

---

POLISH POLITICAL SCIENCE  
VOL XXXIX 2010  
PL ISSN 0208-7375

**THE MYTH OF AUTONOMY: SUBJECTIVITY,  
HETERONOMY AND THE VIOLENCE OF  
LIBERALISM INDIVIDUALISM**

*by Jeffrey Stevenson Murer*

**LIBERALISM AND “UNENCUMBERED SELVES”**

If liberalism is the political embodiment of the Enlightenment, it is possible to trace the origins of both privileging autonomy and taking it for granted to the earliest writings of the Enlightenment. In the monumental declaration of *cognito ergo sum*, Descartes takes his own subjectivity for granted. The “I am” half of the utterance explicitly refers to a conscious being.<sup>1</sup> This is not a psychodynamic process or a process of constructing the conscious self. Rather, the conscious self is being. Further the conscious self is separate from other conscious beings. Perhaps this is best articulated by Rousseau who wrote in his *Confessions* of 1781, “I am made unlike any one I have ever met; I will venture to say that I am like no one in the whole world.”<sup>2</sup> The assertion Rousseau makes that the individual is a naturally occurring unit is important. She is unique; she is self-possessed; she came that way from God. Judgment comes from within;

---

<sup>1</sup> See Mansfield, Nick, *Subjectivity: Theories of the Self from Freud to Haraway*, (New York University Press, 2000), p.15.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Mansfield, Nick, *Subjectivity: Theories of the Self from Freud to Haraway*, (New York University Press, 2000), p. 16.

rationality is most fully realized by rejecting social pressures and giving individuality uninhibited expression. Nick Mansfield notes that Rousseau does not derive his judgments “from reading, nor dialogue with other intellectuals, but by separating himself from the world.”<sup>3</sup> It is in such a formulation that liberal autonomy can often seem to be atomistic. While individuals may be within society, the concern for early liberals appears to be that they can work, prosper and be alone. This permeates much of the early liberal writings.

Locke likewise asserts that in the State of Nature all men are free. This of course is necessary to establish the source of legitimacy in the State of Civil Governance: individual sovereignty. This sovereignty remains, even as individuals transfer some capacity to the liberal state. It remains in the form of autonomy. This is the primary conflict within liberalism, what John Hoffman likes to call liberalism’s “schizoid malady.”<sup>4</sup> The state, conferred with legitimacy through the transfer of sovereignty from the governed individuals, may not interfere with those individuals, even as it is granted a monopoly on force; likewise, these same autonomous individuals must comply with the state, for obedience is the expression of legitimacy of the state. Individuals free to dispose of their persons and property as they choose must do so within limits. Of course these limits are generally recognized as structured by a harm principle. Externalities can cause harm just as intentional acts can. To get around this problem, Kant asserted that individuals must employ the categorical imperative as a self-limiting moral principle of action. In this regard, reason is an ideal and as such people must obey laws (whether they are consulted or not) for this obedience ensures the adherence to the social contract against anarchy. If autonomy is defined as freedom from coercion then the demand for obedience leads right back to a schizoid malady.

John Rawls does not see it that way. He believes that Kant fashions autonomy as the expression of one’s inner rationality. This internal separate rationality is like that described by Rousseau. It is separated from the

---

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, p.17.

<sup>4</sup> Hoffman, John, *Beyond the State* (Polity Press, 1995), pp. 104–106.

interference that comes with habit, tradition, family, and culture. It is worth quoting Rawls at length here:

Kant held, I believe, that a person is acting autonomously when the principles of his action are chosen by him as the most adequate possible expression of his nature as a free and equal rational being. The principles he acts upon are not adopted because of social position or natural endowments or in the view of the particular kind of society in which he lives or the specific things he happens to want. To act on such principles is to act heteronomously.<sup>5</sup>

Thus this rational autonomy on which Rawls' theory of justice is based does not include the matters of traditions, institutions, social forces, or particular historical circumstances.<sup>6</sup> Michael Sandel and other so-called communitarians have critiqued this aspect of Rawls, arguing that Rawls requires the social contractors to act as "unencumbered selves" to such a degree that they are detached from local moral environments and the affections, and thus deprived of that which confers meaning and a sense of purpose to individual lives.<sup>7</sup> These atomistic Lockean mini-sovereigns are normatively separated from one another; to be autonomous they must cut themselves off from the very civil society the Lockean social contract made. Pierre Bourdieu suggests that such a separation would be nearly impossible.

Bourdieu's conception of habitus suggests that we draw on a range of strategies for social behavior framed by our world-view of social-cultural context and particular point in history. In this social behavior arises in the "context of a community of dispositions."<sup>8</sup> We have no sense that our

---

<sup>5</sup> Rawls, John, *A Theory of Justice*, (Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 251–252.

<sup>6</sup> Bocoock, Robert, *Hegemony*, (Tavistock Publications, 1986), p. 56.,

<sup>7</sup> Lomasky, Loren, *Classical Liberalism and Civil Society*, [in:] *Alternative Conceptions of Civil Society*, Chambers, Simone and Will Kymlicka (eds.), (Princeton University Press, 2002). C.f. Sandel, Michael, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, (Cambridge University Press, 1982).

