The Self That Therefore I Am Not:

Jacques Lacan, Zen Buddhism, and the Practice of Subjectivity

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I believe in the kingdom come.
Then all the colors will bleed into one,
Bleed into one,
But yes, I'm still running.
You broke the bonds,
And you loosed the chains,
Carried the cross
Of my shame,
Oh my shame.
You know I believe it.
But I still haven't found what I'm looking for.
But I still haven't found what I'm looking for.
But I still haven't found what I'm looking for.
But I still haven't found what I'm looking for.

From "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For" by U2

The encounter with Buddhism may prove an essential step for the West to free itself from its attachment to individualized personal existence as a final good. The West is prepared for this encounter by its increasing recognition of the appalling price in human misery and risk to human survival that has been paid for our achievements in personal existence. We have become disillusioned with the view that these problems can be solved by appeals to justice and personal righteousness. We recognize that radical changes are required. But we are frightened by the prospects of change. Perhaps the encounter with the transpersonal existence of the Buddhist, the recognition of the serenity and strength it embodies, the experience of Buddhist meditation, and the study of Buddhist philosophy will give us the courage to venture into that kind of radical love which can carry us into a postpersonal form of Christian existence.

John Cobb

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From Kenosis to Emptiness

This project began with the suspicion that the late modern and postmodern conceptions of the subject as significantly culturally constructed and decentered needed a personal, existential complement, which I presumed could be realized through a kenotically Christian spirituality. Moreover, this work has been driven by the Hegelian, sociological, and Foucauldian understanding of a subject who is the bearer of a history and a culture and therefore has internalized and been conditioned to propagate the dynamics and forms of which it is an heir. It is my contention that the mistaken experience of subjectivity as an ego that is self-identical, transparently self-present, separate, perduring, and originarily agential, which fosters an identification with, retention of, and replication of internalized antecedence, is the primary factor allowing societal priority to have its way in and through the subject and thereby reproduce itself with largely unchallenged continuity. Thus, kenotic spiritual practice could be a way to overcome the illusion of selfhood, divest oneself of much of a hamartiologically laden inheritance, connect with what I will name as the Real, realize a new freedom, and perform subjectivity in ways that don't so extensively continue a problematic cultural precedence.

This very personal project is at the same time and definitively a justice matter. Any pursuit of justice must have a deeply personal dimension, for the rudiments of oppression deeply inhabit us all: the Lacanian Other is the cultural order internalized. As Plato, Aristotle, the authors of the Hebrew Bible, and, more recently, Leo Strauss, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Stanley Hauerwas have argued, a just political order is predicated on the constitutive force of virtuous subjects. On the other hand, there is a form of virtue espoused by many conservatives that too readily accords with the status quo and is too divorced from a commitment to justice for the marginalized. Moreover, we certainly should

not follow Plato, Aristotle, or the Bible in every aspect of their ancient conceptions of the good. But we must recuperate the notion that justice is also a matter of the rightness of conduct and *the character of the means employed to pursue socially just ends*. Justice ought to entail fairness, courage, humility, temperance, integrity, and a reverence for salutary and relevant iterations of traditional wisdom. We must rehabilitate a valuation of everyday affairs as bearers of ethical weight that emergently coalesce to produce encompassing structures. The emergent ideal of social justice, if it is to be realized, requires a personal commitment on the part of us subjects to transform ourselves, for the higher order of society supervenes upon the diurnal deeds of us all, and the most pervasive form of egoism propagates this order in accordance with its presently fallen condition.

To wed oneself to the ethics of a given cultural formation is to forestall righteousness significantly and to lose oneself in a thralldom to the internalized force of societal normality. This is probably what happens in most instances of evangelical regeneration: one moves from full-blown egoism to service of what Lacan would call the symbolic order, the domain of culture, language, and law. Given the symbolic order's retention of the historical, it is heavily laden with traditional mores in the domains of gender and sexuality, and, in light of its potent and ethically oriented sway, it produces a normative force that is frequently mistaken for divine influence. However, the relative virtue of the subject who accommodates himself or herself to this mammoth machine, the in-group sense of superiority conferred by collectives of moralists, and the belief in postmortem blessing redound to the aggrandizement of the ego, further rendering the subject's transformation incomplete. Moreover, he or she becomes a servant of the emergent ego of the collective, the *sōma tou christou*. While affection might reign among the members of the flock, the aggressivity of the collective ego is directed toward the heathen. Sublimated Eros among the insiders, raw Thanatos for the outsiders.

Ethics and morality are inconceivable apart from the symbolic order, though. They are therefore insufficient to realize the best personal ends which they seek to facilitate. This is part of the reason that Paul was right in recognizing that law is never capable *by itself* of being salvific. But it is imperative to recognize that there is much within the Hebrew Bible, especially in the Psalms, Ecclesiastes, Job, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, that accords with this insight. Paul was of course talking about a certain way of subjectifying the Jewish law, but in that he saw this nomic system as the best one, his critique a fortiori applies to the subjectification of any form of law or morality. In this respect, there is, mutatis mutandis, a parallel with Zen, which produces moral subjects without a discursively moral thrust, for it holds that there must be a spiritual remaking of the subject that extends to a depth that signifiers cannot reach. And as Lacan would insist, where there is no signifier, there is no morality.

This project unfolds in part in accordance with what I take to be the existential heart of Paul's kenotic spirituality. For Paul, the death and resurrection of Christ were not simply conjunctively foundational events; they were rather subjectified as a pattern of existence: "Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4). Baptism was a figure for the way the Christian life was to be a reenactment of Christ's death and resurrection: the old self was to be crucified and a new, trans-egoic, resurrected existence was to ensue. However, might not the literal interpretation of the resurrection, informed by a background of apocalyptic dualism and the doctrine of a general resurrection, a final judgment, and an infinite bifurcation, be seen as a disastrous mistake? When applied to the regenerate condition, the literal understanding of the resurrection led to a conception of the transformed state as blissful, infinite personhood. And the inevitable concomitant was either utter destruction or infinite suffering for those outside the fold. And has not the category of the "reprobate" perennially been a constitutive, abject exteriority that

has affirmed the egos of insiders, thereby forestalling the latter's realization of the transpersonal condition?

Therefore, while this work will be conducted in a kenotic spirit, I find that at the heart of most iterations of orthodox self-emptying are appeals to the ego that can readily vitiate the endeavor. Furthermore, if one grows up as a Christian and then recognizes the necessity of heeding the imperative to lose one's self in order to find true life, can one go on being a Christian? If discourse is potently constitutive of subjectivity, as Foucault and Lacan have shown, is not the discourse of things ultimate, so readily cathected, tethered to identity, reiteratively reinforced, and continuous with both one's formative milieu and the affective flows that bind one to beloved others, particularly definitive of what is taken to be the self? And is not this seeming selfhood the very thing that Jesus and Paul both said must be crucified for new life to be found? The formatively Christian subject is faced with the option of either remaining a Christian in the same vein or acting on the New Testament's most central teaching … without being able to do both.

In order to overcome that Christian solidity which can impede thoroughgoing kenosis, I will turn to a form of formlessness in another spiritual source, one which can radically cut off the subject from much of her internalized discursive inheritance and decisively end egoic tyranny: Zen Buddhism. My key interlocutors from the Zen tradition will be Masao Abe and D.T. Suzuki. The former is associated with the Kyoto School, which has maintained a long tradition of rigorous Zen thinking interacting with Western thought, and the latter was famous for helping to popularize Zen in the West. For these Zen teachers, newness of life is found by experiencing Reality (or suchness) as it truly is apart from egoic and cognitive projection. Such experience opens an inner spaciousness which, I argue, allows one to practice subjectivity without having to so[1] extensively propagate the

[1] Given that the symbolic order deeply inhabits the subject, it is impossible to utterly rid oneself of internalized cultural precedent.

cultural powers that are productive of the fallen self and rely upon that fictive personal entity in order to continue and expand.

