacob Boehme* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1968), 320.
 13. Jacob Boehme, *Mysterium Magnum: Part II or An Exposition of the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, Tr. John Sparrow (Kessinger Publishing) 60: 38, p. 664.
 14. Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), 325.
 15. Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), 32.
 16. Quoted in Lovejoy, 321.
 17. *Ibid.*, 322.
 18. *Ibid.*, 323.
 19. Schelling recognized this difference when he set Boehme off from the rest of the Western esoteric tradition: 'One must, of course, distinguish Jacob Boehme, in whom everything is still pure and original, from another class of mystics, in whom everything is already corrupt.; the well know Saint Martin particularly belongs in this class: one no longer hears in him, as one could in J. Boehme, the person who has been originally stirred but only the mouthpiece or secretary of alien ideas, which have, moreover, been prepared for purposes of a different kind; what in Jacob Boehme is still living, is dead in him, only, so to speak, the cadaver, the embalmed corpse, the mummy, of something originally living, of the kind that is displayed in secret societies which simultaneously pursue alchemical, magical, theurgic purposes.' Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, Andrew Bowie, tr. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994) p. 183.
Koyre writes '... what Boehme believes prior to any doctrine, what he searches, what his thought is destined to justify, is that God is a personal being, even more, that he is *a person*, a living person, conscious of himself, an acting person, a perfect person.' Koyre, p. 315. Boehme thus differs from the neo-Platonic mysticism of Meister Eckhart. Eckhart seeks the non difference of the mystical 'divinity' which is even superior to the manifested God. Divinity is immutable and unmovable in eternity. For Eckhart the personal God is still limited for it exists in relation to another. 'God becomes and unbecomes', says Eckhart, and is thus inferior to Divinity that does not become. (Gott wird und entwird)'. (Koyre 316) Boehme's God on the other hand lives, develops and evolves. Koyre says he is exactly the god who '*wird and enwird*' eternally. This God is not outside movement. He is not outside time in the immutability of non-being. (Jacob Boehme, *Six Theosophical Points* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1958) I 19, pp. 10-11. Koyre, 317.
 20. Gutmann 88-89, *Werke* 7: 408.
 21. Guttman 18, 19, *Werke* 7:346.
 22. Schelling already approached this position in his early work for example in *The System of Transcendental Idealism* like Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* he likens God to a playwright who is not just outside his work but in it. 'But now if the playwright were to exist independently of his drama, we should be merely the actors who speak the lines he has written. If he does not exist independently of us, but reveals and discloses himself successively only, through the very play of our own freedom, so that without this freedom even he *would not be*, the we are collaborators of the whole and have ourselves invented the particular roles we play.' F. W. J. Schelling, *The System of Transcendental Idealism (1800)*, Tr. Peter Heath (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1978), 210, *Werke* 3: 602.
 23. Kant, p. 17. Quoted in Givens, p. 202.
 24. George Holmes Howison, *The Limits of Evolution and Other Essays Illustrating the Metaphysical Theory of Personal Idealism*, Second Edition (New York: Macmillan, 1904) pp. xi-xii.
 25. *ibid.* pp. 412-413.
 26. Slavoj Zizek, *The Indivisible Remainder: An Essay on Schelling and Related Matters* (London: Verso, 1996) p. 21

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THE CONFUCIAN CONCEPTION OF PERSONS¹

Gordon B. Mower

Abstract

One interpretation of classical Confucianism postulates a role-bearing theory of the person. This theory identifies a fundamental social nature manifest through human relations and ceremonial interactions as the central feature of persons. Against this role-bearing model, I argue that the theory is out of harmony with the Confucian texts and that it lacks philosophical plausibility. I offer the alternative interpretation that the Confucian view of the person is roughly compatible with the seminal theory of persons presented by P.F. Strawson.

Keywords

Ames, Confucianism, Fingarette, persons, role-bearing persons, Rosemont, Strawson.

Nothing in the canon of early Confucians directly corresponds with the concept of a person.² Yet, the philosophical content of their works seems to commit Confucius and those who followed in his wake to various implications about persons. Three recent thinkers have been especially important in trying to specify the features of a Confucian theory of the person. Herbert Fingarette's *Confucius: The Secular as Sacred* is roughly of the same vintage as John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*, and while it is a much more slender volume, it has had within its sphere a similarly far-reaching influence.³ In the wake of Fingarette's work, two other important essays were produced in honour of Fingarette: 'Rights-Bearing Individuals and Role-Bearing Persons,' by Henry Rosemont Jr., and 'Reflections on the Confucian Self: A Response to Fingarette,' by Roger T. Ames.⁴ Each of these thinkers sees Confucius as offering an alternative understanding to the received Cartesian view of the person. In each case, the Confucian stance on the person is interpreted as being overwhelmingly social as opposed to the western view, which is characterized as being impossibly individualistic. Against these three currents, I shall argue here that the Confucian understanding of a person is not so alien to western understandings, and I shall use the seminal piece by P.F. Strawson on persons to demonstrate this.⁵ Since I shall refer to it throughout the treatment of the other authors, I shall begin by briefly specifying the general outline of Strawson's approach to persons. I shall then take up in some detail Rosemont and

Fingarette. This will leave only a little room at the end for Ames. I close with a last look at Strawson.

Very briefly, a person on Strawson's account is not a pure ego in the Cartesian sense, nor does he hold a 'no ownership' view of the person in which psychological states are attributed to nothing but the body. Instead he conceives of a unified entity to which we ascribe both physical qualities and states of consciousness, and in this way he straddles the main positions in the western debate since Descartes over the nature of persons.

In some ways Rosemont has the most radical interpretation of Confucius on persons. In the first part of his essay, the political theory of rights comes under strong attack. He thinks it is a bankrupt outlook that cannot and should not be exported to areas of the world unfamiliar with western individualism; nor is it adequate for settling our quarrels in the west. This political outlook is tied to the inadequate radically individualistic Cartesian theory of the person. The early Confucians offer an alternative.

Rosemont's interpretation of the Confucian alternative can be analyzed in terms of attributing predicates. Strawson seems to intimate a question to be addressed by theories of persons: What kinds of predicates can we apply to an individually constant person? The answer on Rosemont's account seems to be that the only person-making predicates that can be applied are two-place (or greater) predicates of human relation, and the application of one-place predicates of individual quality have no part in the makeup of a person. I shall argue that the nature of the two-place predicates that we ascribe to a person are dependent on the application of one-place predicates to the individuals who constitute the relation. That would seem to indicate, then, that Rosemont's anti-individualism is too severe and that we need room for individuals in order to make the relational aspect of personhood coherent.

The philosophical mistake that Rosemont makes is in thinking that the ascription of relational predicates alone is sufficient for understanding personhood. An interpretative error that accompanies the philosophical error is in thinking that the early Confucians held such a view. In lacking any capacity for accepting the ascription of individually instantiated predicates, the very notion of an individual becomes an empty place-holder. The

individual place-holder remains empty until it is put into relation with some other place-holder (or network of place-holders), but once within a relation, both now become identified by the two-place predicate complex. The individual is no longer a mere place-holder but has become a *person* constituted by bearing a relational role.

This goes too far beyond both ordinary discourse and the philosophical discourse of early Confucianism. Confucius has no difficulty in ascribing non-relational predicates to individuals. His favourite disciple, Yan Hui, gets sick with an illness that can be ascribed to him without any relational reference.⁶ Moreover, the ascription of this one-place predicate, that of being ill, to Yan Hui, makes a social, moral, and relational difference. It is not the case that mere empty place-holders are brought into relation with each other and then personhood is fully constituted by that relation. Instead, one of the *individuals* who constitute a relation is the bearer of a one-place predicate, that of being ill, and now the relational roles have to be re-shaped in light of the ascription of this one-place predicate. These re-shaped relational roles can accord with *li*, role-identifying ritual, or not, and so, as Philip J. Ivanhoe has pointed out, a normatively descriptive predicate must be applied to the individual role bearer, and this too is constitutive of the person.⁷ But in any case, the proper *li*-governed relational role cannot be activated until a specific one-place predicate is ascribed to an individual.

Rosemont, drifting from personhood to identity, says that his identity is fully constituted by the set of his relations. This seems a strange thing to say, in light of one of Rosemont's other philosophical enthusiasms: Leibniz.⁸ Leibniz's view is that persons are constituted of the set of *all* predicates that are ascribed to them, past, present, and future.⁹ Certainly Leibniz is on stronger ground here than Rosemont. What reason could we have for saying that of all the predicates we normally seem to ascribe to a person, the only ones that count toward that individual's personhood are the relational ones? Imagine asking Confucius, who in the *Analects* survives a major illness while Yan Hui does not, if he was the person who was sick at such and such a time in such and such a place. On Rosemont's account, to do so amounts to an ascription error. Rosemont would have Confucius answer that that is not the kind of predicate that can be ascribed to his person. Confucius, however, would answer just like the rest of us, 'yes' or 'no' depending on whether or not the details of the situation had been identified correctly. At *Analects* 7.19 when the Duke of She asks one of Confucius' disciples about him, the disciple makes no

reply. When Confucius hears this he asks his disciple, 'Why did you not just say: "He is the type of person who is so passionate that he forgets to eat, whose joy renders him free of worries, and who grows old without noticing the passage of the years."' In describing his own person, Confucius ascribes a chain of one-place quality predicates to himself.

This stands in stark contrast to Rosemont. He imagines having a conversation with the shade of Confucius and asking him, 'Who am I?' Instead of answering the way Confucius does about himself in the *Analects*, that is, ascribing one-place quality predicates, Rosemont has Confucius answer by listing all the two-place relational predicates of Rosemont's life. He is the son of his parents, the husband to his wife, the father of his children, etc. Rosemont tells us that his identity, by which he here seems to mean personhood, is totality of this set of relational roles. This totality is affected by changes in any of the other relations; if he becomes a widower, for instance, his relational roles adjust accordingly. He says he is the father of Samantha to her teachers, to her future husband, to her future in-laws, etc. This last relational role, however, changes when some one-place predicate is assigned to one of the relational parties.¹⁰ To say, 'I am the father of Samantha,' does not describe the full relational role articulated by saying, 'I am the father of Samantha, who is sick.' True, there may be something embodied in the role of father pertaining to sick children, but this is not the same for every one-place predicate. Some daughters are criminals, some are travelling in Turkey, and some fathers are disabled. The father/daughter relational role must be calibrated in terms of the combination of these ascribed one-place predicates in their infinite variety. All of this is a matter of ordinary discourse, and ordinary discourse as contained in the *Analects*; it is only by over-emphasizing our relational personhood that we lose track of the commonplace notion that our individual characteristics affect our relations.

Now Rosemont might respond by suggesting that he had never meant to eliminate the ascription of one-place predicates, although at least rhetorically he does this. He might say that, 'What the early Confucian writings reflect, however, is that there are no disembodied minds, nor autonomous individuals,' and that these dimensions require predicates of internal subjective states. Fingarette takes the position that internal state predicates cannot be properly ascribed to persons and that the Confucian *Analects* do not do so. On both of these counts Fingarette is wrong.

Even though Fingarette's conception might best be characterized as a behavioural interpretation of Confucius, his position remains important. While it seems to be directed at western Cartesianism, it was clear from the beginning that the interpretation of the Confucian metaphysical person was being used to advance an anti-western conception of the moral and political person. The Kantian transcendental self is the main target, and by the Kantian transcendental self I mean both that self which is the subject and unifying owner of conscious experience, and the noumenal self which is transcendent of all phenomenal experience, and thus of cause and effect relations, and therefore is an entity that can be a free and autonomous person. With the rise of communitarianism, the Kantian political person has been under much attack,¹¹ and Confucianism has come to be seen in some quarters as lending plausible support for communitarianism.¹² So while the behaviourism may seem dated to some, Fingarette remains an important voice in the current work on classical Chinese philosophy.