<sup>8</sup> Bourdieu, Pierre, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, (Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 35.

choices or our strategies are so context dependent. Although our strategies for social behavior are “limited by our social and cultural context, they appear to us to arise as the inevitable circumstances of our behavior and our relationship to them is not experienced as cultural, ideological or religious, but as practical.”<sup>9</sup> This also extends to differences with a given social context across class. That is the range of strategies is shaped by the consideration of the possession of capital. Bourdieu, of course, offers an important and new way of understanding capital, suggesting that it comes in multiple, fungible forms. The possession of different types of capital and the amount possessed shapes the dispositions and practices that reveal a particular habitus. Bourdieu is not suggesting that we automatons operate with a prescribed set of behavioral alternatives. Rather, he points out that we all act within a culturally prescribed range of possible strategies. While this may not itself conflict with either Rawls’ theory of justice or Kant’s notion of the categorical imperative, it is worth noting that the autonomous moral self is not autogenerative. We are shaped by our environments and cultural interactions.

Perhaps autonomy must be defined another way. John Gray suggests that autonomy can be valuable “because by exercising it each of us can choose from among forms of life whose worth cannot be compared.”<sup>10</sup> Joseph Raz in particular promotes this position, suggesting that personal autonomy is necessary in modern societies because of the fast-moving life choices that are presented at every moment. “The ideal of personal autonomy is the vision of people controlling, to some degree, their own destiny, fashioning it through successive decisions throughout their lives.”<sup>11</sup> Yet just as Bourdieu suggests that our cultural context shapes our range of strategies, Gramsci suggests that the capitalist mode of production and the less tangible cultural and social structures of modern society limit the range of possible choices Raz would have us make. Gramsci is concerned with considerations of both autonomy and heteronomy in the way that

---

<sup>9</sup> Mansfield, *op.cit.*, p. 123.

<sup>10</sup> Gray, John, *Two Faces of Liberalism*, (The New Press, 2000), p. 96.

<sup>11</sup> Raz, Joseph, *The Morality of Freedom*, (Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 370. Quoted in Gray, John, *Two Faces of Liberalism*, (The New Press, 2000), p. 99.

limits are placed on people's choices by their economic, political and cultural circumstances.<sup>12</sup> These limits are enacted through the realization of hegemony by the dominant class.

### HEGEMONY

For Gramsci the structures of modern society, particularly modern democracies, are the space in which hegemony is enacted. Like Marx, Gramsci recognizes the power of the state. Through the mutually reinforcing systems of liberalism and capitalism, the state becomes the apparatus of force, the tool of the ruling class. But beyond the police and the military and the organs of the violence of the state, Gramsci sees the ruling class as both dominant and leading. The supremacy of the ruling class comes not from its ability to apply force and exert coercion throughout society, but rather in its ability to coax the mass of the population to adopt its world view. Of course a dominant group has the power to "liquidate" or subjugate antagonistic groups, the real power lies in the ability to rule without notice.<sup>13</sup> Anne Showstack Sassoon writes: "the Gramscian notion of hegemonic leadership requires that millions of ordinary people come to accept, in the sense of really giving their free consent to, the political, economic and cultural policies being pursued by the dominant ruling group."<sup>14</sup> Hegemony is achieved when the ruling class provides the fundamental outlook for the whole of society. The ruling class' interests become everyone's interest. The frame in which decisions are made is squarely created by the interests of the dominant group, yet this goes unnoticed. Thus the dominant social group both dominates and provides "intellectual and moral leadership."<sup>15</sup> In this way, hegemony protects the

---

<sup>12</sup> Bocoock, *op.cit.*, p. 57.

<sup>13</sup> Sassoon, Anne Showstack, *Gramsci's Politics*, (St. Martins Press, 1980), p. 111.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 76.

<sup>15</sup> Gramsci, Antonio, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, (International Publishers, 1971), p. 57-58.

state, which in turn protects the ruling class. For Gramsci the state is “hegemony armored by coercion.”<sup>16</sup>

Marx likewise saw that the state could control non-state spheres. Robert Bocock points out that Marx wrote in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*:

The state enmeshes, controls, regulates, supervises and regiments civil society from the most all-embracing expressions of it life down to its most general modes of existence, down to the private life of the individual.<sup>17</sup>

Gramsci echoes this point when he writes that one of the most important functions of the state is “to elevate the great mass of the population to a given cultural and moral level...which corresponds to the needs of the development of the forces of production, hence the interests of the dominant class.”<sup>18</sup> Gramsci anticipates Foucault in a way by describing the apparatus of such interpolation. Of course the elements of the state are engaged, as the schools which can be seen as both an organ of the state and an institution firmly rooted in civil society, as well as other institutions ostensibly separate from the state which may yet do its and the dominant class’ bidding.