Zen attends deeply and attentively to the subject to emancipate her or him not simply from the ego but also from the symbolic fictions which conspire with the false conception of self to mire her or him in the morass of avidya: a deluding, vice-inducing ignorance. Yet Zen does not contain the intellectual resources to rigorously understand the coincidence of culturally embedded forms and human subjectivity. In order to better comprehend how culture constitutes the subject, I will turn to the work of Jacques Lacan. Lacan combined Freudian psychoanalysis with structuralist linguistics, anthropology, and sociology in order to parse how the subject is inhabited and formed by societal influence. He also developed a theory of the ego as aggressive, narcissistic, and introjected. Both the sense of a subject deeply inhabited by culturally invested linguistic forms and the notion of an ego that masquerades as a self but is opposed to the subject's best interests dovetail quite nicely with the Zen Buddhist themes of the significant problems with conventional cognition and the ego as the root of evil. For Lacan, there are three dimensions to human subjectivity and experience: the imaginary, the realm of images and the ego; the symbolic, the domain of language, law, and culture; and the Real, which is everything as it is apart from imaginary and symbolic projection. The realization of the Real is precisely the goal of Zen Buddhism, though the Zen experience of immersion in the Real significantly diverges from Lacan's occasional and halting experiences with the realm beyond words and images.

A Fertile Hybridity: The Comparative Theological Approach

This is therefore a work drawing primarily on the form of scholarship developed within the subdiscipline of comparative theology. The latter is an increasingly expansive domain in which Christian (and, in some instances, differently religious) scholars wade deeply into the waters issuing

from a non-Christian spiritual spring and return to the fold to share their potentially enriching finds. Part of the impetus for doing comparative theology is the increasing globalism and pluralism of our age, which forces us not simply to tolerate religious others, but also beckons us to respect, learn from, and work with them. In contradistinction to a classically orthodox position that asserts Christian supremacy or even a Rahnerian inclusivism that sees all forms of spiritual transformation, regardless of what context they occur in, as essentially, if apophatically, Christian, the real diversity of descriptions of ultimacy among adherents of various religions is for the comparative theologian more a boon than a dilemma. "Religious diversity," insists John Thataminil, is a "promise rather than problem."[2] And a "celebration of diversity," he writes, is "essential to life itself."[3] James Fredericks has pointed to the increasingly global reach of our connections and communications, the concomitantly more frequent encounter of religious difference, and the necessity of partnering with and learning from religious others.[4] He claims both that "we need to cultivate new forms of social solidarity with neighbors who follow other religious paths"[5] and that we need to learn from them for the sake of our own spiritual edification. Thataminil particularly accents the call to affirm diversity by pointing to the internal multiplicity and continuity with externality in all religious traditions: "We must find ways of engaging in interreligious dialogue without adopting a problematic understanding of religions as: a) internally homogeneous, b) marked by rigid and impermeable boundaries, c) marked by radical difference that amounts to utter incommensurability, and d) so likely to be caught up in conflict."[6] The quest to affirm diversity, as Thataminil's words evince, is driven in a large part by a desire for more irenic interreligious relations. And, my God, this is so necessary. However, is

[2] John Thatamanil, *Circling the Elephant: A Comparative Theology of Religious Diversity* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2020), 1
[3] Ibid.
[4] James Fredericks, *Buddhists and Christians: Through Comparative Theology to Solidarity* (NY: Maryknoll, 2004), x-xi.
[5] Ibid., x.
[6] Thatamanil, *Circling the Elephant*, 39.

diversity what we necessarily encounter experientially when we engage with religious alterity? And is the recognition of ubiquitous diversity as an intrinsic good necessary for peaceable relations? Furthermore, is a religion, which is inevitably a subjectifying power-knowledge apparatus, primarily a force for good that we should automatically be inclined to affirm?

The affirmation of "diversity" sometimes accompanies a detached, distant gaze that surveys what is taken to be an ontically segmented expanse. And in groups and institutions that proudly affirm and embrace diversity, there are almost always insufficiently criticized forms of homogeneity. When I engage with a religious other, I do not primarily encounter diversity but difference. According to Homi Bhabha, "cultural difference as an *enunciative* category, opposed to relativistic notions of cultural diversity, or the exoticism of the 'diversity' of cultures"[7] can be a source of subversively productive novelty. In this discursive modality, one can draw from seemingly incommensurable domains simultaneously without having to affirm the totality of their replicating and subjectifying traditionalism: "Here the transformational value of change lies in the rearticulation, or translation, of elements that are *neither the One … nor the Other … but something else besides*, which contests the terms and territories of both."[8] I will operate, then, from an in-between, hybrid space, making use of my Christian heritage, Lacanian theory, and Zen Buddhism to create something continuously discontinuous with all three realms.

My project perhaps accords more with the pioneering work of John Cobb, who did comparative theology before it was an established academic domain, than it does with the more contemporary works in the subdiscipline. Cobb explicitly attempted to create a Christian-Buddhist synthesis, with the goal being both to enrich Christianity with Buddhist anthropological and soteriological insights and to call on Buddhists to address their failure to significantly support a

[7] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (NY: Routledge, 1994), 85.
[8] Ibid., 41.

social ethic, a historical consciousness, the pursuit of science, and a valuation of particularity. Cobb, then, is more forceful in his aspirations to go beyond learning from the religious other in order to help her: "Dialogue has a missional goal. That Christian hope to make a difference in others through dialogue should not be concealed."[9]

Cobb clearly sees that Christian anthropology is in a problematic condition. In short, the Christian understands herself or himself in terms that are too substantial. The substantial self, at once Christian and other than biblical anthropological models, maintains a walled-off continuity through time and a recalcitrant and essential distance from the presumed accidentality of alterity. "The problems of mutual externality and isolation and the sense of the radical difference between the relation to the neighbor and the relation to the self have all been accentuated in the past by Western substantilist conceptualization."[10] The command to love another *as* oneself is impossible for such a reified and isolable subject. Cobb therefore asserts that a qualified adoption of the Buddhist principle of anatman (no self) could make us better Christians. Yet he proposes a Whiteheadian anthropological model whereby one does not dissolve selfhood utterly but becomes increasingly aware of the alterior events that inhabit oneself, to which one is inextricably and constitutively connected, and which impugn a strong notion of perduring subjectivity. Cobb's solution, then, is not utter detachment from the illusion of the self but a more expansively diffuse and far less self-centered form of attachment that disrupts a subjectivity of diachronic essentiality. He believes that the trace element of retention of selfhood and the valuation of particularity that the model entails, while admittedly less radical than an unequivocal embrace of the principle of anatman, would forestall the dehistoricizing and departicularizing tendencies he finds in Buddhism. I want to go a step beyond Cobb to lean in fully to the anatmanic void but then allow Emptiness to empty itself

[9] John Cobb, *Beyond Dialogue: Toward a Mutual Transformation of Christianity and Buddhism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1998), 50.
[10] Cobb, *Beyond Dialogue*, 109.

and, like Cobb, assert the importance of Christian resources for helping to articulate the affirmation of the particular, a qualified symbolic and intellectual investment, and a social ethic.