Fingarette targets personal choice, doubt, guilt, and the emotional states associated with the premier Confucian virtue of *ren* and its opposite quality, *yu* (pinyin *you*). 'The metaphor,' he says, 'of an inner psychic life in all its ramifications so familiar to us, simply isn't present in the *Analects*, not even as a rejected possibility.'¹³ For Fingarette, internal subjective states are in no way constitutive of a person in Confucius' philosophy. The individual person is not an ultimate atom,¹⁴ and the individualistic ego with all its Cartesian connotations is not the essence of a human.¹⁵ Instead, what it means to be a person is to establish human relationships¹⁶ and to participate with others in communal ceremonies,¹⁷ indeed, society itself is perceived as one vast ceremonial performance.¹⁸ The person, then, on Fingarette's account of Confucius, is an entirely communal entity joined to others in ritual motions.

Fingarette locates his philosophical roots in Wittgenstein, Ryle, Austin, Wisdom, and in P.F. Strawson. This last source, however, seems unlikely since Strawson addresses why we ascribe to persons the kind of predicates that Fingarette denies are found in early Confucian discourse. According to Fingarette, questions of this type simply never occur to Confucius, and Fingarette's philosophical sympathy is with the Confucius of his interpretation in not appealing to any such occult qualities. Ryle's anti-Cartesianism is clearly the main guide for Fingarette.¹⁹

It should be recalled, however, that Descartes begins his *Meditations* leading to the primacy of the

subjective self by considering dreams. If Confucius really invokes no inner psychic life of anything like the Cartesian ego, then we should expect no talk of dreams. In fact, though, there is a reference to dreams, and it is revelatory of more than the obviously subjective dream content. At *Analects* 7.5 Confucius says, 'How seriously I have declined! It has been so long since I last dreamt of meeting the Duke of Zhou.' The Duke of Zhou was one of the ancient sages and was considered a pre-eminent model of virtue. Confucius' statement obviously belies Fingarette's declaration that there are no references to the inner psychic life in the *Analects*, but it is also tinged with another notion that Fingarette claims is absent: guilt. More on that in a minute, but for now to touch on the nature of dreams themselves. Dreams constitute an aspect of ordinary inner psychic experience. As Strawson has pointed out, if our expressions of such inner states are to make sense at all, they must be ascribable to a private owner, to an individual person. They cannot be experiences having no 'owner', nor can they be transferred to some other owner.²⁰ And Confucius accords with all of this ordinary understanding. His dreams belong to him as a person without reference to any other person.

It is important to Fingarette's project that there be no notion of guilt in the *Analects* because having it so undermines the western attributes associated with personhood: choice, autonomy, and responsibility. The closest Confucius gets to guilt, according to Fingarette, is in the concept of *ch'ih*, and *ch'ih* 'looks "outward" not "inward".'²¹ Thus, *ch'ih* refers to shame rather than guilt. Other passages of the *Analects* where Confucius is commonly translated as making an internal reference are explained away by Fingarette²². Yet in the dream reference of 7.5 Confucius clearly takes himself to task for not measuring up to his own moral standards as they influence his dreams. This can only be understood internally because dreams are so private that no outward shame indictment could effectively be rendered. The dreamer could simply not give a public report of the dreams in question. The content of the dream is internal, and it is related to a sense of guilt in Confucius.

A careful reading of the *Analects* shows that Fingarette runs into similar difficulties with choice, doubt, and the internal states of joy and anxiety associated with the all encompassing Confucian virtue of *ren* and its opposite character trait of *yu* (*you*). For instance, at *Analects* 2.4 Confucius outlines his spiritual development, and this seems to have involved a choice for the life of learning that he made when he was fifteen. Moreover, at *Analects*

9.2 the choice for learning is presented as having associated opportunity costs; one who follows that path of learning cannot also be an expert archer or charioteer. Back again to 2.4, he says that in his course of development, after he had made the choice of a life of learning, he became free from doubts about that choice. On several occasions Confucius asks his disciples what they would do if they had the choice,²³ and at Yan Hui's funeral Confucius says that he would have treated Hui as a son, but he was prevented from it by his disciples against his choice.²⁴ These passages which identify possible alternative paths a person might take are unintelligible without a concept of choice. And since it is possible within the discourse of early Confucianism to make a choice, it is also possible to have doubts about the choices made, and to experience guilt as a result of choice. Similar findings can be advanced about the joy one feels when cultivating virtue and the anxiety one feels when one does not.

The corrective to Rosemont and Fingarette is to reintroduce the need for the individual in the concept of a person. Ames recognizes this, and he moves in that direction, but his individual person is entirely idiosyncratic. He rightly recognizes that for Fingarette, and by extension Rosemont, 'the self is an empty room.'²⁵ For Ames, the Confucian self is inseparable from the person.²⁶ The individual is unique in the sense of being 'a single and unsubstitutable particular' artwork, but it is not unique in the sense of being an isolatable atom. It is the latter sense which gives rise to those despised characteristics of the western person: 'autonomy, independence, equality, privacy, freedom, will, and so on.'²⁷ The person is thus constituted of a unique individual, but this unique person is 'irreducibly social.'²⁸ Really, this unique being is identified as unique because of the unique set of relations to which it belongs, and it stands in stark contrast to 'autonomous individuality' of the western person. While Ames takes a step in the right direction in correcting for the no-self views of Rosemont and Fingarette, he does not supply a rich enough layer of individuality to accommodate the personally internal states of the *Analects*. For Confucius the *Analects* reveal a whole range of rich private subjective experiences in addition to *li*-governed social roles.

Rosemont, Fingarette, and Ames have indeed identified a genuine weakness in the western concept of a person. The western approach has not given adequate attention to ascribing social relational predicates to the person. The resultant theoretical direction, however, has been extraordinarily reactionary in denying *anything* but social relational

predicates. A better approach is the one of Strawson's which already intimates the positive aspects identified by the three interpreters of Chinese philosophy. Strawson conceives of a person as an entity to which we ascribe both corporeal qualities and states of consciousness. This, however, does not satisfy the complaint of these Confucian interpreters. Human relations are not mere corporeal states. Strawson recognizes this. He states, 'What I am suggesting is that it is easier to understand how we can see each other, and ourselves, as persons, if we think first of the fact that we act, and act on each other, and act in accordance with a common human nature.'²⁹ We are, he thinks, 'inextricably bound up with the others, interwoven with them.'³⁰ A refinement of Strawson's conception of a person could easily include this: A person is an entity to which we ascribe (1) corporeal predicates, (2) states of consciousness, and (3) interpersonal relational predicates.

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Notes:

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2. By 'Confucian' I refer to Kongzi (Confucius), Mengzi (Mencius), and Xunzi as identified in the classical pre-Han writings the *Analects*, the *Mengzi* (or the *Mencius*) and the *Xunzi* respectively. The authors that I am commenting on for this topic are predominantly concerned with Confucius and that is how they refer to Kongzi. I follow them in both of these particulars. When I refer to the early Confucians, I have in mind shared features of all three of the iconic pre-Han figures, but again, in following the literature I am commenting on, I shall glean textual support exclusively from the *Analects*. The discussion might be enhanced by extending more consideration to the writings of Mengzi and Xunzi.
3. Herbert Fingarette, *Confucius: The Secular as Sacred* (Prospect Heights, Illinois: Waveland Press, 1998).
4. Henry Rosemont, Jr., 'Rights-Bearing Individuals and Role-Bearing Persons,' and Roger T Ames, 'Reflections on the Confucian Self: A Response to Fingarette' in Mary I. Bockover, ed., *Rules, Rituals, and Responsibility: Essays Dedicated to Herbert Fingarette* (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1991).
5. P.F. Strawson, *Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics* (London: Methuen, 1959).

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HUMANISM AND ANTI-HUMANISM IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF ALAIN BADIOU

Joseph M. Spencer

Abstract

Alain Badiou, through a deliberately anti-humanist mathematical ontology, proposes a complex but philosophically compelling concept of personhood. Equating individual personhood with human animality, Badiou proposes a trans-personal theory of the subject, rooted in a robust account of truth and its relationship to novel events. This paper outlines Badiou's notion of personhood through a brief analysis of his philosophical beginnings, a summary of his mathematical ontology, and an engagement with his doctrine of subjectivity.

Keywords

Alain Badiou, Anti-Humanism, mathematical Ontology

1. Introduction

Alain Badiou is not a personalist. He has dedicated the past decade or so to the construction of a phenomenology explicitly at odds with any personalist brand of phenomenology. (In this regard, he is unmistakably the philosophical heir of Martin Heidegger rather than Edmund Husserl.) But despite his unmistakable anti-humanism—at once ontological and ethical—there is an important privileging of the human in Badiou's thought. That privileging, moreover, is coupled with a striking reconceptualization of personhood, a subjectivism grounded in a carefully revised notion of the subject. In this paper, then, I outline Badiou's 'theory of the subject,' positioning it in the fold of Badiou's humanism/anti-humanism. My intentions are thus more expository than polemical, but it should be clear throughout that I believe Badiou's approach to personhood to be deeply compelling.

To come to Badiou's account of personhood, I shall trace the following three-part trajectory. First, I offer a few words about Badiou's immediate philosophical genealogy, the details of which greatly help to situate Badiou's notion of personhood. Second, I turn to a more detailed exposition of Badiou's novel, if daunting, mathematical ontology. Finally, I explain, in light of that ontology, Badiou's concept of personhood.

2. Badiou's beginnings

Badiou began his career in the 1960s as one of Louis Althusser's protégés. He had been, still earlier, a close follower of Jean-Paul Sartre, deeply committed to the French appropriation of Edmund Husserl's

phenomenological project, but by the time he published his first works—all of which were novels, incidentally—he had dispensed with the Sartrean idea of the 'subject condemned to freedom' and assumed the Althusserian idea of 'subjectivity without a subject.'¹ In the same transitional, formative years, Badiou was also attending the seminars of Jacques Lacan—at, it should be noted, Althusser's request—where he was imbibing a third French doctrine of subjectivity, the Lacanian notion of the subject as the vanishing link between signifiers at play. Thus, in the years leading up to May 1968, Badiou was caught in the thick of a triple debate concerning subjectivity—confessing loyalty to the anti-humanist position of Althusser, but deeply impressed by the essentially humanist position of Sartre and closely studying the non-humanist position of Lacan.

May '68 changed absolutely everything about this picture. In what he has himself described as a 'road to Damascus experience,'² Badiou left his 'theoretician' commitments behind and focused on little besides Maoist political action for a full decade.³ He thus, along with many other young Althusserians, broke with his master. Badiou's works of the 1970s show him trying to bring together what he had always seen as right in Sartre's Hegelian and humanist tendencies and what he still saw as right in Althusser's Spinozist and anti-humanist tendencies, all the while coming to recognize that he had yet fully to come to grips with the implications of Lacan's non-humanist work. But after the twin deaths of Mao and French Maoism in 1976—and especially with the election of Mitterrand in 1981—Badiou found himself having to rethink all he had been working on.