The schools as a positive educational function and the courts as a negative and repressive function are the most important aspects of the state; but in reality the multiplicity of other so-call private institutions and activities tend toward the same end, which constitutes the apparatus of the political and cultural hegemony of the ruling class.<sup>19</sup>

Foucault famously pointed out that everyday institutions – the schools, the factories, the barracks, and the prisons – regulate bodies, rendering

---

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 263.

<sup>17</sup> Bocock, *op.cit.*, p. 25.

<sup>18</sup> Gramsci, *op.cit.*, p. 258.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, p.258.

them “docile,” and thus pliable and easily dominated.<sup>20</sup> Further, the very institutions of liberalism are the sources of its domination. A rights-based politics separates and atomizes individuals by assigning each specific separate rights. The individual with rights and freedoms is created through a political technology of individuals. The emphasis on autonomy as individuality is then a key feature of the governing technology. Thus for Foucault individuals are not a given, but rather they are created, through the institutions of power. Michael Clifford puts this sharply:

Individualization is a disciplinary form of subjection and domination. It means the individual has already been marked, trained, differentiated, judged, ranked and is already bound to a disciplinary practice, a function, a use.<sup>21</sup>

For Foucault there is not much to be done about this. With power there is resistance and it demonstrates the presence of power. Governmentality is the realization of power. For Gramsci however resistance can be enacted and the dominant group subverted. Gramsci keeps the Marxian notion of humans as the agents of history, not the objects of an economism which determines history exclusively through the materialist evolution of the modes of production.

Gramsci represents an important thread in the Marxian tradition. Like György Lukács and other so-called neo-Marxians, Gramsci is concerned with overcoming alienation. This is not the Marx of Althusser, one focused on the scientific theories of productionism and economism, a fetishized orientation toward the scientific or technical rationality. Quite the opposite. Gramsci termed Marxism a philosophy of praxis: a moral and political philosophy integrated with social theory. He states the genesis of Marx’s praxis is to be found in the essay *Holy Family*, stating that the philosophy of praxis “is a ‘materialism’ perfected by the work of specula-

---

<sup>20</sup> See Foucault, Michel, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, (Pantheon, 1977).

<sup>21</sup> Clifford, Michael, *Political Genealogy After Foucault: Savage Identities*, (Routledge, 2001), p. 107.

tive philosophy itself and fused with humanism.”<sup>22</sup> It is through this humanist practice that those who desire change can combat hegemony. This takes the form of moral and philosophical arguments – a combat of discourses – and is what Gramsci calls the “war of position.” This hegemonic struggle with the state and its hegemony, which Sassoon sees as the culmination of the historical process, takes place within the space of civil society.

The massive structures of the modern democracies, both as State organisms, and as complexes of associations in civil society, constitute for the art of politics as it were the “trenches” and the permanent fortifications of the front in the war of position...<sup>23</sup>

The war of position, the ideological combat between opposing moral discourses, as a struggle is the attempt to displace alienating and objectifying hegemonic discourse with a socially engaged moral practice filled with human meaning. Its goal is to achieve human understanding and displace the scientism that may lead to anti-humanism. Scientism is a discourse about objects, and as objects humans would have no moral or rational autonomy. The privileging of scientific or economic discourse suggests that human relations are in fact object interactions.<sup>24</sup> The philosophy of praxis, on the other hand, promotes the understanding of human subjectivity. By examining such subjectivity through psychodynamic processes it is possible to see the interaction between the development of the self and its interaction with the larger human community. Psychodynamic investigation also illuminates some of the less obvious institutions of hegemony, namely gender identification and the institution of family.

---

<sup>22</sup> Gramsci, *op.cit.*, p. 371.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 243.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 244. C.f. Bocoock, Robert, *Hegemony*, (Tavistock Publications, 1986), p. 64.



### FREUD, EGO FORMATION, AND THE SENSE OF THE SELF

Freud suggests that any given subjectivity is neither innate nor inevitable.<sup>25</sup> Unlike the auto-generative self assumed by the likes of Descartes, Rousseau and Locke, for Freud subjects are not born into an undefined world that they then order according to their own priorities or rationalities. Rather, the processes of ego-formation and superego internalization as the significant components of subject formation are greatly informed by outside influences, particularly parental relations. This follows Gramsci's proposition that the world is structured by cultural traditions and civil politics laden with significance, imperatives and norms. In this Freud provides an important critique of the liberal presumption of the autonomy of the individual subject. The range of action and strategic choices available is not only limited by cultural practice à la Gramsci and Bourdieu, but is also affected by the interpretation, internalization, and enactment of those traditions with regard psychodynamic processes. Superego maybe akin to a conscience, but it is also never conscious. One may not know why s/he becomes hostile in certain situations, or nervous, or giddy. One may become keenly aware, and perhaps with analysis explore the origins of those responses, but one cannot consciously shape the form of super-egoist development or the content of internalizations.

On the other hand, there are significant feminist critiques of Freud's theorization of subject formation regarding gender identity and interpersonal relations, and particularly his theorization sexual identity formation. In many ways gender relations are an important key to the production of subjectivity within the Freudian frame, although Freud himself privileges anatomy over gender (in the contemporary feminist usage) as a determinant of identity. Freud's ideas about subject formation, and especially those of his feminist heiresses and critics, have interesting implications for our understanding of autonomy, hegemony, and their critique from a Marxian perspective.