But I also hope to branch out beyond the discipline of theology to a greater extent than most comparative theologians have. I see no reason why comparative theology need only concern itself with "religious" thinkers. What is religion if not, as Tillich argued, a movement toward ultimacy? As Robert Neville has written, "religion should be defined philosophically as those elements in the human engagement of the world (which has very many different kinds of things in it) that relate to ultimacy."[11] But is this definition not at odds with modern conceptions of religion? Are we willing to restrict the access to ultimacy to those who identify with what is generally classified as a religious tradition? And is not "religion" a Procrustean category that is a modern, Western invention? John Thataminil has argued cogently that religion is analogous to race in that both are relatively recent Occidental constructs that have been distortingly consequential and are lacking in intrinsic verity.[12] Thataminil insists that comparative theology must also contribute to constructive theology and the theology of religious diversity, and this is a helpful suggestion. But are these not subdisciplines whose academic status and sway owe much to the reified category of religion which he deconstructs? Is it not possible that comparative theology contains the potential to contribute to philosophy, which has often presupposed an orientation to ultimacy? Furthermore, human access to ultimacy requires the subject; the subject is a kind of universal penultimate. Anthropology, sociology, and psychology, then, can fruitfully be brought to bear on discussions of ultimacy.

Instead of operating with the sullied category of religion, I choose to use the less institutionally bound term of spirituality. Of course, I do not exactly mean spirituality in the way it is now employed by many who claim to be "spiritual but not religious." I am insisting on a more

[11] Robert Cummings Neville, *Ultimates: Philosophical Theology, Volume 1* (Albany, SUNY Press, 2013), 6.
[12] See Chapter 1: "Religious Difference and Christian Theology," in *Circling the Elephant*, 21-40.

rigorous definition of spirituality, one that owes much to the late work of Michel Foucault. Foucault spent much of the latter part of his career studying and writing about the generally neglected domain of Greco-Roman spirituality. Whereas the imperative to know yourself (*gnothi seauton*), inscribed on the entrance to the Delphic oracle and brought into philosophy by Socrates, has been a dictum traditionally cherished by rationalistic modern Westerners, Foucault has shown that for both Socrates and the ancients in general, it was secondary to the more general and less strictly rational practice of the care of the self (*epimeleia heaoutou*). The care of the self, according to Foucault, was a general existential framework of rigorous self-cultivation, a form of intently conscious attention to the movements of the mind (similar to what Buddhists call mindfulness), and a set of spiritual practices "by which one changes, purifies, transforms, and transfigures oneself."[13] Elsewhere he writes, "I think we could call 'spirituality' the search, practice, and experience through which the subject carries out the necessary transformations on himself in order to have access to the truth. We will call 'spirituality' then the set of these researches, practices, and experiences, which may be purifications, ascetic exercises, renunciations, conversions of looking, modifications of existence, etc., which are, not for knowledge but for the subject, for the subject's very being, the price to be paid for access to the truth."[14] I would add, though, that the highest domain to be sought cannot be captured by words and so is not constituted by truth in the Western sense. This amendment would make Foucault's work on spirituality better cohere with his earlier troubling of the will to truth as often coterminous with oppressive power.

Regardless, it must be noted that the emphasis on self-transformation and seeking a higher truth, even, or especially, if the latter is trans-discursive, is remarkably consonant with not only Zen but also a host of spiritualities spanning both the globe and many centuries. Unfortunately, there was

[13] Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-1982*, tr. Graham Burchell, ed. Frédéric Gros (NY: Picador, 2005), 11.
[14] Ibid., 15

a kyriarchal dimension to the Greco-Roman care of the self. To care for the self was also to master the feminine passions with a masculine reason, and this self-mastery was always imbricated with kyriarchal societal structures. In *The History of Sexuality, Volume 2: The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault highlights the centrality of *enkrateia* in the ethics of Classical Greece. *Enkrateia* was "characterized … by an active form of self-mastery, which enables one to resist or struggle, and to achieve domination in the area of desires and pleasures."[15] It implied a masculinist anthropological hierarchy which replicated and reinforced the patriarchal social structure of the classical world. To be sure, the salience of mastery within coinciding with a kyriarchy without was somewhat altered in the late Hellenistic and Roman periods by a form of self-cultivation in which caring for oneself as though one were one's own physician became as important as ruling oneself and mastery of the passions did not as readily translate to mastery of other persons.[16] Nevertheless, the Logos remained ascendant and with it a fundamental dualism. I am seeking instead a nondual solution to the human condition which sees rationality itself as far more problematic than both our pagan and Christian forebears did.

Foucault also describes the care of the self as ego affirmative, an assertion that elements of Greco-Roman self-cultivation defied. Contrasting the *epimeleia heautou* with derivative Christian and modern moralities enjoining self-abnegation, he writes, "Christianity and the modern world has based all these themes and codes of moral strictness on a morality of non-egoism whereas in actual fact they were born within an environment strongly marked by the obligation to take care of oneself?"[17] But why should attending to oneself be necessarily egoic and problematizing the ego be a rejection of self-concern? In Zen, and, more broadly, in mystical traditions spanning both the globe and many centuries, attending to oneself and transcending the ego have been coterminous

[15] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 2: The Use of Pleasure*, tr. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990), 64.
[16] See *The History of Sexuality: Volume 3: The Care of the Self*, tr. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1988).
[17] Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 13.

movements. Furthermore, choosing a spirituality that is ostensibly ego-affirmative is a curious move for someone who believed that the subject has been deeply formed to propagate problematic power dynamics.

As a main thrust of this project is to describe the transcendence of the ego, it would seem that I must prefer the more self-abnegating Christian forms of care of the self. However, as I have shown, there is much that appeals to the ego in foundational Christian texts. Whereas Foucault prefers Greco-Roman to Christian spirituality because it is more self-affirming, I am turning to Zen spirituality because I find both the Greco-Roman and Christian traditions too ego affirmative, dualistic, and discursively coterminous with a kyriarchal milieu. To be sure, Zen nondualists have tended to uncritically embrace the foundational binaries of gender and unjust societal orders, but I find the insistence on moving into profound personal spaces that exceed the limits of discourse potentially more amenable to resisting problematic power-knowledge, provided that one does not linger in the depths to such an extent that one becomes politically indifferent and that the trans-verbal experience is wedded to a necessarily verbal and practical ethic.

Lacanian thought contains both a subjectivity of saturated verbality and a realm beyond the reach of words. But can the psychoanalytic theory of Lacan be considered fodder for spirituality? For Foucault, Lacanian psychoanalysis in fact resumes the ancient practice of the care of the self: "Lacan tried to pose what historically is the specifically spiritual question: that of the price the subject must pay for saying the truth, and of the effect on the subject of the fact that he has said, that he can and has said the truth about himself. By restoring this question, I think Lacan actually reintroduced into psychoanalysis the oldest tradition, the oldest questioning, and the oldest disquiet of the *epimeleia heautou*, which was the most general form of spirituality."[18] Yet I will be more interested in Lacan's anthropology than his spirituality, while recognizing that the two domains are

[18] Ibid., 30.

not utterly distinct. I see what Foucault describes as the Lacanian return to the care of the self to be too connected to the Western conception of truth as principally discursive. However, insofar as the truth to be realized is the Real beyond words, I am in accordance with Lacan. Yet I will approximately describe the Real in terms more consonant with Buddhism and process theology, all the while insisting that the Real is ultimately beyond definition.