The result was *Theory of the Subject*, Badiou's first major philosophical work and an unmistakable turning point in his career. In that book—originally a series of lectures given between 1975 and 1979, and published as a book only in 1982—Badiou finally addressed Lacan in detail and began to outline what remains his (Badiou's) novel conception of the (human) subject. Taking Lacan (as well as Hegel and, of all people, Stéphane Mallarmé) to bring fully to light the *problem* of the subject, but arguing that Lacan does not provide a satisfactory *answer* to that problem, Badiou finally struck on what he took to be the necessary weave of Sartrean humanism and Althusserian anti-humanism. All that Badiou has

done since 1982 in a theoretical vein has arguably been only an elaboration on and clarification of what he first put together in *Theory of the Subject*. But in order to explain Badiou's conception of subjectivity, as well as what it has to say about the nature of personhood, it will be necessary to clarify the robust mathematical ontology he constructed in the immediate aftermath of *Theory of the Subject*: the ontology set forth in *Being and Event*, published in 1988.

3. Badiou's Anti-Humanist ontology

It is best to see Badiou's larger ontological project as Heideggerian in orientation. That is, Badiou asks the same question—the *Seinsfrage*—as Heidegger: 'Can the [Parmenidean] One be unsealed from Being?'⁴ But while Badiou agrees with Heidegger about the question that must thus be asked, he disagrees—strongly—about the answer. Whereas Heidegger locates the thought of ontological pluralism in the thinking of the poet, Badiou locates it in the thinking of mathematics. For Heidegger it is the poet-thinker who un-enframes being by thinking difference, while for Badiou it is the Cantorian set theorist who strips being of the One by thinking pure multiplicity. Hence Badiou's inaugural ontological gesture: mathematics (in its set theoretical shape) is ontology in its contemporary form.⁵

Starting from this conviction, the majority of *Being and Event*, unquestionably Badiou's most important philosophical work to date, is dedicated to philosophical exegeses of the axioms of Cantorian set theory and philosophical expositions of the history of the development of those axioms. On his interpretation, the philosophically crucial axiom is the set theoretical axiom of separation, and the philosophically crucial moment in the history of set theoretical mathematics is thus Russell's discovery of the paradox that famously brought the Fregean project to a halt. Frege originally proposed that, as Badiou summarizes, 'one can infer, on the basis of a [given] property $\varphi(a)$ correctly constructed in a formal language, the existence of a multiple whose terms possess it.'⁶ That is, any correctly constructed formula induces the existence of a set of those things the formula picks out. But this led directly to Russell's famous paradox, the simultaneous belonging and non-belonging of the set of all sets that are not sets of themselves to itself.⁷

The axiom of separation (technically: in concert with the axiom of foundation), formulated by Zermelo years after the first exchange between Russell and Frege, is aimed at foreclosing the possibility of Russell's paradox arising. Badiou summarizes it as follows: 'The axiom of separation says that for any supposed given multiplicity there

exists the part (the sub-multiplicity) whose elements validate [the property] $\varphi(a)$.'⁸ That is, any correctly constructed formula separates out of an already-existing set a subset of those things the formula picks out. The consequence of the shift from Frege's original problematic presupposition to the set theoretical axiom of separation is, then, in Badiou's words, that 'language cannot induce existence, solely a split within existence.'⁹ Language, in other words, does not bring things into existence; it solely divides and subdivides what exists. This neatly solves the problem of Russell's paradox, since the axiom of separation prescribes that sets can only be constructed out of already existing sets. The axiom of separation effectively guarantees the consistency of set theoretical mathematics—and so, for Badiou in his philosophical appropriation of mathematics, guarantees the consistency of ontology.

One might object, however, that Badiou—along with the twentieth-century systematizers of Cantorian set theory he follows—needs to defend what he presupposes without argument, namely, the idea that formal systems must be consistent, that formal systems should proscribe *paradoxes*. Indeed, Graham Priest's paraconsistent logics in Anglo-American philosophy and Gilles Deleuze's paradoxical logic of sense in European thought suggest from both sides of the so-called 'continental divide' that any decision in favour of consistency must be defended or at least motivated. Why would we not do well just to embrace Frege's original presupposition, which is unquestionably in line with the way things are talked about in everyday language, and then commit ourselves to working out a fully rigorous logic that is not allergic to paradox?¹⁰

But this objection misses something crucial. Badiou, in what is the most difficult part of *Being and Event*, does provide an account of inconsistency, one that has major philosophical repercussions. Replacing the Parmenidean One (an *ontological* One) with the Lacanian one (an *operational* one), with what he calls 'the count-as-one,'¹¹ Badiou draws a distinction between two kinds of multiplicity: one that precedes the operation of the one, to which Badiou gives the name of 'inconsistent multiplicity'; and one that follows the operation of the one, to which he gives the name of 'consistent multiplicity.'¹² Being is thus subject to what Badiou calls 'the distribution of the count-as-one; inconsistency before and consistency afterwards.'¹³ Logic, Badiou has made clear quite recently, is the thinking of consistent multiplicity (the thinking of what Badiou now calls 'worlds'),¹⁴ while the thinking of the multiple subtracted from the one has been, since *Being and Event*, the task of

mathematics. As Badiou summarily puts it: 'ontology can be solely *the theory of inconsistent multiplicities as such*.'¹⁵

But how can this too-briefly-summarized claim—namely, that mathematical ontology is the thought of inconsistent multiplicity—be reconciled with the obvious fact that mathematics takes as its unquestioned guiding principle, precisely, *consistency*? That is, how does the consistency aimed at and apparently achieved through the axiomatization of set theory mesh with what Badiou identifies as the inconsistency of being subtracted from the count-as-one? The answer is deceptively simple: ontology is, according to Badiou, that form of thinking that attempts to render inconsistent being consistent. And it does so, as we have already seen, through the axiom of separation.¹⁶

It should be noted, though, that the axiom of separation does not foreclose inconsistency simply by asserting that contradictions are out of bounds. The axiom of separation does not say that there does not exist any multiple that both is and is not the case. Rather, with a careful eye to the shape of Russell's paradox, it cuts off the possibility of contradiction by foreclosing the possibility of self-belonging: given the axiom of separation, one can demonstrate that there is no multiple that is an element of itself. And if self-belonging is foreclosed, Russell's paradox—the contradiction that results from Frege's problematic presupposition—cannot arise. Consistency is achieved in set theory through the exclusion of the possibility of self-belonging, of sets being elements of themselves.

Of course, the fact is that *there are* sets that belong to themselves. Set theory achieves consistency only by making itself fully *formal*, by *abstracting itself* from the messiness of reality. In other words, set theory as ontology renders the inconsistent consistent by addressing itself only to static, Spinozist Nature, foreclosing becoming from being, foreclosing history from nature. Set theory—mathematics in general—is thus rightly described by phenomenologists as 'poor in intuition.' The mathematical entity, in the words of Jean-Luc Marion,

Does not need much more than its concept alone, or at least just its intelligibility (the demonstration itself), to give itself—of course, in the empty abstraction of the universal without content or individuation, according to an iterability that is perfect because unscathed by matter (even significative), but nevertheless in fact.¹⁷

This is all quite accurate, and Badiou fully recognizes it. Ontology in the form of set theoretical mathematics renders Being consistent only by

systematically foreclosing everything *interesting*. And Badiou gives a name to the most interesting of interesting things (the same name, incidentally, that Marion gives to it in his own work): *the event*.

According to Badiou, what ontology in its attempt to render being consistent ultimately forecloses is the event—the pure happening, novelty, grace.¹⁸ Thus, in addition to being as ontology thinks it, there is the event, mathematically symbolizable as the illegally self-belonging set. Put another way, in addition to consistent nature, there is inconsistent history, the incessant interruption of nature's formal perfection. Foreclosed from ontology—from the thought of being—but nonetheless taking place, events are *real* for Badiou. *Being and Event*, true to its title, thus spells out what Badiou takes to be the two crucial categories of ontology—what ontology undertakes to think (being) and what ontology forecloses from what it thinks (event); or what ontology renders consistent (again: being) and what unceasingly interrupts that consistency through its own insistence (again: event).

But what has all this to do with the debates within which Badiou's career began, or with the obvious obsession of his first major philosophical work, *Theory of the Subject*? Indeed, where is the *person*—or at least the *subject*—in this ontological story? Does Badiou's ontology not make clear that he is, like, say, Spinoza, effectively anti-humanist, uninterested in the nature of the human and focused more or less exclusively on sorting out impersonal being? At the very least, in short, must one not confess that Badiou's ontology is deeply *non-humanist*?

In fact, the emergence in the past few years of a self-proclaimed new discipline in philosophy would seem to suggest as much. Drawing on Badiou's non-personalist ontology, interpreted in turn through the lens of Quentin Meillassoux's *After Finitude*, thinkers describing themselves as object-oriented ontologists have taken as philosophy's task the investigation of the agency of objects—of tables and chairs, etc. In Badiou's name, object-oriented ontology has announced the need to dispense entirely with the subject-object distinction, not by disrupting the technological worldview of which Heidegger was critical, but by claiming that all objects *are subjects*, by *equating* objects with subjects.¹⁹

This, though, is not Badiou's project, on my argument. He *has* undoubtedly been hard at work in recent years constructing what he calls an 'objective phenomenology,' a theory of worlds (or 'logics of worlds') that refuses to root a world in the projection of a Cartesian subject. He thus undeniably desires to think the consistency of worlds that bear their own

organizing principle—worlds, even, in which there has not been and perhaps may never be any element of the human. But none of this should be construed as suggesting that Badiou has abandoned the person, that he is uninterested in subjectivity. Indeed, as in the beginning of his career, and as in his first major philosophical work, the theme of subjectivity remains the very core of Badiou's thought. Even his work on worlds-regardless-of-subjects opens with a sustained study of subjectivity.²⁰ Thus, all Badiou's non-humanist ontology, as well all his talk of self-organizing worlds, is waged, I would argue, in an attempt *to save subjectivity*, and to root subjectivity unmistakably in the *human* experience. Though Badiou's ontology is deeply non-humanist, perhaps even anti-humanist, it is constructed precisely in order to put a finer point on exactly what is at stake in personhood, in subjectivity, and in humanity.

Of course, given the non- or even anti-humanist orientation of Badiou's ontology, his doctrine of personhood cannot be said to be traditionally personalist. I turn, then, to look at Badiou's theory of the subject in the light—always and only in the light—of his ontology.

4. Badiou's concept of personhood

In the introduction to *Being and Event*, Badiou describes his overarching philosophical project in the following, instructive terms: 'In a reversal of the Kantian question, it [is] no longer a matter of asking: "How is pure mathematics possible?" and responding: thanks to a transcendental subject. Rather: "pure mathematics being the science of being, how is a subject possible?"'²¹ Badiou thus recognizes, along with the objection above, that the ontology he outlines in his work would seem in advance to exclude any place for subjectivity. And he certainly concedes, with postmodernism, that we have entered 'a *second epoch* of the doctrine of the Subject,' that in the place of 'the founding subject, centred and reflexive, whose theme runs from Descartes to Hegel,' one must look for something 'void, cleaved, a-substantial, and ir-reflexive.'²² But Badiou's full reversal of the Kantian project calls as much for a move 'beyond' this contemporary—and essentially *negative*—doctrine of the subject as it calls for a rejection of the Cartesian founding subject. Though he begins from a non- or even anti-humanist position, Badiou aims to outline a remarkably robust philosophy of the subject. And his account of subjectivity begins from the event.