---

<sup>25</sup> Mansfield, *op.cit.*, p. 31.

For Freud the self is derived from a tripartite division of agency or structure of the mind: the id, ego and superego. At times the id is described as primitive, for the id knows no values, no good, no morality.<sup>26</sup> Freud considered that the id “contains everything that is inherited, that is present at birth, that is laid down in the constitution – above all therefore, the instincts...”<sup>27</sup> The id represents and contains all wishes and memories associated with gratification of basic physiological needs. The id is of the pleasure principle and it does not aim at self-representation.<sup>28</sup> The second part of the triumvirate, the ego, represents the external world to the id. As such the ego coordinates, alters, organizes, and controls the instinctual impulses of the id so as to minimize conflicts between desires for gratification and the external world. Thus the ego “dethrones the pleasure principle.”<sup>29</sup> It does so by regulating stimuli both internal and external by seeking to achieve optimal gratification of instinctual strivings while maintaining good relations with the external world. This ego-id matrix allows infants to develop, and while some of this process has conscious elements, most of the operations of the ego are unconscious. The ego-functions to mediate the self’s relationship with reality, to mediate drives and impulses within the self, to differentiate objects and other persons, and to provide defenses against anxiety that results from the arousal of sexual or aggressive impulses.<sup>30</sup> These defenses are shaped by the external inputs regarding acceptable and unacceptable behavior. Namely this is the internalization of external restrictions which first parents and then other social agencies impose upon individuals. These restrictions are introjected into the ego and become “conscience.”<sup>31</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Marcuse, Herbert, *Eros and Civilization*, (Beacon 1955), pp. 29–30.

<sup>27</sup> Freud, Sigmund, *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis*, [in:] *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (Hogarth Press, 1953) 23:144–207 quoted in: *Psychoanalytic Terms and Concepts*, B. Moore, B. Fine (eds.), Yale 1990, pp. 90–91.

<sup>28</sup> Marcuse, *op.cit.*, p. 30.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 30.

<sup>30</sup> Moore, Burness and Bernard Fine (eds.), *Psychoanalytic Terms and Concepts*, (Yale, 1990), pp. 62–63.

<sup>31</sup> Freud, Sigmund, *The Id and the Ego*, [in:] *the Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (Hogarth Press, 1953) 29:75 quoted in Marcuse, Herbert, *Eros and Civilization*, (Beacon 1955), p. 32.

The third mental component is the superego which develops from the infant's long dependency on its parents. Parental influence is at the core of the superego. As the infant develops social and cultural influences are also taken in by the superego until it "coagulates" into the powerful representation of established morality and "what people call the higher things in human life."<sup>32</sup> In turn, the ego carries out the representations initiated by the superego, as one of the other functions of the ego is to establish unity among the three mental components. That is defenses and repressions are made in the service and at the behest of the superego. The transformation of this repressive scheme into something automatic is the basis of what Freud called "civilization."<sup>33</sup>

For Freud the most significant demonstration of this process is found in the Oedipus complex, in that he suggested the Oedipal position was the nodal point or coalescence of the superego. Named for Sophocles' tragic play, the child at age two or beyond up to six, in the so-called phallic stage, strives for sexual union with parent of the opposite sex and wishes for the death or disappearance of the parent of the same sex. A so-called "negative Oedipus complex" is a scenario in which the child also wishes to unite sexually with the parent of the same sex. In the more traditional "positive" interpretation the child fears retaliation for the forbidden incestuous and parricidal wishes. A boy fears castration or penile ablation, while a girl fears a less specific genital injury.<sup>34</sup> This lack of specificity is important for it suggests an androcentricism to Freud's formulation. Male sexuality forms the basis of Freud's theory of subjectivity. For working through the Oedipal complex is the culmination of identity formation according to more traditional Freudians. While in the complex the unconscious tie of a girl to her mother, and a boy's unconscious desire to surrender or submit to the father in return for ever lasting love and the hope of receiving passive masculinity without the fantasy of violence continues to influence of psychological life.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> Marcuse, *op.cit.*, p. 32.

<sup>33</sup> C.f. Freud, Sigmund, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, (W.W. Norton, 1989), pp. 56–59.

<sup>34</sup> Moore, *op.cit.*, p. 133.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 133.

Freud suggests that it is in this moment of conflict within the triad of mother, father and child a person develops the firm sense of self and subjectivity that will carry with him for the rest of his life. In the case of the boy, he recognizes the gender difference between himself and his mother. He and his mother are not the same, and in fact she is the object of his infantile genital drive. He recognizes that his mother does not have a penis and is therefore not like him. Further, his relationship with his father is oriented through power dynamics. The desire for the death or disappearance of his father allows the boy to understand his separateness from the father and his ability to exist without him. Further, he understands that certain objects of sexual desire or drive are forbidden. This sublimation of sexual impulses for forbidden objects will structure the processes of repression for the rest of the child's life. This is the movement of structuring the child's personality along the super-ego and ego-ideal. Freud sees this process, however, as much more than repression.