The Sound of One Hand Lying on Freud's Couch: Buddhism and Psychoanalysis

Since I am seeking to create a spiritual bridge between psychoanalysis and Buddhism, it is imperative to examine some of the history of other attempts to do so. After Freud, psychoanalysis tended to dismiss Hindu and Buddhist spirituality as culminating in a return to the sense of egoic boundlessness preceding individuation. This widespread, dismissive contention is rooted in a few brief comments in *Civilization and its Discontents*. In this monumental work, Freud related an exchange with a friend who claimed in Schleiermachian fashion that "the ultimate source of religious sentiments … consists in a particular feeling, which never leaves him personally … which he would like to call a sensation of 'eternity,' a feeling of something limitless, unbounded, something 'oceanic.'"[19] For Freud, this intuition of vast, boundary-dissolving connectedness directly contradicts the tendency of the ego to maintain a strict boundary between itself and alterity. Freud turns for an explanation of this religious sensibility to the infantile ego, which initially does not distinguish between itself and the outer world (For Lacan, this means the ego has not formed yet.). Freud also contends that the history of the subject's experience is retained by the mind, so there is usually an inchoate remembrance of this primally expansive state: "the ideational content belonging to [this retention] would be precisely the notion of limitless extension and oneness with the universe – the

[19] Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, tr. Joan Riviere (Blacksburg, VA: Wilder Publications, 2010), 4.

feeling as that described by my friend as 'oceanic.'"[20] Freud concludes thus: "That feeling of oneness with the universe which is its ideational content sounds very like a first attempt at the consolations of religion, like another way taken by the ego of denying the dangers it sees threatening it in the external world."[21] And since the adepts of both Hinduism and Buddhism describe their spiritual awakenings in terms that are in many ways consonant with this "oceanic feeling," these traditions were generally dismissed by early followers of Freud as being regressive.

However, commonality does not equate with identicality, and those who operate from a fixed position that is shared by most of their peers, as is often the case with the consensus of a professional discipline, can too readily both unwarrantedly assume that their shared normality equates to truth and over-assimilate instances of otherness. These latter disparate things and events swim and then dissolve in the melting pot of not-us-ness, thereby constituting a forced unity that ricochets back to affirm the insiders' egoic aspirations for self-identicality, which always needs a constitutive, unitary foil. The Western gaze has tended to homogenize alterity stereotypically, even as it has relegated collated others to a status of inferiority. Ken Wilber has posited that Freud operates with the pre/trans fallacy, mistakenly identifying transrational and transpersonal experience with prerational and prepersonal infancy.[22] Those who operate with this fallacy either dismissively reduce spiritual experience to the infantile condition or mistakenly attempt to elevate the elements of the latter, seeing them as components of trans-egoic subjectivity. For Wilber, Freud's tendencies are of the former variety and are coterminous with the belief that "rationality is the great and final omega point of individual and collective development, the high-water mark of all evolution."[23]

[20] Ibid., 7.
[21] Ibid., 11.
[22] See Ken Wilber, *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality: The Spirit of Evolution* (Boston, Shambala, 2000), 210-213.
[23] Ibid., 211.

It is also instructive to remember that Freud's move to call a very Easternly congenial depiction of religiosity regressive was in keeping with a Western attitude that considered Eastern cultures to be developmentally inferior. Ania Loomba has commented insightfully on the paternalism of a colonialism that reached its apex during Freud's lifetime: "The colonial state cast itself as the *parens patriae*, controlling but also supposedly providing for its children. In the colonial situation, the familial vocabulary was not limited to the relations between state and subject but became the means of expressing racial or cultural relations as well. The white man's burden was constructed as a parental one: that of 'looking after' those who were civilizationally underdeveloped (and hence figured as children), and of disciplining them into obedience."[24] The Western apparatus used the Name of the Fatherland to castrate the colonized, supposedly delivering the diachronically deficient from a law without reason, native libidinousness, and retro religiosity. Alan Watts, commenting on Freud's denigration of nirvana, writes, "[Freud's] attitude flows, perhaps, from the imperialism of Western Europe in the nineteenth century, when it became convenient to regard Indians and Chinese as backward and benighted heathens desperately in need of improvement by colonization."[25] I am insisting, instead of the imperial condescension, that many Easterners are, in a certain sense, ahead of us and that we egocentric, rationalistic Westerners are desperately in need of that non-Occidental spiritual wisdom that has for too long deemed primitive by both Christians and secularists.

Carl Jung, who maintained a more positive view of the unconscious than did Freud, had a keen interest in religion and especially nonwestern forms of it. He in fact had a well-known recorded conversation with Shin'ichi Hisamatsu, a famous Zen teacher. The crux of their discussion was the nature of the self and the possibility of liberation. For Jung, the self is a totality comprising the

[24] Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism: The New Critical Idiom*, 2nd ed., (NY: Routledge, 2005), 181.
[25] Alan Watts, "Psychotherapy and Liberation," in Anthony Molino (ed.), *The Couch and the Tree: Dialogues in Psychoanalysis and Buddhism* (NY: North Point Press, 1998), 80-85, 84.

conscious ego and the unconscious, part of which is personal and part of which is collective. The self is then for him a complex *ontos* which, because much of its content is submerged, cannot be fully known. The Self for Hisamatsu, on the other hand, is both no self at all and coterminous with a certain form of consciousness. As Masao Abe writes, "[I]n Zen the true Self is awakened to only through overcoming or breaking through the self in the Jungian sense."[26] The realization of Self for Hisamatsu and Abe comes through the overcoming of the illusion of self, even as this Self that is realized is apophatically reserved and beyond all duality, including that of self vs. no-self. Complete liberation from suffering is something that Jung admits he does not in his clinical practice try to accomplish. He insists on an approach that is always attuned to the particularities of his patients and their problems. But Hisamatsu faults this approach for being too partial and not delving into the source of human dysfunction and fully emancipating the patient. For Hisamatsu, Zen is able to accomplish a liberation that psychoanalysis cannot realize.

Nevertheless, the approach of another famous psychoanalyst, Erich Fromm, comes closer to Zen, as well as to my own project, yet it does so at times through an amalgamating inattention to difference. One of Fromm's fundamental premises in his famous essay, "Psychoanalysis and Zen Buddhism," coincides with a contention that has been a source for this dissertation: "Zen Buddhism helps man to find an answer to the question of his existence, an answer which is essentially the same as that given in the Judeo-Christian tradition, and yet which does not contradict the rationality, realism, and independence which are modern man's precious achievements. Paradoxically, Eastern religious thought turns out to be more congenial to Western rational thought than does Western religious thought itself."[27] Zen provides a way to become oneself by denying oneself (Mark 8:34; cf. Matthew 16:24, Luke 9:23), yet, because it seeks what is beyond the signifier, it lacks the

[26] Masao Abe, "The Self in Jung and Zen," in Molino (ed.), *The Couch and the Tree*, 183-194, 188.
[27] Erich Fromm, "Psychoanalysis and Zen Buddhism," in Erich Fromm, D. T. Suzuki, and Richard DeMartino, *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis* (London: Souvenir Press, 1974), 77-141, 80.

absolutization of dated discursivity that has turned many away from orthodox versions of the monotheistic religions. However, there is more conflict between Zen and Western reason and independence than Fromm acknowledges.

Fromm noticed in many of his patients that the maladies of the Western subject extend deeper and wider than a given psychological symptom or relational issue would suggest: "The common suffering is the alienation from oneself, from one's fellow man, and from nature; the awareness that life runs out of one's hand like sand, and that one will die without having lived; that one lives in the midst of plenty and yet is joyless."[28] We might say that, for Fromm, the late modern Western subject's basic issues are more holistic, spiritual, and existential than merely symptomatically psychological. At the heart of this struggle is an estrangement from Reality, which is the effect of having been formed by a limitingly discursive and egoically conducive societal order. For Fromm, culture imposes a grid of intelligibility through which one cognizes and affectively relates to everything that fits, and all of experience which does not conform to the strictures of this imposed and indwelling epistemic structure is unacknowledged and repressed. Therefore, the subject's alienation from the contents of his or her unconscious is coterminous with an estrangement from Reality as a whole.

Fromm sees in Freudian psychoanalysis a program for salvation. He understands the Austrian progenitor as one who, far more than just trying to alleviate symptoms, sought to rescue the subject from the opaque tyranny of the unconscious: "Freud answered this question perhaps most clearly in the sentence: 'Where there was Id – there shall be Ego.' His aim was the domination of irrational and unconscious passions by reason; the liberation of man from the power of the unconscious, within the possibilities of man."[29] Summarizing an underlying, unstated principle of

[28] Ibid., 86.
[29] Ibid., 81.