An event as defined in *Being and Event* is, in and of itself, not enough to change things radically. In fact, in his more recent *Logics of Worlds*, Badiou has divided what he earlier simply called an event

into four distinct 'forms of change' or becoming, ranging from mere 'modification' (which is 'without real change') through 'facts' and 'singularities' (both forms of 'real change' but with 'non-maximal consequences') to the 'event' proper (which has 'maximal consequences').²³ The maximal consequences that follow from a genuine event take the shape of so many interventions that, point by point, rework a situation, reconstitute a world, reorient what appears to the pure happening of the event. And it is not surprising who it is that accomplishes these interventions: the Badiouian subject. This subject is, in Badiou's own words, 'the incorporation of the event into the situation in the mode of a generic procedure,' that is, what 'turns the event towards the truth of the situation for which the event is an event.'²⁴ Of course, this must be further clarified.

Crucial to Badiou's notion of the subject is its relation to what he calls truth. Indeed, it is perhaps easiest to summarize Badiou's conception of the subject simply by referring to it as the subject of or to truth. But what does Badiou mean by 'truth'—a question that is particularly important in an era of European postmodernism and Anglo-American minimalism and deflationism? Perhaps surprisingly, Badiou means by 'truth' precisely *truth*—what is absolutely universal, eternal, invariant, and so on. At the same time, though, Badiou's doctrine of truth departs in important ways from traditional conceptions, particularly in that he does not believe that truth takes a propositional form or has a sensible content.²⁵ It is precisely for this reason that truth is connected, for Badiou, to the event.

Given Badiou's conviction that being is pure multiplicity—that what is is multiples of multiples of multiples *ad infinitum*—he conceives of truths also as multiples, but multiples that are not constructed by any formula or function derivable from a situation. Truths are thus *generic* multiples, multiples made up of 'a little bit of everything,' constructed out of elements drawn from every multiple making up a situation. No function or formula could prescribe such a construction, though the construction of a generic multiple *is* a set theoretical operation—worked out in 1963 by P. J. Cohen (Badiou dedicates almost two-thirds of *Being and Event* to an exposition of Cohen's concept of forcing). But if truths are thus made up of 'a little bit of everything,' if they are constructed without function or formula derivable from the situation, how can they be constructed? Their construction must be driven by something that outstrips the situation—something that stands, as it were, outside of being. In a word, the construction of a truth must

be driven by the event. It is the event, which is without sensible content due to its being foreclosed from being, that guides the construction of a truth. In the course of an event, such a truth—its possible inscription in a world—is glimpsed, as it were, and the procedure through which a generic multiple can be constructed becomes a real possibility.

It is the Badiouian subject who connects the event up with being by constructing a generic multiple. But because events are just as immediately eclipsed by being as they are glimpsed, construction of a truth is something only to be accomplished through *faith*, through fidelity to the vanished flash of an event. The Badiouian subject is, as it were, commissioned by the event, called to assume the task of revising the world itself in light of revealed possibilities, to construct a collection or gathering that is irreducible to any determinate grouping already existent, thus to bring into the world a glorious body. All this talk of faith, commissions, revelation, and glorious bodies might seem inappropriate here, given that Badiou is an unapologetic atheist. Yet they are terms that Badiou himself employs and defends.²⁶ He has, in fact, written a very provocative book on Saint Paul, arguing that it was Paul himself who, as the most rigorous thinker of faith, launched the tradition of universalism, outlining a most robust programme of generic construction—construction of the body of Christ, a generic collective in which there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male nor female. Paul, according to Badiou, was the first great thinker of subjectivity, theorizing a uniquely Christian subjectivity that radically broke with the polarized opposition between Greek and Jewish subjectivities. But where Paul's subject is subject to (is a slave of) Christ Jesus, Badiou's subject is subject to truths, or rather to the event that prescribes the construction of truths.²⁷

Thus, also as with Saint Paul, Badiou's subject of faith is irreducible to individual personhood. Paul famously claims that the faithful are '*in Christ*,' no longer their own, members of a body that outstrips individuality. Indeed, for Paul even the unfaithful subject is irreducible to the individual, since it is sin, dwelling in one who desires to do good, that does evil; it is only the naively innocent, still ignorant of law and its association with death, who might be said to be reducible to individuality—though such a person would necessarily be unaware of her individuality. Put another way, it is simply impossible to speak, in Pauline terms, of Kantian autonomy: one is either without law ('*alive apart from the law*,' in Paul's words), or one is under the law of another—whether of sin or of Christ.

All of this is also true of the Badiouian subject, though without a religious cast. Badiou's subject of faith is irreducible to individual or autonomous personhood, and even the Badiouian equivalent of the Pauline subject of sin (what Badiou has recently termed the reactionary and obscure subjects) cannot be reduced to individual persons.²⁸ Both of these, as in Paul, would have to be said to be heteronomous rather than autonomous—under the law of another, whether of the event/truth or whether of '*sin*.' The Badiouian individual person, what Badiou calls simply '*the human animal*,' would be, as in Paul, essentially non-subjective, neither autonomous nor heteronomous because, again, she would be '*alive apart from the law*.' Badiou makes this point in the following language:

It is clear that the human animal, '*in itself*,' implies no value judgment. Nietzsche is no doubt right, once he has assessed humanity in terms of the norm of its vital power, to declare it essentially innocent, foreign in itself to both Good and Evil. His delusion is to imagine a superhumanity restored to this innocence, once delivered from the shadowy, life-destroying enterprise led by the powerful figure of the Priest. No: no life, no natural power, can be beyond Good and Evil. We should say, rather, that every life, including that of the human animal, is beneath Good and Evil.²⁹

At the level of the person, of the living individual, according to Badiou, one is dealing only with what is *beneath* good and evil, bereft of truths—truths being, by definition, *trans*-individual—and essentially incapable of sin, which Badiou defines as betrayal of the event, abandonment of a truth procedure.

In Badiou's view, in the end, individuals are mere beings, beings independent or ignorant of events and, so, of truths. Mere personhood is a category of monotonous everydayness, of mere human animality, of the incessant communication of opinions (opinions making up the stuff of human animality). Subjectivity, on the other hand, is what arises for Badiou only in the wake of events, and it is always inflected in the direction of the good (fidelity to what has disrupted being) or in the direction of evil (reaction against the event, if not violence against the very possibility of the event). It is similarly inflected always in the direction of the *trans*-personal. But if it is clear what it means to say that the subject moves away from human animality, what does it mean to say that it assumes the shape of *trans*-personhood? In its simplest form, *trans*-individuality or *trans*-personhood can be described just by saying that Badiouian subjects can be and generally are made up of more than one person.

A nice illustration of this is to be found in Badiou's discussions of love. In and since *Being and Event*, Badiou has insisted that there are—and '*on this*

point,' he says, 'things haven't budged since Plato'³⁰—four distinct kinds of truths: political, scientific, artistic, and amorous. Though it might seem somewhat odd for Badiou to claim that there are truths of love—genuinely universal, invariant, eternal truths of love—he does make this claim. It would take too much space to explain Badiou's theory of love in any detail, so suffice it to say for the moment that the truths of love are bound up with the universality of sexual difference. The reconstitution of the world starting from the amorous encounter—an event in the most robust sense—that refuses not to see how everything is coloured by the existence of two distinct 'positions of experience,' by the Two (with a capital 'T'): such is love, according to Badiou.³¹ So what is the subject of love? In a word, the subject of love is, for Badiou, made up of the Two, the lovers as a Two irreducible to their individual natures. Incorporated into the amorous truth procedure, individual persons break with their autonomy in order to assume a position in a subject that is trans-individual.

Badiou's notion of trans-individual subjectivity might thus be said to be a theory of corporate subjectivity. The theme of incorporation is thus central to Badiou's philosophy, as has become especially clear in recent years. Individuals are incorporated into a subject irreducible to the elements (to the persons) that go into its composition. Brought into an eternally living body, rather than being left to the merely mortal life of individual personhood, subjectivized individuals leave off mortality to 'live as an immortal,' though of course as individual persons they remain death-bound.

From all this, it seems clear that Badiou's philosophy is deeply anti-personalist. And it is not hard to guess that Badiou takes as a major target in his writings on ethics the humanism of the Kantian tradition. Concluding both with postmodernism in general that 'Man' (with a capital 'M') does not exist and with Lacanian psychoanalysis in particular that the 'Other' (with a capital 'O') does not exist, Badiou claims that Kantian humanism amounts to an 'ethical nihilism' caught 'between conservatism and the death drive.'³² Autonomy is something Badiou is simply not interested in, because he thinks—as I have already explained—that it is ultimately an incoherent concept.

Nevertheless, Badiou's philosophy is also characterized by an unmistakable humanism, though in a crucially qualified sense. It is striking, at any rate, that for an anti-humanist or anti-personalist, Badiou is unmistakably interested in what makes human beings unique, even—rather against the ethical grain of contemporary thought—in what

distinguishes human beings from animals. Ontology is thus, for Badiou, something that must be addressed, but with the ultimate aim of fully (if not finally) clarifying the nature of the human. What marks human uniqueness he explains in an essay on justice: 'Thought is the one and only uniquely human capacity, and thought, strictly speaking, is simply that through which the human animal is seized and traversed by the trajectory of a truth.'³³ Thus though Badiou wants to break with (Kantian) humanism in its claims about human *autonomy*, about human *dignity*, and even about the *ethical prescriptions* that can be derived from autonomy and dignity, he nonetheless wants to affirm *another* humanism, a humanism that not only recognizes but emphasizes and polemicizes on behalf of the uniquely human capacity to be seized by truths. Indeed, Badiou has produced an ethics associated with this reinvented humanism, what he calls an 'ethic of truths,' which prescribes for human beings—and human beings *alone*—that they stay true to events, that they continue in their uniquely human capacity to outstrip animality, that they persevere in the production of something immortal.³⁴ Badiou proposes, in the end, a humanism beyond humanism.

Of course, in this Badiou is not unique. I have already suggested that he is one with Saint Paul in this regard. And, naturally, there are others as well who share with Badiou an anti-humanist humanism—others who argue that there is something deeply incoherent about Kantian personalism but who do not conclude, for that reason, that humans are inseparable from animality. Indeed, Badiou has argued that it is precisely *Kantian* humanism—even with its talk of autonomy and dignity—that 'equates man with his animal substructure' or 'reduces him to the level of a living organism pure and simple.'³⁵ (Allow me note parenthetically that an at least provocative confirmation of this claim is to be found in the now-widespread extension of Kantian ethics to non-human animals.) Badiou might well claim that it is only a humanism of the sort he promotes that ultimately amounts to humanism, and it only does so by passing through an anti- or at least non-humanist ontology.

Badiou's strategy thus embodies, despite his militant atheism but in accord with his interest in religious vocabulary, a saying of Jesus: those who, Kant-like, seek humanism will lose it, but those who lose humanism, for the sake of truths, will find it. Or, put more directly in the language of personalism: those who seek personhood will lose it (individual personhood being delimited, as Heidegger showed almost a century ago, by death), but those who lose

personalism for the sake of universal truths will find a personhood—a trans-individual personhood—that can be called, with philosophical rigour, immortal.

Of course, Badiou might say, the faithful-and-so-incorporated individual will not spend much time bothering about whether she has found herself in trans-individual personhood. Presumably, she will find, at that point, that she has too much work to do to bother autonomy.