It is the equivalent, if ideally carried out, to a destruction and abolition of the complex....If the ego has in fact not achieved much more than a repression of the complex, the latter persists in an unconscious state in the id and will later manifest its pathogenic effect.<sup>36</sup>

In many respects however the complex is not reducible to a particular situation. Rather the efficacy of the position is that it requires the child to encounter a proscriptive agency (i.e. the incest taboo) and the internal desire for wish fulfillment. The issue for Freud (and also for Lacan) is the internalization of the law. Some cultural critics and anthropologists, among them prominently Bronislaw Malinowski, challenged the proposition that the Oedipus complex would be present in societies where the father is not expected to reform a repressive function. On the one hand Claude Lévi-

---

<sup>36</sup> Freud, Sigmund, *The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex*, [in:] *the Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (Hogarth Press, 1953) 29:178–179 quoted in Laplanche, J and J.-B Pontails, *The Language of Psycho-analysis*, (Hogarth, 1973), p. 285

Strauss found the prohibition against incest to be universal<sup>37</sup>; on the other what is most important is the relationship of the triad and the realization of the conflict of wish fulfillment and law.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, there are significant gender role considerations at play in Freud's formulation.

Aside from the obvious privileging of heteronormativity, Freud's emphasis on the Oedipal Complex as the formative moment for human subjectivity makes it a masculine subjectivity. First, the fear of castration is clearly a masculine fear. Freud's ambiguous position as to what the motivating fear for a girl might be suggests that this does not really matter to him. In fact the "discovery" of the Oedipus complex comes out of Freud's self-analysis, in conjunction with similarities he saw in his patients. He wrote: "we can understand the riveting power of Oedipus Rex.... The Greek legend seizes on a compulsion which everyone recognizes because he feels its existence within himself."<sup>39</sup> He was insistent on the universality of the complex, even though he did acknowledge that he was late in recognizing a "primal link" to the mother.

He also claimed that working through the complex made the way for accession to genitality, which biological maturation does not guarantee.<sup>40</sup> For Freud this genital orientation clearly privileges the penis and makes clear the primacy of the phallus. This also sets the time for the consolidation of subjectivity rather late in a child's life. By denying the possibility of subject formation in a pre-oedipal position, Freud denies any maternal contribution to subjectivity. In psychodynamic terms girls cannot repudiate their mothers in such a drastic way without damaging their ego-ideal. By making such an extreme repudiation of the mother as prescribed in working through the complex, boys become alienated from their mothers. By transforming their mothers from love-object to sexual object to forbidden object, they deny any similarity between themselves and their mothers. Dorothy Dinnerstein suggests this is a great source of rage repressed

---

<sup>37</sup> See Lévi-Strauss, Claude, *Structures élémentaires de la parenté*, James Harle Bell and Richard von Sturmer trans., (Beacon Press, 1969).

<sup>38</sup> Laplanche, J. and J.-B Pontails, *The Language of Psycho-analysis*, (Hogarth, 1973), p. 286.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 283.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 285.

within boys, that manifests itself in the socially acceptable behaviors of anger against women, whether realized as violence or not.<sup>41</sup> Patriarchal society demands a masculine subjectivity and women's identification with it is part of women's subordination.<sup>42</sup> However, there are significant critiques of Freud, and many are from a specifically feminist perspective. For those analysts building upon psychoanalytic contributions of Melanie Klein, liberation and emancipation in terms of generating a human subjectivity would come about from a repositioning of the formative subjective moment to a pre-oedipal one, emphasizing the maternal dyad between mother and child.

### KRISTEVA AND THE SELF WITHIN THE OTHER

For feminist theorist such as Kristeva or Luce Irigaray in the Oedipal complex every woman is a lack. A woman without a penis is incomplete and suffers penis envy. At best the clitoris is a penis substitute which is wholly inadequate; at worst in this phallic-centric culture Irigaray suggests that female genitalia are invisible: the penis is the sexual organ *par excellence*. Nick Mansfield suggests that the symbolism of the phallic culture "emphasizes erection, unity, strength, and above all visibility."<sup>43</sup> The oedipal desire of a girl to have sexual union with her father is the desire to have the missing penis within her, and the oedipal desire to have a baby with the father is the desire to have the father place inside of her a baby which is a substitute for a penis. From this Freud's account of motherhood is either an attempt to satisfy penis envy or from a completely different perspective the desire to have a baby is a reactivated anal drive (the anal phase preceding the phallic) whereby the baby equals feces. While in the realm of Freud's theory all of this is fantasy, Kristeva asserts that this theoretical formulation is itself a male fantasy revealing Freud's androcen-

---

<sup>41</sup> See Dinnerstein, Dorothy, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and the Human Malaise*, (Harper Perennial, 1976).

<sup>42</sup> See Kristeva, Julia, *The Power of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, (Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 6.