Freud's work, Fromm uses language reminiscent of the Greco-Roman care of the self: "in the very act of *knowing* oneself, one *transforms* oneself."[30] And this knowing is for Fromm far removed from a merely scientific or theoretical episteme: this is a deep, holistic knowing of the whole person that alters the whole person. Yet Fromm finds Freud, in the end, too Western and his successors too concerned with symptomatic particularity. A "wider, humanistic frame of reference"[31] that draws on the spiritual resources of the East is in order.

Fromm describes the goal of his form of psychoanalysis in language largely consonant with Zen Buddhism. The subject must wake up from a culturally conferred somnambulance. She must overcome the sense of separation she feels from nature, others, and her true self. She must overcome the dominion of the ego and thereby become "fully born." She must overcome the preponderance of verbality in her psyche and taste Reality as it really is apart from the distortions of the signifier. She will thereby become renewed, creative, fully conscious, loving, and truly independent and free of greed and envy. She will thereby become who she really, holistically is. But the psychoanalytic mechanisms through which Fromm seeks to accomplish these ends is more removed from Zen than he acknowledges. As noted, for Fromm, what has been repressed is that which does not accord with a culturally conferred epistemic frame. While he does at times talk about awakening as something primal and whole, he also retains the psychoanalytic anthropology of an ontic, subjective container that becomes whole by making unconscious contents conscious. This process, which is never-ending, is far removed from Zen spirituality, in which the Self is also a no-self that is not at all the same thing as the totality of the subject, and enlightenment entails tapping into an indwelling but transpersonal capacity and not dredging up repressed elements. Despite

[30] Ibid., 82.
[31] Ibid., 137.

Fromm's intentions, he remains too committed to Western reason and the onticality of the subject to realize his more ontologically holistic spiritual aims.

The Ego, the Signifier, and the Tathātā That Lies Beyond Them: Lacan and Zen

To move even closer to our target, let us now consider the efforts of those who have not only done comparative work on the intersection of psychoanalysis and Buddhism, but have specifically discussed the relationship between Buddhism and Lacan. In "Zen, Lacan, and the Alien Ego," Anthony Molino claims that "the question of onto-existential alienation, or 'inauthenticity,' is central to both Lacan and Zen,"[32] as the anthropologies of both traditions posit a split subject who is drawn by the ego into a condition of blindness. Drawing heavily on both the work of Anthony De Martino, a protégé of D.T. Suzuki who composed an incisive essay on Zen that was included in the volume in which Fromm's essay appeared, and Lacan's analysis of the ego and the imaginary, Molino notes both congruence and divergence between Zen and Lacanian conceptions of the ego. The differences are most interesting. Whereas Lacan insists on the importance of the mirror in the construction of identity, De Martino highlights the constitutive force of human others and the insufficiency of the reflection. While Lacan locates the source of aggressivity in an agonistic relationship of self to self, De Martino holds that violent inclinations in the subject, while egoic, are predicated on interpersonal relationships. Lacan cites the introjection of images as internal to the constitution of the ego; De Martino believes that the ego, while inextricable from the object, is more self-contained. And while Zen posits the possibility of a final subjective unity, no such state is possible for Lacan. These points of comparison and contrast are accurate but could be expanded through an analysis of the intersection of the critique of the linguistic inhabitation of the subject in

[32] Anthony Molino, "Zen, Lacan, and the Alien Ego," in Molino (ed.), *The Couch and the Tree*, 292.

Zen and the description of the indwelling of symbolic forms in Lacan, and an examination of enlightenment in Zen in light of Lacan's category of the Real.

Raul Mancayo, perhaps more than anyone else who has dealt with the intersection of our two focal domains, operates with a considerable knowledge of both Zen and Lacan. However, like Fromm, his work too readily conflates the two forms of spirituality. Moncayo, a California-based Lacanian psychologist and Zen practitioner, is open to the notion that "the healing, redemptive, and renewing forces of religion may be more powerful than pure psychological analysis"[33] but finds moral counseling, the dualisms or religion, and prescriptive belief to work against such forces. He finds in Zen a spirituality without these detrimental impositions that is also compatible with his clinical practice. Moncayo notes important similarities between Zen and Lacanian psychoanalysis. The detachment and acceptance of the psychoanalytic attitude he finds to be quite like the ideal disposition of the Zen meditator. He also finds that both practices can be means of accessing a more expansive, nondual mind. Moreover, both target the ego as a main source of subjective dysfunction. Even the unexpected, provocative speech of the Lacanian analyst and Zen master can be quite congruent: "in analysis the analyst needs to allow what is equivocal, paradoxical, and ambiguous instead of expecting and utilizing forms of linear directive speech."[34]

However, Moncayo tends to equate the Zen Self (which is no self) with the Lacanian subject. He writes, "Both [Zen and Lacan] could be said to converge on the Zen formula that 'true self is no-self' or the Lacanian-informed formula that 'true subject is no ego.'"[35] But the Lacanian subject is secondary to the Other, which is a storehouse of signifiers, whereas in Zen a central part of awakening is overcoming the illusions of discourse. Here we have an apparent convergence in the

[33] Raul Moncayo, "The Finger Pointing at the Moon: Zen Practice and the Practice of Psychoanalysis," in Jeremy D. Safran (ed.), *Psychoanalysis and Buddhism: An Unfolding Dialogue* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2003), 331-363, 333.
[34] Ibid., 354
[35] Ibid., 349

surpassing of egoism to realize a higher form of subjectivity, but for Lacan (for most of his career) this subjectivity is a triumph of the symbolic over the imaginary, whereas in Zen (and to some extent, in the late Lacan) it is a realization of the Real that is beyond both the image and the word. Moreover, Moncayo distorts Lacan's conception of the Real to make it align with Emptiness: "Lacan often described the Real in terms of an absence or a lack within the Symbolic to pinpoint the Real. Such lack alludes to a limitation of language to represent a Real beyond symbolization. Lacan defines the emptiness of the Real as a lack in the Other."[36] To be sure, Lacan frequently points to a fundamental lack at the root of being and an incompleteness in the Other. But he does not equate this emptiness with the Real, which for him is an undifferentiated, undivided *plenitude*. There is a lack of the Real in the symbolic order, but this lack itself is not for Lacan the Real. I agree with Moncayo: the Real is empty. But such a contention is not Lacanian.

Mario D'Amato's essay, "*Lacan avec le Bouddha*: Thoughts on Psychoanalysis and Buddhism," while too brief to do justice to the intersection of these domains, nevertheless evinces a supple understanding of both their common ground and their divergences. He recognizes that both Buddhism and Lacan emphasize "the constructedness of what is often taken to be a stable and enduring self-concept" and that often what is taken to be voluntarily originary and primally agential is for both these schools of thought "an effect of various mental processes, both conscious and unconscious."[37] Both traditions, he rightly avers "entail a parallax view of reality" and aim to foster "a systematic shift in perspective."[38]

D'Amato focuses on the linguistic parallels between Lacan's thought and the Yogācāra school of Buddhism. He rightly discerns that the semiotics of the former, in highlighting the deceptiveness

[36] Ibid., 346.
[37] Mario D'Amato, "*Lacan avec le Bouddha*," in *Theology after Lacan*, ed. Creston Davis, Marcus Pound, and Clayton Crockett (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), 71-86, 76.
[38] Ibid., 85.

of language, is indicative of the semiotics of Buddhism in general, and he appropriately nuances his depiction of the Buddhist position as not being dualistically opposed to language itself: "[M]y sense is that the goal of Buddhism is not to completely *eliminate* semiosis, but rather to *change one's relation to it*, which is evidenced by the fact that models of Buddhahood in Yogācāra texts characterize a buddha-mind as 'reengaging with conceptual thought, although in a way that has somehow been fundamentally transformed through the attainment of a nonconceptual awareness.'"[39] He also correctly notices a parallel between the Buddhist notion that words create the illusion of fixed, enduring, and separate entities and Lacan's insight that the signifier produces the substantiality and persistence of the object. However, for Lacan, this symbolic production is not necessarily alienating. Lacan's qualified acceptance of the symbolic order diverges markedly from the Buddhist quest to overcome the false reality induced by an acceptance of discursive fictions. D'Amato sees clearly that the Buddhist quest for the transrational sharply conflicts with the early Lacan's depiction of the Real as a source of trauma and anxiety. However, the late Lacan would paint the Real with different colors. Still, he remained far removed from a full-fledged Buddhist immersion not simply in the Real but more fundamentally in the empty ground of all things that is the most Real Real and that which lends all other aspects of the Real their Reality.