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Notes:

1. Badiou, *Metapolitics*, 58-67.
2. Badiou, *De l'ideologie*.
3. For a good account of French Maoism, in which there appears an unfortunately bad account of Badiou's relationship to it, see Wolin, *The Wind from the East*.
4. Badiou, *Briefings on Existence*, 34.
5. It is beyond my purposes in this paper to address Badiou's relationship with Heidegger in any detail. Badiou's most important interventions on Heidegger can be found in Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, 47-77; and Badiou, *Briefings on Existence*, 21-43.
6. Badiou, *Being and Event*, 45.
7. For the original exchange between Frege and Russell concerning this paradox, see van Heijenoort, *From Frege to Gödel*, 124-128.
8. Badiou, *Being and Event*, 46.
9. *ibid.*, 47.
10. For just such an objection to Badiou, see Livingston, *The Politics of Logic*.
11. Badiou, *Being and Event*, 24.
12. *ibid.*, 25.
13. *ibid.*
14. Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*.
15. Badiou, *Being and Event*, 28, emphasis in original.
16. Naturally, things are a bit more complex than just this. Consistency is, Badiou says elsewhere, 'the unnamable proper to the matheme', employing a concept (the unnamable) that plays a very complex role in his philosophy. I am obviously leaving these complications to one side here. For the claim just quoted, see Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, 26; for the idea of the unnamable, see Badiou, *Conditions*, 113-144; and Badiou, *Ethics*, 80-87.
17. Marion, *Being Given*, 222.
18. For a study of Badiou in terms of the theological category of grace, see Miller, *Badiou, Marion and St Paul*.
19. See Meillassoux, *After Finitude*; as well as Bryant, Srnicek, and Harman, *The Speculative Turn*.
20. Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 45-89.
21. Badiou, *Being and Event*, 5-6.
22. *ibid.*, 3.
23. Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 363-380.
24. Badiou, *Being and Event*, 393.
25. This is not to say that there is no place for propositional truth in Badiou's philosophical project. Indeed, it holds an important place, though Badiou calls such truths 'veridical' rather than "true" in order to distinguish them from truths in the stronger sense. The relationship between truths and veridical statements in Badiou's thought is too complex to outline in any detail in a footnote, but at least this much can be said: truths are among the transcendental conditions for veridical statements in something like the Kantian sense.

Continued on p. 50

BEYOND PERSONALITY: C. S. LEWIS' SEMI-POSTMODERN VIEW OF THE HUMAN PERSON

Bruce W. Young

Abstract

C. S. Lewis's view of human personality anticipates some doctrines of postmodernism: he critiques the modern conception of the self, arguing that our natural selves are largely illusory and at best incomplete; his philosophy of "the other" has affinities with Levinas; and he rejects the self as the master and owner of discourse. Yet unlike many postmodernists, he insists that humans can attain real personality, through a self-offering that puts them properly in relation with others and with God.

Key Words

authorship; Barthes; C. S. Lewis; creativity; discourse; ethics; Foucault; individuality; Levinas; literary theory; originality; the other; personalism; personality; personhood; postmodernism; reading; self; self-expression; subjectivity; theology; transcendence; writing

It is admittedly a stretch to call C. S. Lewis a postmodernist or even a semi-postmodernist. Though the words *postmodern* and *postmodernism* have been in use since the early twentieth century, they took on wider circulation in their currently predominant meanings beginning in the 1960s and especially the 1980s—in other words, after Lewis's death.¹ Yet Lewis had studied and taught philosophy at Oxford and was aware of some of the philosophical currents of the mid-twentieth century, including personalism (though only vaguely).² More importantly for my purposes, even if direct connections and influences are absent or minimal, his view of human personality repeatedly anticipates some of the doctrines of postmodernism. In this paper I shall consider three aspects of that anticipation: Lewis' theological discussions of personality; his ethical view; and his view of authorship, which in some ways is the most presciently postmodern element in his writings. I shall use as sites of comparison and contrast certain writings by Emmanuel Levinas, Michel Foucault, and Roland Barthes. At the same time, I shall note significant differences between the views of Lewis and those of the postmodernists, most strikingly his insistence that personhood is not mere illusion or surface play but something essentially and eternally real.

1. Lewis' theological discussions of personality

Some postmodern thinkers appear to dissolve coherent personhood completely and make the person an illusion or a function of social discourse or at most a site within which culture or discourse or being itself operates. Others, like Levinas, see the separate person as an essential aspect of the structure of being while at the same time arguing that the self is primordially dependent on its relation to what is other than itself. At least in his earlier writings, Levinas describes the self as that which resists absorption in anonymous being (the 'il y a'), that which maintains itself as a separate existent in the face of anonymous existence (*Existence and Existents*). Or as he suggests in *Totality and Infinity*, the absolute separation between the self and the other—between the apparently self-enclosed consciousness and exteriority—is the necessary condition for relationship, which (without reducing the other to the same or the same to the other) makes possible the opening of the self to what is other than the self. Levinas asserts in fact that the self has always already been in relation with the other, that the self's apparent self-sufficiency and self-enclosure are indeed only apparent, and that the self's very existence, its consciousness, its way of being, is primordially dependent on its relation with the other. Yet the self has to maintain itself *as if* it were separate in order to be in relation with the other, especially to be in ethical relation with the other. In *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas proposes that the human person is not a self-contained or static entity and that its most authentic activity is not the maintenance of its own being. Here to be a self is to be exposed to the other, in a condition Levinas calls proximity, sensibility, even maternity. Exposure to the other is not simply to be aware of the other person as a separate entity, but to be exposed to the very core, to be passive in this exposure with a passivity that is beyond passivity. Levinas thus presents something of the same challenge other postmodern thinkers have made to the coherent self, except that here the self is a site, not of anonymous discourse or being, but of ethical responsibility.

Lewis doesn't go this far and, with a few exceptions, doesn't use the same vocabulary. Yet he does see the human person, not as a finished entity, but as an activity, as in process of being created.

Furthermore, Lewis and Levinas both start from the idea of separation, a separation that makes each person other in relation to every other. At the same time, both emphasize a relatedness that not only does not obliterate otherness but that sustains it.

According to Levinas, the relation with the personal other arouses consciousness and, if welcomed, invests existence with ethical meaning. '[A] truly human life . . . is awakened by the other' (*Ethics* 122), and a human being—the 'I'—'is confirmed in its singularity' to the degree that it becomes responsible to others (*Totality* 244-45). Lewis, in more obviously theological language, likewise emphasizes relationship along with otherness. 'Christianity,' according to Lewis, 'thinks of human individuals not as mere members of a group or items in a list, but as organs in a body—different from one another and each contributing what no other could.' Indeed, 'the whole human race is, in a sense, . . . one huge organism' in which each person plays a vital role (*Mere Christianity* 185-86). This, he says, makes the Christian view different from either a 'Totalitarian' (what Levinas might call a 'totalizing') or an 'Individualist' view. Lewis's use of the ancient image comparing social relationships to connections within an organism is not, of course, a typical postmodernist move. But it does at least faintly resemble Levinas's comparison of personal relationship to maternity, to the bodily connection between a mother and her unborn child. Lewis goes on to argue that the ideal condition God aims at—the condition that makes a fully significant life possible—is an even deeper unity than the one naturally connecting all humans, but a unity that will increase rather than diminish individual identity. As they are 'taken into the life of God,' Lewis argues, 'human souls . . . [will] yet remain themselves—in fact, be very much more themselves than they were before' (161). 'The happiness which God designs for [humans] is the happiness of being freely, voluntarily united to Him and to each other' (48). That kind of union obviously requires both separateness and intimate relationship. God, it appears, 'wants a world full of beings united to Him but still distinct' (*Screwtape Letters* 39).

Lewis accepts the mainstream Christian teaching that every human being is created by God out of nothing (*ex nihilo*) and often uses the analogy of God as an author and of humans as his creations, as if our status is something like that of a fictional character, in the sense that each person is an expression of God's creative thought. Yet Lewis doesn't use this image to suggest that humans are mere extensions of God; rather he uses it to

emphasize human 'otherness.' 'Once,' Lewis writes in *Miracles*, God 'was the only Thing: but He is creative. He made other things to be. He is not those other things.' The things God created—including every human person—are 'concrete, individual, determinate'; they are 'real, resistant existences' (139, 137-38). They are essentially *other* than God.

Interestingly, Emmanuel Levinas uses the notion of *ex nihilo* creation in a similar, though more subtle way: 'creation is *ex nihilo* . . . because the Separated and created being [Levinas's way of referring here to the human person] is thereby not simply issued forth from the father, but is absolutely other than him.' Even 'filiality' or sonship must '[retain] this memory of the creation *ex nihilo*, without which the son is not a true other' (*Totality* 63). For Levinas, the human self is nevertheless unavoidably in relation to others, including human others and God. Yet God has made us capable of denying him and pretending we are isolated, self-sufficient beings ('One lives outside of God, at home with oneself; one is an I, an egoism'), perhaps because only as beings separated in that way can we enter into genuine relationship with others. This daring move on God's part is alluded to by Levinas as follows: 'It is certainly a great glory for the creator to have set up a being capable of atheism, a being which, without having been *causa sui*, has an independent view and word and is at home with itself' (58-59).

Lewis tackles this question of the separateness of humans from each other and from God by considering why God did not, from the beginning, create all humans such that they fully possessed his attributes, in the same way Christ does as the only 'begotten.' His answer—or his guess, as he puts it—is that a multiplicity of selves would require space and time, would require all that is implied by 'Nature,' so that each self could occupy a unique location and be different from every other self. 'Was Nature—space and time and matter,' Lewis wonders, '—created precisely in order to make many-ness possible?' Though they come at it in somewhat different ways, both Lewis and Levinas see reality, especially reality viewed in terms of persons, as being irreducibly plural.

A condition in which distinct beings enter freely into relationship is at the root of what Lewis describes as being 'beyond personality.' In fact, I have borrowed this paper's title from the title of the last section of Lewis's *Mere Christianity* (a section earlier published as a separate book): he gives the section the title 'Beyond Personality,' followed by the much more obviously theological subtitle 'The Christian Idea of God' (in the earlier separate

publication) or 'First Steps in the Doctrine of the Trinity' (in the later version incorporated in *Mere Christianity*). Though this section of *Mere Christianity* spends some time on the Trinity, it is mainly concerned with the nature of the human personality and its relation to God and to others. Lewis uses 'beyond' here with a double meaning: on the one hand, the word can refer to complete change involving the abandonment of an earlier state; on the other, it can refer to a transformation in which something from the original state is preserved. In other words, to be 'beyond' can indicate movement to something entirely different, or it can mean transforming one condition into a more authentic, transcendently real version of itself. If what we now have is 'personality,' we must, in the first sense of 'beyond,' move on to something else (to 'non-personality'?); or perhaps, in the second sense, we are now persons only in a most rudimentary sense and must move toward true personality. Lewis plays with both readings of the phrase 'beyond personality.' 'To become new men'—that is, to attain the transcendent condition for which we are designed—'means losing what we now call "ourselves."' Yet '[t]he more we get what we now call 'ourselves' out of the way . . . , the more truly ourselves we become.' Alluding to his earlier discussion of the Trinity (in which Lewis sees both distinction and unity), he argues not only that there are 'Personalities in God,' but that '[t]here are no real personalities anywhere else. Until you have given up your self to Him you will not have a real self.'

The solution to this paradox is that our current personalities have little to do with authentic selfhood; our personalities certainly are not (as we sometimes pretend) our own creations, nor do they express what is most genuinely unique and valuable in our natures. 'I am not, in my natural state,' Lewis writes, 'nearly so much of a person as I like to believe: most of what I call 'me' can be very easily explained'—for instance, as the result of 'heredity and upbringing and surroundings and natural desires,' even of advertising or propaganda (*Mere Christianity* 224-26). The self or the person as we currently conceive or experience it is, for the most part, mere surface play.