<sup>43</sup> Mansfield, *op.cit.*, p. 70.

tricism.<sup>44</sup> It is engendered by the Western conflation of the maternal body with mother and woman. By repositioning the formation of subjectivity to a pre-oedipal position boys and girls have a like relationship with their mothers. Moreover, the mother is not sexualized. There can be a differentiation between mother, woman and maternal body. The child separates and differentiates from the maternal body, in order to achieve a relationship predicated upon love with the mother. This distinction between maternal body and mother, does not require children to repudiate women in the same act as separating from their mothers, as the oedipal position requires.

For Irigaray, this very multiplicity characterizes the feminine. She asserts that masculine culture premised on the Oedipal complex emphasizes separateness, exclusion. Perhaps from this we find the emphasis on autonomy as separateness. Recognition of the other, let alone inclusion of the other within the self, is a direct challenge to identity. The multiplicity of Irigaray's notion of femininity does not insist on this strict dividing line between self and other. A single subject can be mother, woman, and the maternal body. For Irigaray at the heart of this is the way in which the female genitalia subverts the emphasis on unity and consistency of meaning and identity found in masculine culture. The plurality of the female genitalia, because of its complexity and variety of surfaces, cannot be reduced to the singular logic of phallic form.<sup>45</sup> The denial of the strict and visible separations associated with masculine culture can be best understood in the course of pregnancy.

Kristeva calls pregnancy an "institutional psychosis,"<sup>46</sup> as the ego cannot distinguish between mother and child, for they are one and they are two. The ego understands the reality that they are two, codependent, but that they are also one body, one flesh. Kristeva asks "am I me or it?" In

---

<sup>44</sup> Oliver, Kelly, *Julia Kristeva's Speaking Body*, [in:] *Transitions in Continental Philosophy*, Dallery, Arleen, Stephen Watson and E. Marya Bower (eds.), (State University of New York Press, 1994), p. 104. C.f. Kristeva, Julia, *Tales of Love*, (Columbia University Press, 1987), p. 255.

<sup>45</sup> Mansfield, *op.cit.*, pp. 70–71.

<sup>46</sup> Oliver, *op.cit.*, p. 97.

this case the other cannot be separated from the self. Kelly Oliver describes this in a voice befitting a discussion of Kristeva:

The other is within the self. It is not in its place – the place of the other. It is, rather, in the place of the subject. This inability to separate self from other is a symptom of psychosis, the fundamental psychosis upon which any relationship is built.<sup>47</sup>

The mother knows that there is no transcendent other, no phallus, separate and visible. The other is of her flesh, and from that the other is natural, and most importantly the other is loved. This relationship is not an external one, not premised on the phallus and therefore unfulfillable. Even at the moment of birth the other is not yet autonomous. Connected by the umbilical cord the self and the other remain one even as the body inside becomes the body outside. Only through the act of love for the other and simultaneously love for the self, the cord can be cut. This act of separation is in fact the bond of the mother-child relationship.

One of Kristeva's most original insights is her proposition of the fluid nature of subject formation. Rather than suggesting the subject is to be taken for granted as a given, Kristeva suggests that the subject is constantly being defined and altered. The subject is, she suggests, a polymorph.<sup>48</sup> The subject is never stable, but is constantly re-establishing the boundaries of its identity. This occurs mostly through the act of abjection, whereby some part of the self that is threatened or perceived to be weak, may be cast off and projected as the basis of an other. In this each identity of the self has its antipode within it. "The pattern and logic of alterity is already found in the subject."<sup>49</sup> This process of abjection, of splitting and casting off those parts seen as dirty or violated, is a prohibition. So while the self is in constant activity with the other, redefining itself through the rejection of the other, there is a constant fear of the abject returning and claiming its original place within the subject. This fear is the fear of the return of the

---

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 98.

<sup>48</sup> Kristeva, Julia, *Strangers to Ourselves*, (Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 37.

<sup>49</sup> Oliver, *op.cit.*, p. 96.



repressed. For if the repressed were to return, it would destroy the newly established subjective sense of the self. The abject is a crisis for the subject: an obsessive fear of collapsing into the self-created other. This prohibition, then, is maintained through the violence of debasement.<sup>50</sup>

Just as social relationship of self and other can be founded on a prohibition, so too can it on love. To return to the maternal body as example, the distinction of self and other is not a prohibition between mother and child, but love. Love for the child as expressed as love for the self before separation and becomes the mother's willingness to give up herself. This love for herself might be seen in patriarchal terms, as narcissism, or the inability to love, but is the basis for a new ethics, what Kristeva calls herethics.<sup>51</sup>

This love that serves as the basis for herethics is the love of a child through identification with her mother. A mother's love is her reunion with her own mother, not as a third party, but as love for herself. Likewise the child's transference identification with the imaginary father is an identification with the mother's reunion with her own mother. For Kelly Oliver, Kristeva's notion of the love for the other, the stranger within ourselves, may serve as the basis by which we can love the other, the stranger, outside of ourselves. "If we can learn to live with the return of the repressed in ourselves, then we can learn to live with the return of the repressed in society."<sup>52</sup> The suggestion is a powerful one. Rather than expelling the negative within ourselves and projecting it upon the other, learning to live with the return of the repressed in society requires that we find in ourselves the positive of the other. Kristeva suggests that such an inability to distinguish self from other, what she calls a fundamental psychosis, should be the basis of any relationship.<sup>53</sup> This goes beyond Gadamer's proposition that human understanding can be best realized through a "fusing of horizons."<sup>54</sup> The engagement of self and other in Gadamer's case

---

<sup>50</sup> Kristeva, 1991, p. 187.