D'Amato is thus quite careful and respectful of difference in his engagement of the intersectionality of Buddhism and Lacan. But the limits of this essay, situated as it is in a compilation, preclude the sort of depth that this potentially fecund comparison deserves. Furthermore, the engagement with Lacan is quite limited, never venturing into the seminar. D'Amato thus succeeds where others have failed, but there is much more that can be done.

Of the main academic contributions to the study of the intersection of Buddhism and psychoanalysis, only Fromm and Moncayo have treated the topic with works of adequate length, but

[39] Ibid., 84.

both of them produced procrustean amalgamations that do not do justice to the differences between the domains. And while D'Amato and Molino parse the disparities well, their works are too narrow in scope to do justice to the topic. There is thus need for a monograph-length work comparing Lacan and Buddhism that recognizes both congruencies and disparities and, beyond this, seeks a practically soteriological resolution that is selectively synthetic and novel. This is what I aim to provide.

An Outline of the Following Chapters

We will begin in Chapter 1 with Lacan's description of the formation of the ego in the mirror stage, but before we do, we will look at the Freudian precedent. For Freud, the ego is a conscious extension of the libidinal forces of the id that has the capacity to alter the directionality of the base impetus through its connection to the reality principle. But the very agency with which it can accomplishes this is not its own but derived from the very forceful unconscious prevenience which it is trying to modulate. Freud never theorizes how the ego is initially formed; he tends to presuppose that where there is a conscious human body, there is also an ego. But he does aver that the introjection of alterity that accompanies mourning and melancholia contributes to the growth of the ego. He also calls attention to the necessity of identification with the father as a key stage in ego formation. Lacan would draw on these ideas to posit a seminal introjection and identification before which the ego is not. Yet the focus of the assimilating production for Lacan is the infant's recognition, prehension, and internalization as self of its own reflection. But this recognition is also an error, for the image taken to be primary is in fact inverted, flat, and derivative. Thus, egoism is from the get-go a distorting, alienating, and imaginary affair. And in this pessimistic Lacanian assessment, we have an important parallel with Buddhism, which sees egoism as the root of all evil.

But Lacan's account, while not strictly limited to the infant's recognition of itself in the mirror,[40] nevertheless makes something culturally contingent universal. Yet, in another sense, he is insufficiently contextual, failing to recognize the great extent to which mirroring and imaginary excess have formed subjectivity throughout modernity and for the extent of subjects' lives. Modernity, which postmodernity and post-postmodernity have not entirely eclipsed, might be seen as the mirror stage of the West. Literal mirrors have been central to the formation of the modern subject, but they are only part of an imaginary preponderance which, significantly exacerbated by capitalism, has engendered individualism, objectification, and an increasing distance from Reality. Yet there is that within consciousness, the witness, which is analogously spectating and can be a source of liberation. It is what Sartre called "unreflected consciousness," but it is not reducible to the cognition to which Sartre bound it and which cannot, in Lacanian terms, be fully free. But in that this nothing-something is unreflected, it is not sullied by having to operate in alienating subsequence to the introjected image. And it is precisely that which is honed through mindfulness, meditation, and centering prayer, and which is fully unleashed in enlightenment.

While in our image-saturated, social-media-committed, entertainment-laden culture, it can seem as if the imaginary order rules, there is still a symbolic order behind it upon which it relies for support. This realm will be the focus of Chapter 2. In Lacanian terms, the symbolic order is the domain of culture, with a particular accent placed upon language and law. Lacan is greatly indebted to Lévi-Strauss's account of the formation of symbolic culture through the incest prohibition and the concomitant practice of exogamy. For Lévi-Strauss, human society is impossible apart from this institution, which facilitates an inter-familial relationality and symbolic system predicated on exchange. Lacan adopts this framework and connects it to the Oedipal complex, wherein the subject overcomes its incestuous attachment to the mother, submits to the law of the father, and is able to

[40] Other humans can be mirrors as well.

accommodate itself to the normality of the symbolic order. Language and culture thereby come to deeply inhabit subjectivity as the preconditions and inwardly motivating forms and prerequisites of cultural legibility. Yet there is a brokenness and there are great injustices in the structures which we inhabit and which, in Lacanian terms, deeply inhabit us. In this respect, the question of desire, which Lacan always insists is not simply one's own, is paramount. And Lacan's answer, to facilitate the recovery and articulation of the repressed desire of the Other, is, in my estimation, preferable to both an identification of deep, corporeally connected urges as inherently sinful and a Deleuzo-Guattarian impetus to liberate desire. Still, Lacan may not go far enough and may too readily fixate on the buried contents of the subject without attending to the Self, which both inhabits and transcends the subject. A more radical solution to the rectification of subjectivity may be in order, and this dissertation aims to show that Zen can help to provide that. But Zen has its own limitations and, from my vantage point, should be supplemented by the attention to the particular, symbolic investment, and pursuit of justice that Jewish, Christian, and secularized post-Christian traditions have emphasized.

But before we venture there, it will be necessary to trouble Lacan's totalizing conception of cultural influence. What is the symbolic order? Is there one symbolic order? If so, how do we reckon with cultural difference? In much psychoanalysis and psychology there is a universalization that fails to do justice to the disparateness of variously located forms of subjectification, and Lacan's gnomic symbolic order and subject are a prime case in point. Nevertheless, the general concept of the symbolic order is indispensable. We therefore might speak of the symbolic order when generically speaking of cultural influence. But we all move through different spheres of normality and generally occupy positions shaped by umbrellas that diverge in important ways from the symbolic frameworks of others.

I have found the scientific notion of emergence a helpful frame for both understanding Lacan and dealing with some of his excesses. Emergence describes the evolutionary appearance of novelty

that depends upon precedent but evinces that which precedence cannot account for. And strong emergentists insist that the emergent level can causally influence the lower-level components. There are no atoms apart from subatomic particles, but atoms produce a level of order and set of properties that cannot be found in electrons, neutrons, protons, quarks, and neutrinos. At the same time, the atom provides a framework wherein the subatomic particles operate harmoniously and productively. And molecules require constituent atoms but produce chemical properties that do not reduce to the sum of the atomic parts. At the same time, the atoms within a molecule are somewhat constrained to accord with their own intrinsic properties in a fashion that conduces to the relational supportiveness that superveniently produces the molecule, while the latter engenders a downward force through which it constrains its atomic components.