This view has affinities with the postmodern notion of a self that is nothing more than a site in which discourse or cultural or biological or psychic forces or the structures of power are at play. One difference is that, for some postmodernist thinkers, the self is not and cannot become anything other than this sort of space, lacking in genuine agency or individuality. What lies beneath or beyond what we

call the 'self' is something unimaginable and utterly impersonal. Part of what distinguishes Emmanuel Levinas's thought from that of some other postmodernist thinkers is that he does not view personality as disappearing the further we move toward the unimaginably real. Rather he sees 'self' and the ways by which the self is maintained as being built into the deep structure of reality. Furthermore, the very condition of being a self—or perhaps better, the way in which the singularity of the 'I' is produced—depends on an activity in which separation is maintained, in which the self does not merge with the conditions to which it is exposed. Indeed, only as a separated being can the self offer itself to others, an offering that, according to Levinas, confirms the self in its singularity. For both Lewis and Levinas, then, the self begins as a separated being, and for both, this condition is only a starting point. The self can become truly itself—as Lewis would put it, it can acquire genuine personality—through a complete and willing offering of itself.

2. *Lewis' ethical view*

In this idea of self-offering we are at a transition point between theology and ethics. For Lewis, the scriptural injunction to 'lose ourselves' refers both to our relationship with God and to our ethical relation with others. Levinas refers to the injunction as well, giving it an almost exclusively ethical reading. (In fact, for Levinas, religion itself is mainly a matter of ethics.) According to Levinas, 'I am defined as a subjectivity, as a singular person, as an 'I,' precisely because I am exposed to the other. It is my inescapable and incontrovertible answerability to the other that makes me an individual 'I.' So that I become a responsible or ethical 'I' to the extent that I agree to depose or dethrone myself—to abdicate my position of centrality—in favour of the vulnerable other. As the Bible says: 'He who loses his soul gains it'' (*Face to Face with Levinas* 27).

'Losing one's soul' or one's 'self' for Levinas means something like shifting one's concern from one's own being to the needs of others. Thus, 'The I, which we have seen arise . . . as a separated being having apart, in itself, the centre around which its existence gravitates, is confirmed in its singularity by purging itself of this gravitation, purges itself interminably, and is confirmed precisely in this incessant effort to purge itself' (*Totality* 244-45). This movement toward responsiveness to others (which also means accepting responsibility *for* others) brings the self to its significance as a singular being. Levinas continues: 'To utter 'I,' to affirm [one's] irreducible singularity . . . , means to possess a privileged place with regard to

responsibilities for which no one can replace me and from which no one can release me. To be unable to shirk: this is the I. . . . The accomplishing of the I qua I and morality constitute one sole and same process in being: morality comes to birth . . . in the fact that infinite exigencies, that of serving the poor, the stranger, the widow, and the orphan, converge at one point of the universe'—namely, here where the 'I,' the singular self, is situated (245).

Lewis too, sees human personality as coming into being in part through the ethical relationship with others. In fact, for Lewis, the relationships with God and with human others have much in common, suggesting that theology and ethics ultimately converge and do so precisely in the relationship of the self and the other. Reflecting on the meaning of his marriage shortly after his wife's death, Lewis wrote: 'The most precious gift that marriage gave me was [the] constant impact of something very close and intimate yet all the time unmistakably other, resistant—in a word, real' (*Grief Observed* 18-19). He fears that, with his wife's death, he may be 'doomed to crawl back—to be sucked back—into' the shell God had forced him out of through marriage. But it is not only his wife's otherness, it is God's otherness and the otherness of every other person that makes meaningful personal existence possible. All reality, Lewis says, shatters the ideas to which we try to reduce it. Just as '[t]he earthly beloved, even in this life, incessantly triumphs over your mere idea of her,' so '[a]ll reality is iconoclastic,' shattering the ideas and images to which we attempt to reduce it. This includes God: 'My idea of God is not a divine idea. It has to be shattered time after time. He shatters it Himself. He is the great iconoclast' (66).³ This need to be in relation with something *other* informs our relation both with God and with other humans: 'I need Christ,' Lewis writes, 'not something that resembles Him. I want [my wife], not something that is like her. . . . Not my idea of God, but God. Not my idea of [my wife], but [my wife]. Yes, and also not my idea of my neighbour, but my neighbour' (65, 67).

In this suggestion that my own existence depends on my relationship with others, Lewis and Levinas are in close agreement. Though Lewis's style and vocabulary obviously differs from Levinas's, there is a similar emphasis on the otherness of others. And there is at times a similar sense of personal exposure to and responsibility for others. Levinas writes of an exposure and proximity to the other that goes to the point of substitution, of suffering on behalf of the other, of being a kind of hostage. C. S. Lewis believed that something comparable took place in his relationship with his wife, that he literally took on the

role of substitute for his wife when she began to regain calcium her bones had lost to cancer at the same time that he suffered loss of calcium from his bones.⁴ In more general terms, Lewis writes of the risks that come with love, including the risk of suffering: 'To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken.' Yet the 'alternative to tragedy, or at least the risk of tragedy, is damnation,' which Lewis equates with 'a self-invited and self-protective lovelessness' (*Four Loves* 121-22). Levinas similarly acknowledges the possibility that a 'separated being can close itself up in its egoism,' maintaining itself in isolation, 'forgetting the transcendence of the Other,' and 'shutting itself up against the very appeal that has aroused it' (*Totality* 172, 216). But to do so amounts to a kind of denial of or disconnection from the roots of one's own being.

3. Lewis' view of authorship

So far we have considered Lewis's understanding of human personality from a theological and ethical point of view. What it means to be a person, an individual self, is also an important issue in Lewis's literary criticism, leading him at times toward something like phenomenology or reader response, at times toward a kind of aestheticism, but sometimes beyond these to anticipate the later challenges posed by Foucault, Barthes, and others to traditional views of literature and authorship.

In his essay 'The Death of the Author' (1968), Roland Barthes asserts that the '*author* is a modern character' providing critics a means to block the endless interpretive possibilities of a text and imposing a kind of unity on a body of work. According to Barthes, 'the image of literature to be found in contemporary culture is tyrannically centred on the author, his person, his history, his tastes, his passions; . . . *explanation* of the work is still sought in the person of its producer, as if . . . it was always, ultimately, the voice of one and the same person, the *author*, which was transmitting his 'confidences'' (1131, 1132). But this has never, Barthes says, been how 'writing' actually works, for 'writing is the destruction of every voice, every origin. Writing is that neuter, that composite, that obliquity into which our subject flees, the black-and-white where all identity is lost, beginning with the very identity of the body that writes' (1130-31). Writing is essentially impersonal; language, not authors, produces texts, and a text consist of 'a field without origin—or at least with no origin but language itself' (1131-32). Though Barthes concedes that someone has written any given text, he proposes that that someone exists as a writer only in the writing itself, not as a person outside of the text whose characteristics or

experiences somehow explain it. Barthes argues for a shift from writer to reader, yet the reader too is a sort of empty space: 'the reader is a man without history, without biography, without psychology; he is only that *someone* who holds collected into one and the same field all of the traces from which writing is constituted' (1133). To read is therefore to provide a space in which writing can take place as an essentially impersonal activity.

Michel Foucault, writing at about the same time as Barthes, agrees that 'the author' is a problematic concept but, instead of exalting 'writing' or 'language' as Barthes does and granting them what Foucault calls 'transcendental' privileges, he argues that discourse always happens within a concrete cultural context. The exaltation of 'writing' or '*écriture*' 'has merely transposed the empirical characteristics of an author to a transcendental anonymity' and 'sustain[ed] the privileges of the author' by 'extend[ing] [them] within a grey neutrality' ('What Is an Author?' 141). By contrast, to consider the specific cultural context in which writing takes place helps us understand the concrete factors involved in its production and reception. Among other things, cultural practices and understandings determine what it means to be an author. Of course, individual people do in fact write texts, yet the 'author' (according to Foucault) is a function of how discourse operates in a culture, and this 'author-function,' as Foucault calls it, can vary with time, culture, and kind of discourse (see 'Discourse on Language' 153; 'What Is an Author?' 142-43, 145). Foucault asserts that 'the function of an author is to characterize the existence, circulation, and operation of certain discourses within a society,' an activity that involves, among other things, determining how specific texts are classified and interpreted ('What Is an Author?' 142; 'Discourse on Language' 153). Especially since the seventeenth century, he says, 'the author' has been understood as the source of a work's meaning, with the personality and biography of 'the author' supposedly finding expression in the work and explaining its contents. Yet this view is both historically situated (and therefore subject to change) and problematic. According to Foucault, 'We can easily imagine a culture where discourse would circulate without any need for an author. Discourses . . . would unfold in a pervasive anonymity' ('What Is an Author?' 148). And in fact, by his own time, Foucault asserts, writing had 'freed itself from the necessity of 'expression'' so that, instead of asking 'Who is the real author?' or 'What has he revealed of his most profound self in his language?,' we can now ask

questions about the circulation and 'modes of existence' of discourse (139, 148).

For both Barthes and Foucault, questions about the meaning of selfhood or subjectivity are at the root of understanding what it means to be an author. While Barthes sees both reader and writer as essentially empty spaces and writing as an activity where the subject disappears, Foucault sees subjectivity as culturally determined, with the author or 'author-function' as 'one of the possible specifications of the subject' (148). Both writers agree in questioning the traditional idea of the author as the self-sufficient creator of works of literature. Rather than being understood as someone who freely 'endow[s] [material] with meaning' and 'accomplish[es] its design,' the subject who speaks or writes (according to Foucault) 'must be stripped of its creative role and analysed as a complex and variable function of discourse' (148).

Despite obvious differences, there are surprisingly significant connections between Lewis and these two French writers. For one thing, Lewis agrees that the idea and function of the author have changed over time. The author as the sole creator and owner of a text is a relatively modern invention, and to insist on viewing works of literature as the creations of this sort of author is a serious obstacle to understanding earlier literature. Especially during the Middle Ages, Lewis says, texts were produced 'by a process which is quite foreign to modern literature': 'There is no question here of finding the single author, totally responsible for his work of art, and expressing his unique personality through it' ('Genesis' 36, 22). Lacking the modern 'ideal of originality,' writers of this period typically engaged in an activity of "'touching up' something that was already there' (36, 37). Texts produced in this way are therefore are not so much self-sufficient units created by a single writer as they are the coming together of material from various sources, affected, of course, by a particular writer's imagination and attitudes but not solely his creation. In fact, the total work does not belong to any of the writers who have had a role in putting it together. At least when dealing with medieval literature, Lewis argues that we must set aside such notions as 'the clear separation of one work from another and the clear unity of the individual author with the individual text' (22). To a degree, Lewis favours taking this approach to all literature: 'all criticism should be of books, not of authors,' he says (38). And though he thinks books (rather than authors) should be the primary object of our study and enjoyment, he even questions the unity of individual books. 'Sometimes,' he argues—at least in connection with medieval literature, 'we begin to

doubt whether even the Book is a unit; when we are presented with something constantly retold, which never remains exactly the same in the retellings yet never becomes wholly new, it is hard to say where one Book ends and another begins' (38). The 'real literary units' of the Middle Ages 'were 'matters,' 'stories,' and the like'—in other words, rather amorphous bodies of cultural discourse—'rather than individual authors' or even individual books ('What Chaucer Really Did' 30). Lewis views the modern insistence on trying to thinking of books and authors as isolated, self-contained units as something of a perversion.