<sup>51</sup> Oliver, *op.cit.*, p. 97.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 96.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 98.

<sup>54</sup> Gadamer, Hans Gerog, *Truth and Method*, (Continuum Publishing, 1993).

leaves behind something of one another in each other after the engagement. Kristeva suggests that we find something within ourselves that connects us to the other before we engage in order to fuse horizons.

Likewise, Melanie Klein's approach to psychoanalysis through object relations suggests that two seeming opposite determinations can be held simultaneously. At center is Klein's proposition that adaptive subjects can manage ambivalent images of good and bad within a single entity, whether it be the self or representations of the other. The psychoanalytic insights of Klein keep ego-formation within the dyad of the mother-child relationship and within the time frame of pre-oedipal development. Klein believes that superego coalescence occurred much earlier than Freud does. She believes that most formative developments occurred in what Freud referred to as the oral phase, beginning at roughly three to four months of age, and replaces Freud's notion of phases with reference to positions associated with object relationships. Two fundamental positions contribute to superego formation: the "paranoid-schizoid" and the "depressive positions." She uses the term "positions" to suggest that these are not phases to be grown out of; in fact she believes that these positions are never permanently transcended, but that even adults can vacillate between the two positions.

In the paranoid-schizoid position the infant believes the "bad" breast, the breast of denial, to be a persecutor punishing it for aggressive attacks, withholding for itself the gratification denied to the child. Likewise the infant idealizes the "good" breast, which never fails to yield satisfaction to its demands.<sup>55</sup> When the child encounters the "good" breast it abolishes the "bad." When the infant learns to perceive the mother as a person, learns that both the "bad" breast of which the infant lived in fear, and the "good" which the child idealized are of the same mother, the infant move into the depressive position. This is characterized by an anxiety of guilt and regret that the child caused injury to the mother by abolishing the "bad" breast. The child has the urge to "make reparations."<sup>56</sup> Overcoming

---

<sup>55</sup> Wright, Elizabeth, *Psychoanalytic Criticism: A Reappraisal*, (Routledge, 1998), p. 72.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 72.

the depressive position requires the abandoning the fantasy of omnipotent control over the love-object in favor of accepting the reality of the relationship, whether it be one of dependence of a child on a mother or otherwise. In this case, the child would weld the “good” and “bad” images of the mother as a single internal representation of the love-object, and also come to accept that the child never had the power to destroy the mother or the power to repair her. Overcoming the depressive position is the subject’s learning to live with ambivalence. The depressive position itself represents the maturation process.

The ability to weld good and bad images represents a kind of multiplicity, for it denies the need for a singularity. The attempt to hold image representations of love-objects as either all good or all bad often leads to the manifestation of psychopathology. Perhaps the rage and violence associated with masculine society is likewise the manifestation of a psychopathology related to insistence on singularity and unity or identity and self-other representations.

#### THE PROCESS OF BECOMING AND SOME CONCLUSIONS

Ian Buchanan describes Giles Deleuze’s proposition of “becoming” as presented in the commentary on Herman Melville, “Bartelby; or, The Formula” as the basis of a total critique. Catarina Kinnvall proposes something similar; she suggests that while individuals try to present their “core-selves,” a steady and determined self. Yet in fact we are unable to do so. Identity is established dialogically, in a social setting, whereby individuals define themselves “in relation to others according to the perception of the positions within the structural basis of power.”<sup>57</sup> Put simply, identity is constantly negotiated and in flux. Kinnvall suggests that individuals present “as-if” selves, as if they are the bearer of lasting identities.<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>57</sup> Kinnvall, Catarina, *Globalization and Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity and the Search for Ontological Security*, “Political Psychology” 2004, Vol. 25, No. 4, pp. 741–767.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibidem*.

In these presentations people explore the boundaries between interiority and exteriority, attempting to discern where they stand.

For Deleuze simply identifying or even transgressing the limits of social acceptability does little to change society or the structures of domination because “it preserves the idea of the limit.”<sup>59</sup> The goal rather should be a stage of “indiscernibility” where it is no longer possible to identify a thing as one or another. “Identification is exchanged for proximity” where whole “zones of indistinction” become centers of creation.<sup>60</sup> “Becoming” is a process; it is an act, whereby one thing is transformed and continues to be transformed, such that it is its own thing, new and unnamable. Becoming-woman is the free identification beyond man and woman; it is something new and therefore not yet identifiable, and so long as it continues to transform it will remain a “becoming” the process of transcendence.