Emergence moves, then, form subatomic particles to atoms to molecules to cells to tissues to organs to systems to organisms to communities of intraspecies groups to ecosystems. And each new level supervenes upon the prior and provides the boundary conditions wherein the lower-level entities can interact harmoniously and productively. In human terms, the organism is the subject, the intraspecies group is culture, and Lacan's big Other, the unconscious inhabitance of the symbolic order within the subject, is the prime source of the downwardly causal influence of the societal level. For Lacan, culture in fact transmogrifies subjectivity. In typical forms of emergence, the higher order provides the boundary conditions in which the entities of the lower level operate without radically altering the internal structure of the lower-level entities. Water molecules do not significantly affect the nuclei of hydrogen and oxygen atoms; the eccentric polarity of water belongs primarily to the totality of the molecule. And the wetness of collections of water molecules, which is an effect of their amalgamation, does not drastically affect the internal stasis of the queerly polar molecules themselves. But the human subject who exists within the ambit of cultural power is transformed into an unnatural creature by the downward causality of the sociological level. This is what I call—mindful of theological

resonances—fallenness. Fallenness is a cancerous mutation in evolutionary emergence whereby the higher level colonizes the depths of the entities of the lower level and induces them to turn against themselves, each other, and their earthly host. And the illusion of the ego induces the subject to cathect, identify with, cling to, and propagate the fallen mental forms that issue primarily from this top-down forcefulness. Therefore, the most important aspect of the rectification of fallenness must be the radical transformation of subjectivity.

There is time for us to rectify our broken subjectivities and our wayward symbolic orders, but the contention that there is time is also among our foremost obstacles. Our temporal conditioning and Zen's way of radically altering it will be the theme of Chapter 3. In Lacanian terms, we live in the future perfect. We are strongly conditioned by the form of experience that listening to and reading discourse entails. When someone speaks a sentence to us, we do not grasp meaning throughout its duration. In Lacanian terms, there are *points de capiton*, quilting points, at intermittent junctures when signifieds line up behind signifiers and comprehension is possible. Most of the time we spend listening to or reading discourse is a suspended anticipation of these *points de capiton*. Conditioned as we are to inhabit the modalities of language, we are forcefully formed to wait for a futural fullness, to listen for a terminus which will enable us to retroactively make sense. But that terminus is never final. After every phrase, sentence, paragraph, and discourse, we want to hear and know more. Thus, our linguistic experience parallels the movements of desire, which is always aiming for objects which, if they are realized, are never sufficiently sating. We are futural creatures who hasten past the liberatory now because we are addicted to what the signifier pretends to offer but cannot deliver, and this dimension of our fallenness is deeply intertwined with the way the symbolic order, which is the source of our signifiers, inhabits us and uses us to reproduce itself.

The Zen koān is aptly equipped to help us overcome our chrononormative subjection. The koān is a statement whose *points de capiton* do not align. Meditation upon it can thereby disrupt the

temporality that ordinary language inculcates. The koān can help the subject to overcome the dualistic, futural form of subjectivity that symbolic orders produce and thereby move in a manner that does not so extensively accord with chrononormative inculcation. But meditation on the koān only effects this by inducing a thoroughgoing failure wherein the rational and egoic resources of the subject are used and then shown to be utterly incapable of penetrating into the depths of paradoxical wisdom. One can only reach this profound level, which is the place of the master whose mind produced the riddle, by becoming a radically different kind of subject. And for such a new being, the altered space-time parameters of her phenomenality produce a whole new world. A signal aspect of this transformation is tapping into that which is beyond time altogether, of realizing the face one had before one's parents were born. One's personhood does not thereby become immortal but one realizes an identity with That which is undying and transcends personhood.

However, this experience has often led Zen thinkers to conflate eternity and time, dismiss the irreversibility of the temporality of the space-time continuum, and devalue history. These errors have been coterminous with a neglect of the commitment to social justice. But if we understand the personal transformation of Zen as not simply personal but, as I have argued, a profound way of dealing with the internalization of fallen cultural power, then we have a springboard from which to recognize that Zen is already dealing with structural brokenness and needs to extend this remedy to aspects of this fallenness that are temporally tethered and not strictly spiritual.

The overcoming of dualism is an important dimension of the transformation effected by koān meditation. Yet Zen nonduality needs its own chapter and will be the topic of the fourth chapter of this work. First, I will explore dichotomization with respect to Lacan and render a mixed verdict. On the one hand, Lacan affirms traditional heteropatriarchal binaries. On the other hand, he demonstrates that behind the acquisition of subject positions that accord with what have historically taken to be naturalistic dualisms are contingent processes. Yet one dualism that pervades the early- and mid-career

works of Lacan is that of the signifier over the signified. Moreover, in that he strongly emphasizes the role of the signifier in the production of meaning, he neglects the contributions of the naturally brilliant human mind apart from symbolic intervention. I aver that this given intelligence is the source of what Zen calls *prajñā*, transcendent wisdom. In Lacanian terms, this intelligence is of the Real, in which there are no divisions, so *prajñā* is bound up with the natural, nondualistic wisdom of the cosmos, the All.

To tap into this wisdom fully, one must overcome the illusion of self, which engenders the dualisms of the doer and her deed and the thinker and his thinking. I will use Judith Butler's performativity, Derrida's deconstruction of centered structure, and Bertrand Russell's and Nietzsche's problematization of the Cartesian cogito to demonstrate that there is good philosophical reason to reject these basic subjective dichotomies.

Language is another source of illusion. It is structurally governed by binaries, even as egoic rationalism effects a dichotomizing existential division between the subject and the rest of the cosmos. Much of the work of Zen spirituality is an attempt to overcome the linguistic spell which precludes the realization of "satori," or enlightenment. There is a depth to the subject that is one with the eternal depth of all things[41], and dualistic cognition is too superficially contained to be a medium through which the subject realizes this expansive profundity. Satori is the name given to the experience of unity with this depth, wherein one overcomes the illusion of a dualistically confined, separate selfhood. There is no self to save; nor is there a subject to enlighten. Enlightenment is the cosmos overcoming the dream state of fallen human subjectivity and uniting with its Groundless Ground.

In a sense then, enlightenment is the realization of the spiritual omega point that also turns out to be the alpha. But have Zen practitioners fully realized that, when this end is realized, it becomes a new alpha? John Cobb has rightly pointed out that Buddhism has not sufficiently valued history,

[41] I will be operating with a Kyoto-School-inspired metaphysical reading of Zen that is more consonant with mystical Hinduism than is that form of Zen in which Emptiness has no real ontological status in itself.

temporality, science, particularity, and social justice. But when awakening is recognized as the overcoming of structurally conferred fallenness, the telos is seen as a new beginning, Emptiness empties itself of a nirvana-situated exaltation, then the whole world can be seen as the field for enlightenment's interpenetration of all things.

Yet, the origin is more complex than either Buddhists or orthodox Christians have allowed; in the eternal beginning, Emptiness ceaselessly begets the God who is the source of the Good. As I will argue using process theology, the Christian should embrace the freedom to be that enlightenment produces but marry this to a commitment to align with the lure of God, which is the source of the freedom to become. This liberty is realized through an attunement with God's initial aim and a concomitant quest for the ordered novelty of symbolically attuned flourishing and a justice to come.

Chapter 1: Created in My Image: The Alienated Ego and the Possibility of Realization

Introduction

This chapter focuses on Lacan's psychoanalytic conception of the ego and its implications, even as it ventures well beyond his narrowly individualistic conception of the mirror stage to demonstrate that the modern Western subject has historically and culturally been formed through mirroring and ego-aggrandizing visibility.

It could perhaps be said that we live in an age of the ego, and part of my argument will be to show both that the forces of modernity have exacerbated egoism and that insofar as we identify with our egos, we are bearers and propagators of these forces. But it could also be said that, in recorded history, there has not been an age in which the ego was not prevalent and determinative, for as psychoanalysis teaches, the formation of the ego is the beginning of acculturation. Therefore, perhaps there is no conceivable subject apart from the ego, inasmuch as humanity as we know it is impossible apart from the subject's acculturation. In an effort to be relevant, it is tempting to point to the salient example of Donald Trump as an egregious case of egoism, but to do this might weaken an argument that aims to show that egoism is a universal phenomenon and not simply the province of the megalomaniacal. The ubiquity of egoism can be gleaned from the fact that significant strands of every major religion have targeted the ego or an approximate equivalent as a central problem.