Barthes and Foucault, who talk about 'writing' and 'discourse' rather than books, would push this point even further and apply it to all objects made up of language. No text, Barthes argues, is the creation or expression of a single author: rather than conveying 'a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God),' a text consists 'of a multi-dimensional space in which are married and contested several writings, none of which is original: the text is a fabric of quotations, resulting from a thousand sources of culture. . . . [T]he writer can only imitate an ever anterior, never original gesture; his sole power is to mingle writings, to counter some by others, so as never to rely on just one' (1132). Lewis and Barthes thus join in questioning the ideals of originality and textual unity, yet they differ in how much room they allow for these ideals. Barthes notes, accurately I think, that no text attains absolute originality or unity—any 'text consists of multiple writings, proceeding from several cultures and entering into dialogue, into parody, into contestation' (1132). Yet Barthes's generalizations are so broad that he seems blind to differences among texts. Lewis, on the other hand, focuses on specific works and differentiates between extreme instances of single and 'shared authorship,' seeing most texts as being somewhere in the middle ('Genesis' 38).

Like Lewis, Barthes and Foucault locate the idea of 'the Author-Book unit' (Lewis, 'Genesis' 38) in the modern period, following the Middle Ages. According to Barthes, the modern idea of the author was 'produced by our society as it emerged from the Middle Ages, influenced by English empiricism, French rationalism, and the personal faith of the Reformation, thereby discovering the prestige of the individual, or, as we say more nobly, of the 'human person.'" In addition, 'positivism' and 'capitalist ideology' contributed to elevating the importance of 'the author's "person"'—the personality that originated, owns, explains, and expresses itself in a given work (1131). Foucault notes that 'there was a time when those texts which we now call 'literary' .

. . . were accepted, circulated, and valorized without any question about the identity of their author' ('What Is an Author?' 143). This was largely true, he argues (and Lewis would more or less agree with him), of the Middle Ages.

But Foucault goes on to make an important distinction between different kinds of texts: 'in the order of scientific discourse, it was, during the Middle ages, indispensable that a scientific text be attributed to an author, for the author was the index of the work's truthfulness'; with the growth of modern science in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, 'this function [of the author's name] has been steadily declining' so that scientific texts are now evaluated 'on their own merits,' without regard to authorship ('Discourse on Language' 153; 'What Is an Author?' 143). The contrary movement has taken place in what we call literature. Foucault locates the major shift in the seventeenth century, when "'literary' discourse [came to be] acceptable only if it carried an author's name. . . . [I]n our day, literary works are totally dominated by the sovereignty of the author,' so that if a work is anonymous we insist on trying to discover an author and recreate his personality ('What Is an Author?' 153). Now, Foucault says, 'We ask authors to answer for the unity of the works published in their names; we ask that they reveal, or at least display the hidden sense pervading their work; we ask them to reveal their personal lives, to account for their experiences and the real story that gave birth to their writings' ('Discourse on Language' 153).

Yet the author so conceived is a function of culture, used to limit the 'chance element'—what Foucault also calls 'the hazards of discourse'—by acting as a being with an identity 'whose form is that of *individuality* and the *I*' ('Discourse on Language' 153). In a sense, then, individual identity, not only for authors but for anyone, is not so much an empirical reality, actually experienced by a person, as it is a cultural principle used to control and interpret discourse.

According to Foucault, this connection between author and work has been influenced by various 'legal and institutional systems' including the establishment of 'a system of ownership and strict copyright rules . . . (toward the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century)' ('What Is an Author?' 145, 142). But along with these institutional changes, both Barthes and Foucault also see the emphasis on the author's life and emotions as reflecting a new conception of the individual self or subject. (Though they do not name it as such, the Romanticism that dominated the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries seems an appropriate

movement to associate with this new conception. But Barthes and Foucault view this conception as persisting well into the twentieth century.) For Barthes, the author as understood through much of the modern period has been a repository of 'passions, moods, sentiments, [and] impressions' that are then expressed in literary texts (1132). If we operate according to the standard modern procedure, Foucault says, we explain a text through 'the author's biography or by reference to his particular point of view,' and we project onto the author characteristics we find in the text, speaking, for instance 'of an individual's 'profundity' or 'creative' power, his intentions or the original inspiration manifested in writing' (144, 143). The author is thus conceived as a 'self' who is in possession of certain inward contents, which find expression in a literary work. The author, like other people, is conceived as having 'an *identity* whose form is that of *individuality* and the *I*' ('Discourse on Language' 153)—that is, the self-contained, unique self. Questioning this view and noting its recent decline, Foucault anticipates that we will move past seeing texts as the creations and self-expression of authors and will see them as locations where the cultural activity of discourse takes place. We will ask, in effect, 'What matter who's speaking?' ('What Is an Author?' 148).

Through most of Lewis's lifetime, literary culture was dominated by the idea of the author as a creative being expressing himself in works that somehow belong to him. Anticipating some of what Barthes, Foucault, and others would say, Lewis was consistent—from the 1930s to the 1960s—in critiquing the ideas of creativity, originality, and self-expression. As early as 1932, he argued that literary texts and their authors must be viewed as historically situated and that we must avoid the 'preposterous picture of the author as that abstraction, a *pure* individual, bound to no time nor place' ('What Chaucer Really Did' 27). While modern criticism 'loves to treat a work of art as the expression of an artist's personality and perhaps values that personality chiefly for its difference from others,' Lewis recommends (in a lecture written in 1952) reading books 'in the spirit of children' who 'would not care whether two or twenty-two had written it' ('*Hero and Leander*' 58, 73)—an attitude that should remind us of Foucault's question 'What matter who's speaking?' In fact, in 1939, Lewis asked a similar question: '[A]lways, of every idea and of every method [the writer] will ask not 'Is it mine?,' but 'Is it good?' ('Christianity and Literature' 9). (Compare Goethe's 'What matter the

mine or thine?'—Goethe also being an opponent of the naive exaltation of originality as a literary value.)

Especially during the 1930s, Lewis reacted against the idea that we read in order to come into contact with a writer's personality. In the book *The Personal Heresy*, Lewis proposed an 'objective or impersonal theory of poetry' incorporating his conviction that imaginative literature does not '[consist] in self-expression' and that what literature presents to us 'is not and never can be the personality of the [writer]' but rather a vivid sense of external realities (8, 98, 11). Instead, imaginative literature invites us to experience concrete things by participating in a particular 'mode of consciousness' (17). Even when that means sharing in a mode of consciousness the writer has also experienced, what we attend to is not the writer: 'I look with his eyes, not at him'; 'I must share his consciousness and not attend to it' (11-12). Furthermore, the consciousness we participate in as we read is not the poet's normal frame of mind—it is 'no permanent element in his psychology' (24)—and does not even necessarily belong to a single writer, especially in works drawing on traditional language and poetic devices. In reading such works, the consciousness we share is 'not the consciousness of any single individual,' but a mode of consciousness made possible by various elements of culture and language (15). Indeed, any writer draws on culturally available materials and uses them to allow us to experience things other than himself. Hence, the details of poet's biography or temperament are not relevant to literature as literature. What is important in literary experience is what happens to readers, not what it reveals about the author's attitudes or state of mind (see 120).

Along with the remarkable similarities between what Lewis and postmodern writers say about literature, there are of course important differences. For one thing, Lewis's view did not derive from the postmodern critique of the 'self,' a critique that had yet to become widespread, but instead was influenced by his beliefs about the relation between humans and God. The religious source of his critique of modern views of literature is clearest in 'Christianity and Literature,' an essay published in 1939. As he does elsewhere, Lewis challenges the dominance of ideas of creativity, spontaneity, and freedom (put by many of his contemporaries in supposedly superior contrast with being derivative, conventional, or bound by rules), and especially questions the notion that literary creation is a process in which 'good work [bursts] out from certain centres of explosive force—apparently self-originating force—which we call men of genius' (3). But his main argument against the contemporary

view is that it is out of harmony with Christian doctrine. The New Testament as he reads it endorses imitation: "Originality" in the New Testament is quite plainly the prerogative of God alone" (6). Therefore, a literary artist should not aim at being creative but instead should try 'to embody in terms of his own art some reflection of eternal Beauty and Wisdom.' Literary criticism should not exalt spontaneity and originality; 'and above all it would be opposed to the idea that literature is self-expression' (7). Why? Because one's self—one's 'own temperament and experience'—'are of no value or importance whatsoever' except as a medium through which something of greater value may be conveyed. The writer's temperament and experience are not valuable simply because they exist and least of all because they 'belong' to the writer as a kind of personal possession (8). As Lewis would later put it in *Mere Christianity*, 'I am not, in my natural state, nearly so much of a person as I like to believe,' and what I call my personality is neither so valuable nor so much in my possession or under my control as I would like to think (225).

Another difference between Lewis's view of literature and that of postmodernists is that, though Lewis denies that a literary work really belongs to its author, he does see it as belonging to someone—namely, to God, who is the source of whatever is of value in it. Furthermore, though Lewis claims to favour an 'impersonal theory of poetry,' he does not join with Barthes in arguing that subjectivity completely evaporates in the activity of writing or reading. He is closer to Foucault: both argue that writing and reading are culturally situated and that these activities, though not at their best serving as means of self-expression, involve particular modes of subjectivity or consciousness.

There is, in fact, something in Lewis's view of natural human personality as the product of cultural forces not unlike Foucault's view. Of course, one way Lewis's view differs from Foucault's is that he does not consider human personality as only and forever remaining nothing more than such a product. For Lewis, submitting to God, allowing him to shape and animate one's personality, allows one to gain a real personality—real in the sense that it is substantial and genuinely in one's possession. Yet even in imagining this ideal, Lewis does not conceive of the human person as an isolated, self-sufficient ego. The 'real personality' we aspire to will be one that arises in community—in community with God and with other humans. And it will (as Lewis several times suggests) be something more like an activity than an unchanging substance, an activity that Lewis

describes as a continual death and rebirth made possible through a continual process of self-giving (e.g., *Problem of Pain* 156-58: the soul's 'union with God is, almost by definition, a continual self-abandonment. . . . [S]elf exists to be abdicated and, by that abdication, becomes the more truly self').

As a literary critic, Lewis focused on books rather than on their authors and even more on the experience of reading books. In fact, one of his last critical projects—a book titled *An Experiment in Criticism*—focused on the experience of reading and proposed that books could be evaluated by the way they are read. '[G]ood literature' could theoretically be defined 'as that which permits, invites, or even compels good reading' (104). 'Good reading' would in effect be the kind of reading that involves 'an enlargement of our being,' in which we find more than just an echo of what we bring and instead find ourselves allowed or invited to surrender ourselves to something other (137). Acknowledging that the reality of reading is complicated and not so easily divided into 'good' and 'bad,' Lewis nevertheless sees in reading transformative possibilities, possibilities that include the remaking of our personalities. Here Lewis goes beyond anything I have found in Barthes or Foucault or even Jacques Derrida (though like Derrida, Lewis puts a value on 'free play' [*Experiment* 126] in literary experience).

Given the imperfect state of personhood, both writer and reader (according to Lewis) must be willing to surrender themselves as they are. Though he does not, like Barthes, view the reader merely as an empty space (note Barthes's view of the reader as 'a man without history, without biography, without psychology' [1133]), Lewis does assert that the reader must divest himself of—or at least suspend his attachment to—his individual history, biography, and psychology in order to experience a book as other: 'We must,' Lewis writes, 'empty our minds and lay ourselves open' (116). But we do so precisely to become more than we are now. Literature 'admits us to experiences other than our own' (139); and it does so in such a way that we 'see with other eyes,' 'imagine with other imaginations,' 'feel with other hearts' (137), in effect by allowing us to 'become these other selves' whose voices and imaginations we experience as we read (139).