Deleuze and Guattari presented the notion of becoming in conjunction with their description of rhizomatic action. The Rhizome is antithesis of Arborescent knowledge. In arborescent knowledge “one element only receives information from a higher unit and only receives subjective affection along pre-established paths.”<sup>61</sup> To counter this system of hierarchy and subordination, they suggest engagement along the mode of the Rhizome, that which is multiplicitious, heterogeneous, and moving in all directions at once. Distinct from the model of the tree, the Rhizome is grass, distinct yet connected through the roots, differentiated yet comprising a totality. In the example of becoming Deleuze and Guattari suggest the wasp and the orchid become a rhizome, each engaged with the other to the point where they are not simply dependent, they have become something together: becoming-wasp.<sup>62</sup> This is a transcendence of subjectivity. In its most multiplicitious form, individual autonomy or individual subjectivity would be obliterated in the becoming of innumerable social

---

<sup>59</sup> Buchanan, Ian, *Deleuzism: A Metacommentary*, (Duke University Press, 2000), p. 94.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 95.

<sup>61</sup> Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari, *One Thousand Plateaus*, (University of Minnesota, 1987), p. 16.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibidem*, p.10.

interactions, each transformative and satisfying, such that they might become a praxis of gratification.

They rightfully critique Lacian and Freudian psychoanalysis as being patriarchal, androcentric and oppressive. They propose replacing psychoanalysis with schizoanalysis, suggesting that the basis of psychosis or at least neurosis is the superegoist internalizations or social inhibitions, prohibitions and limits. The move, they claim, would reveal the hidden and obscure dimensions of subjectivity.

Ferenc Fehér distinguishes between egalitarianism as a material enterprise and as a practice or social engagement that points out, highlights, and opposes inequality. This is different than treating egalitarianism as an achievable materialist goal; rather Fehér suggests this type of commitment to egalitarianism is the implementation of a social warning system indicating concrete inequalities before they become enduring or systemic.<sup>63</sup> Perhaps this is the best way to engage Deleuze and Guattari. Their call for complete transcendence, complete critique, challenges hegemonic domination, and is not dissimilar to Marx's early call for a "Ruthless Critique of Everything Existing." Klein and Kristeva's critiques of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis take us similar places, and each also offer us a means to rethink gender. Deleuze's and Guattari's focus on process also brings us back to Gramsci. The proposal of Rhizomatic action is another weapon in the arsenal to be deployed in a war of position against capitalism's hegemony. Likewise a re-conceptualization of subjectivity and the processes of its formation offer new insights into autonomy and the potential for self-actualization. Yet I am more convinced Gramsci's philosophy of praxis can be enacted as a realizable human practice. Moreover it is Gramsci that is attentive to the cultural and historical contexts of action. In many ways autonomy and heteronomy are two sides of the same coin of self-actualization. In its current, liberal form, the autonomy of the individual enshrined in rights-based politics denies the possibility of self-actualization to the subaltern, whether she is conceived in gender politics

---

<sup>63</sup> Fehér, Ferenc and Agness Heller, *Eastern Left, Western Left: Totalitarianism, Freedom and Democracy*, (Humanities Press International 1987), pp. 39–40.

or in class politics. The promotion of an ideal equal opportunity for self-actualization under the terms of liberalism is the myth of autonomy.

### ABSTRACT

Self-actualization is often touted but rarely achieved. The Liberal frame that champions autonomy requires strict conformity: conformity to laws assured by state force, conformity to market transaction assured by privileging private property, conformity to limited collective action assured by the social atomization which comes from the construction of negative rights. This paper explores the many impediments to autonomous self-actualization within the rubric of liberalism, including the superegoistic internalizations of mores and taboos elucidated by Western-oriented psychoanalysis. It further explores the possibility that self-actualization may be more readily achieved through what Gramsci referred to as “heteronomy:” self-consciously engaged collective social action. By examining the mechanisms of self-limitation through the dynamics of superego development, the paper posits that self-actualization may best be realized through collective articulation of ethics and morality which are constantly situational. In this, the paper takes up the Deleuzian and Guattarian propositions of simultaneous, multiplicitious identities, deterritorialized and evaluated only within the multitude of a given moment in time and space. The dynamic and contextual quality of this discursive engagement is not one of relativity, but characterized by the intersubjectivity of the participants. This specificity – specificity of interlocutors, specificity of locality, and specificity of time – provides for unique self-actualization, which neither reifies nor objectifies selves, but suggests that individuals are not essences, but subjective beings which are as dynamic as the social situations they create. Thus self-actualization cannot be achieved alone, but only within a collective discursive context. This context must be characterized as a social forum of praxis, for instrumentality or technical motivations disrupt the contributions not only of the actor guided by *techne*, but the contributions of the whole for disingenuousness makes intersubjectivity impossible. Collectively articulated ethics and morals cannot be adjudicated by a discursive forum which is

tainted by motives of self-gain. Instrumentality of one impedes the ability of all others to self-actualize. Thus, self-actualization only comes within the context of heteronymous action. This paper will thus interrogate the consequences of inverting the age-old problem of public action – autonomous self-actualization is threatened by free-loading – and suggests that collective self-actualization is impeded by self-oriented, atomistic, instrumentality.