Literary experience is thus closely tied for Lewis to what it means to be a self. To be a self in the fullest sense is to be in relation to something genuinely other and to be willing to give up what one is now in order to be transformed into something richer and larger. Literary experience at its best

involves a similar openness to relationship and transformation. 'Obviously,' Lewis says in *An Experiment in Criticism*, 'this process can be described either as an enlargement or as a temporary annihilation of the self. But that is an old paradox; 'he that loseth his life shall save it'' (138). Literary experience certainly does not, for Lewis, involve a total or permanent annihilation of the self, for that would make the notion of experience itself nonsensical. Instead, Lewis (like Levinas) uses the notion of transcendence: in literary experience, 'as in worship, in love, in moral action, and in knowing, I transcend myself; and am never more myself than when I do' (141).

Levinas, though with an ethical emphasis, views transcendence in much the same way. For Levinas, transcendence is specifically a property of the relationship with the other person: 'goodness [or being for the other] is transcendence itself. Transcendence,' he writes, 'is the transcendence of an I. Only an I can respond to the injunction of a face' (*Totality* 305). In being for the other, the 'I' can be beyond itself and yet remain itself, in a sense become more fully, uniquely, and significantly itself than it would be in isolation or in self-centeredness. Lewis sees something of the same kind of transcendence in literary, religious, and even intellectual experience, while Levinas views genuine transcendence as taking place only in the relation with someone else. Yet Lewis would agree that transcendence, in literary experience as well as elsewhere, occurs only when we come into relationship with something genuinely other than ourselves. He might even accept Levinas's view that such otherness is established only by the personal other—the other who makes even the material world genuinely external, something more than a solipsistic dream, because it is something we share with others.

As we compare Lewis's views with those of postmodern thinkers, important distinctions must be made, especially ones having to do with the presence or absence of God and the ultimate origin and possible destiny of the human person. In addition, it is worth emphasizing that Lewis was critiquing the modern viewpoint at least in part because it had lost touch with older attitudes, many of which Lewis wanted to defend. In fact, he claimed in one famous speech to be himself a representative of 'Old Western Culture' (*De Descriptione Temporum* 12-14).⁵ He might therefore be called a 'premodernist' rather than a 'postmodernist.' But of course, Lewis, who closely followed contemporary trends, was not such a Neanderthal as he pretended to be and was well aware that any attempt simply to return to an earlier viewpoint would be foolish as

well as impossible. And he saw value in the ideas of many of his contemporaries. Rather than being merely an unreconstructed representative of an earlier time period, Lewis was—in some ways like the postmodernists—self-consciously resisting and critiquing certain elements in modern thought.

In particular, Lewis joins with many postmodern thinkers in critiquing the modern conception of the self and, as a literary critic, in rejecting the self as the master and owner of discourse. Neither for Lewis nor for any of the others I've discussed are human beings simply individuals; in fact, for some postmodernists, there is no such thing as individual selves. There is only 'a series of subjective positions' or of spaces opened up by language or culture (Foucault, 'What Is an Author?' 145). Lewis, by contrast—though questioning the value and even the possibility of isolated selfhood—asserts the reality of individual selves and views that reality as having an eternal dimension. In fact, the most startling difference between Lewis and most postmodern thinkers, including Levinas, is Lewis's placing of human personality in a cosmic context. Everyone we meet, Lewis says, is an immortal, a possible god or goddess; all are destined to become either 'immortal horrors or everlasting splendours' ('The Weight of Glory' 45-46). At the end of *The Great Divorce*, Lewis memorably imagines human individuals as 'gigantic forms' existing, in effect, outside of time, with 'the inmost nature' of each of these forms being enacted within time (143-44).⁶

Yet while viewing human persons as eternal beings, Lewis nevertheless conceives of selfhood as an ongoing activity, especially as an activity of self-offering. What we do 'within time' thus has enormous consequences for what we become. Lewis joins with Levinas in arguing not only that the self arises in response to and relationship with others but that the self thereby becomes most truly itself. That is part of what it would mean for Lewis to acknowledge that we are members of one another, or as he put it early on, 'if we mean something, we do not mean alone.' We have meaning as part of 'the whole process of things,' a process that includes our relationship with others (*Personal Heresy* 30, 29). While 'semi-postmodernist,' as I've put it, in arguing that our natural selves are largely illusory and at best incomplete, Lewis does believe that we can attain real personalities, but only as we engage in an activity of self-offering that puts us properly into relation with others and with God.

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Notes

1. *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 3rd ed., Dec. 2006; online version June 2011; s.v. 'postmodern' <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/148605>>; 'postmodernist' <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/238236>>; 'postmodernism' <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/238214>>; accessed 7 July 2011.
2. In response to a correspondent who asked for his view of Edgar S. Brightman (as found in the edited collection *Personalism in Theology*), Lewis said, 'I don't know Dr. Brightman's views, and don't know what Personalism is' (*Collected Letters* 2:914). However, Lewis knew something of William James's philosophy, admired the moral insights of Denis de Rougement (sometimes associated with personalism), met and spoke with Gabriel Marcel (but had mixed feelings about his philosophy), and had a somewhat positive impression of Martin Buber's thought. (See *Collected Letters* 1:440, 711 [on James]; 2:379, 828, and 3:686-87, 1091 [on Rougement]; 2:526, 954; 3:24, 631-32, 713, 979-80, 1173-74, 12383 [on Buber and Marcel].) Lewis was well versed in the philosophical tradition and in fact, after completing a degree in philosophy at Oxford, hoped to teach the subject. The development of his own thought was strongly influenced by Bergson, by the English Hegelians, and to a degree by the less well known philosopher Samuel Alexander (see *Surprised by Joy* 204-05, 209-11, 217-19). But Lewis had little knowledge of or interest in the thinkers who contributed most strongly to 'postmodernism': he mentions Nietzsche briefly in his letters (1:74); I've found no reference in any of his writings to Heidegger. He was aware, but dismissive, of Sartre and 'existentialism' and had read at least one of Sartre's books (3:24, 781, 1238).
3. Levinas uses similar language when he says that the other person 'at each instant . . . overflows the idea a thought would carry away from [his expression]' and that '[t]he face of the Other at each moment destroys and overflows the plastic image it leaves me. . . . The face is a living presence; it is expression. The life of expression consists in undoing the form in which the existent, exposed as a theme, is thereby dissimulated' (*Totality* 50-51, 66).

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CONTINUATIONS

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I agree with the communitarian critique on this point. So, while I will offer an account of values and evaluation which centres on the individual's, again, *stepping back* from community-endorsed values and reasons in order to re-evaluate these according to 'her own' criteria, I do concede to the communitarian that there can be no *stepping out* of one's own skin in such instances.

Charles Taylor provides an outstanding description of the kind of qualifiedly unconstructed choosing that I take to be both possible and essential to making a choice 'one's own': 'I can learn what anger, love, anxiety, the aspiration to wholeness, etc., are through my and others' experience of these things being objections for us, in some common space . . . Later, I may innovate. I may develop an original way of understanding myself and the human life, at least one which is in sharp disagreement with my family and background. But the innovation can only take place from the base in our common language. Even as the most independent adult, there are moments when I cannot clarify what I feel until I can talk about it with certain special partner(s), who know me, or with whom I have an affinity (p.36).' *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989.

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27. Zizek illustrates this idea in Schelling with an example from pop culture, Harold Ramis' film *Groundhog's Day*. In the film, a weatherman, Phil Connors (played by Bill Murray) finds himself thrown into eternity: he wakes up day after day in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, and it's always February 2nd, Groundhog Day. After thinking that he might be a God and in a heaven where his is unrelated to everyone else, because they are only in time and their lives are meaningless from the point of view of eternity. But Phil eventually grows bored, he realizes that he is actually in a hell in which nothing matters. He only escapes this hell when he actually commits to the others around him, and particularly—this is Hollywood after all—to his producer Rita (played by Andie McDowell). Time finally begins with Phil's act of decision to enter into real relations with other persons around him, and when his love for Rita becomes more than just an attempt to seduce her. In real relationships, both beings in the relationship are affected by the other. Zizek writes that the film has a 'Schellingian' dimension. 'The "Schellingian" dimension of the film resides in its anti-Platonic depreciation of eternity and immortality: as long as the hero knows that he is immortal, caught in the "eternal return of the same"—that the same day will dawn again and again—his life bears the mark of the 'unbearable lightness of being', of an insipid and shallow game in

which events have a kind of ethereal pseudo-existence; he falls back into temporal reality only and precisely when his attachment to the girl grows into true love. Eternity is a false, insipid game: an authentic encounter with the Other in which 'things are for real' necessarily entails a return to temporal reality'. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

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6. See Amy Olberding, 'The Consumation of Sorrow: An Analysis of Confucius' Grief for Yan Hui,' *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 54, No. 3 (July 2004) 279 - 301.
 7. See Philip J. Ivanhoe, 'The Shade of Confucius: Social Roles, Ethical Theory, and the Self,' in *Polishing the Chinese Mirror: Essays in Honor of Henry Rosemont, Jr.* Chandler and Littlejohn, ed. (New York: Global Scholarly Publications, 2008) 38 – 39.
 8. See Fred Dalmayr, 'On the Natural Theology of the Chinese,' in Chandler and Littlejohn, 162 – 175.
 9. See G.W. Leibniz, 'Primary Truths,' *Philosophical Essays*, trans. Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber (Indianapolis: Hackett 1989) 30.
 10. Rosemont, 89 – 90.
 11. See for instance Michael J. Sandel, 'The Procedural Republic and the Unencumbered Self,' in *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Anthology*, ed. Robert Goodin and Philip Pettit (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1997), 239 – 247.
 12. See for instance Daniel Bell's entry 'Communitarianism' in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/communitarianism/>.
 13. Fingarette, 45.
 14. *Ibid.*, 76.
 15. *Ibid.*, 77.
 16. *Ibid.*, 76.
 17. *Ibid.*, 77.
 18. *Ibid.*, 76-7.
 19. See Ivanhoe, 41 – 42.
 20. Strawson, 95 – 98.
 21. Fingarette, 30.
 22. *Ibid.*, 31-4.
 23. See for example *Analects* 11.26.
 24. *Analects* 11.11.
 25. Ames, 105.
 26. *Idem.*
 27. *Ibid.*, 108.
 28. *Ibid.*, 109.
 29. Strawson, 112.
 30. *Idem*
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26. As Badiou has written recently: 'I like the great metaphors hailing from religion: Miracle, Grace, Salvation, Glorious Body, Conversion . . . This has, predictably enough, led to the conclusion that my

philosophy is a disguised Christianity. . . . That said, all in all I would rather be a revolutionary atheist cloaked in a religious vocabulary than a Western ‘democrat’-cum-persecutor of Muslim men and women, disguised as a secular feminist.’ Badiou, *Second Manifesto for Philosophy*, 140-141.

27. Badiou, *Saint Paul*.

28. See Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 54-62.

29. Badiou, *Ethics*, 59.

30. Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 71.

31. See Badiou, *Conditions*, 179-198, 251-284; Badiou, ‘The Scene of the Two’; and Badiou and Truong, *Eloge de l’amour*.

32. Badiou, *Ethics*, 38.

33. Badiou, *Metapolitics*, 97-98.

34. See especially Badiou, *Ethics*, 40-57.

35. *ibid.*, 11.

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4. In describing this event to a friend, Lewis added, ‘One dreams of a Charles Williams substitution!’—referring to a doctrine of his friend Charles Williams that we can literally ‘bear one another’s burdens’ perhaps by taking on another’s suffering and thus becoming a ‘substitute’ for that person (see Carpenter 246, 104-05).
 5. I am grateful to Joseph M. Spencer, at the University of New Mexico, for pointing out the relevance of Lewis’s claim to this paper.
 6. Again, I am indebted to Joseph Spencer for reminding me of this scene.
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