Yet the resources of psychoanalysis and sociology can be brought to bear on all these religious discussions to help show what exactly is being targeted. And to comprehend what is targeted is also have a better conception of that dimension of the subject that is to be pursued. For accompanying virtually every religious check on "selfishness" is an appeal to subjective fulfillment.

In this chapter, then, I will investigate Lacan's conception of ego formation in the mirror stage in light of its Freudian precedent. I will then demonstrate how the modern (and postmodern and post-postmodern) Western subject, by no means as anthropologically universal as the ego itself, has been formed extensively through reflections and gazes far beyond the nascent emergence of the ego. All the while, our world has become increasingly simulacric as we have grown increasingly distant from a Reality which, if we were sufficiently still, would shatter our illusions and ground us in peace. We are still in the throes of an elongated cultural mirror stage that engenders rampant egoism, and spiritual resources that help us to attend to *the witness behind the gaze* can help to free us from the Babylonian captivity of our subjectivity.

II. Freud's Ego

In order to appreciate the radical moves Lacan makes in charting the development of the ego, it is necessary to comprehend the Freudian precedent.[42] But Freud's conceptions of the ego are only partially drawn upon by Lacan. Lacan leaves behind the attunement of the ego to the reality principle but extends the seminal idea that the ego is formed through the internalization of externality, even as he heightens the pessimism (with respect to consciousness) already present in his precursor.

In *The Ego and the Id*, Freud depicts the ego as the component of the subject that can grasp reality. But the ego is not absolutely distinguishable from the id, the seat of unconscious libidinal energy: "The ego is not sharply separated from the id; its lower portion merges into it."[43] But if the

[42] Elzabeth Grosz, in *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (Routledge: New York, 1990), also describes the Freudian background to the Lacanian conception of the ego. She distinguishes between two broad strands of theorization about the ego in Freud: the realist ego and the narcissistic ego. She identifies the former primarily with *The Ego and the Id* and the latter primarily with *On Narcissism: An Introduction*. But there is much in *The Ego and the Id* that does not reduce to the realist conception. In fact, as I will show, in this text is important theorization about the genesis of the ego that is crucial for understanding the Lacanian innovation.

[43] Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, Joan Riviere (trans.) (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1960), 8.

ego is part of the id, it is differentiated from the latter by its access to external reality: "[T]he ego seeks to bring the influence of the external world to bear upon the id and its tendencies, and endeavors to substitute the reality principle for the pleasure principle which reigns unrestrictedly in the id."[44] The id is a powerfully energetic source of desire that insatiably seeks pleasure through the subject. The ego, attuned to an external reality to which the id largely does not have access, seeks to rein in its recklessly energetic unconscious base by forcing the subject to reckon with the world. If the id is motivated by a sheer instinct to pursue pleasure and avoid pain, the ego is driven by perception. And through that perception, it seeks a compromise with the powerful forces within.[45]

Freud famously compares the ego's relationship to the id to a rider's relationship to a horse:

> Thus in its relation to the id it is like a man on horseback, who has to hold in check the superior strength of the horse; with this difference, that the rider tries to do so with his own strength while the ego uses borrowed forces. The analogy may be carried a little further. Often a rider, if he is not to be parted from his horse, is obliged to guide it where it wants to go; so in the same way the ego is in the habit of transforming the id's will into action as if it were its own.[46]

The ego is like the man on the horse in that it has to rein in the superior strength of the id. But unlike the horseback rider, whose strength is his own, the ego can only modulate the energies of the id with forces that it borrows from the latter. Moreover, like the horseback rider, the ego is often compelled to accede to the power of the id and guide the subject where the id wants to go. The ego, then, is not simply opposed to the id, but is the modulator of its energy and is often forced to render the will of the id the will of the entire subject.

Freud's analogy might call to mind the famous chariot analogy from Plato's *Phaedrus* (246a-254e). In this passage, Socrates likens the subject to a charioteer guided by two winged horses. One horse is of ideal stock and readily heeds the charioteer's commands. The other horse is of baser

[44] Ibid.
[45] Another important element of this compromise is the superego. The superego represents the incessant demands of society and is just as irrationally forceful as the id.
[46] Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, 19.

descent and recalcitrantly resists the guidance of the master. The driver and the two horses represent the three parts of Plato's soul. The driver is the rational portion; the good horse is "spirit" or *pneuma*, an energetic component of the soul located in the chest that is in accord with rationality; and the bad horse is the belly, the seat of the passions and the analogue to Freud's id. It is important to note how Freud modifies Plato's analogy. Most obviously, for Freud, the rational element no longer has the distinguished separation conferred by the chariot. For Freud, the rider is directly on the horse. Freud even qualifies the analogy to assert that an actual rider has more agency than the ego has with respect to the id, for the ego must borrow its energy from the id. Furthermore, in Plato, there is an energetic component of the soul that acts complementarily to the movements of *nous*, whereas in Freud, all passion is of the insatiable id.[47] Most importantly, though, for Plato, desire is completely available to consciousness, whereas for Freud, the bulk of the id is unconscious. There is then a kind of proximity of the charioteer to the horses that clashes with the distance of the rider from the opaque energies of the horse, and consequently these latter equine energies are far more determinative.

But it might be argued that Freud retains an element of the sober rationalism we see in Plato and attributes it to the ego. For the ego in Freud remains attuned to the reality principle. In Lacan, as we shall see, this last bastion of rational control attributed to the ego is abrogated. For Lacan, the ego is not aligned with reality at all, but with the imaginary, a projective, image-driven phenomenality that is estranged from a discursively framed reality. From Plato to Freud we have a radicalization and an increased pessimism about conscious rational agency. But also, from Freud to Lacan, we also have a further radicalization and a more marked pessimism.

This point highlights Lacan's pivotal break with ego psychology, a post-Freudian school that accented rational egoic agency and, from a Lacanian perspective, tended to neglect the Freudian

[47] To be sure, Freud would allow an element of the id to be transmuted to higher purposes through sublimation.

challenge to consciousness.[48] Ego psychology took Freud's model of an ego attuned to reality (while arguable eschewing the more pessimistic elements of Freud's portrayal of the ego) and built a whole framework of analysis on its basis. Ego psychology aims to strengthen the ego of the patient and aims to achieve this end by putting forth the model ego of the analyst as an example. Lacan deplored ego psychology. For Lacan, the ego is not an agency that can ever be improved; as we will see, for Lacan, the ego is fundamentally distorting and misaligned with symbolic reality. In fact, Lacan presents the ego as one of the foremost obstacles in analysis. Not only does it fail to see reality, but it subverts the analytical processes with a series of defenses that prevent the unlocking of repressed material.[49] Thus, for Lacan, any analysis predicated on the improvement of the ego is fundamentally misguided. The ego for Lacan is an other and not the subject that should be the locus of intervention.

If Lacan shies away from Freud's alignment of the ego with reality, he does retain Freud's close connection of the id's desire and the ego's aims. Even beyond this, though, there are two moments in *The Ego and the Id* that significantly clarify Lacan's theorization around the formation of the ego. First is a brief comment about melancholia. For Freud, melancholia is the removal of cathexis from an external object and the replacing of that object with an identification with a semblance of it within the subject.[50] For example, if a person falls in love and then loses the object

[48] In the second year of his seminar, Lacan takes aim at the notion of an autonomous ego and the ego psychologists' bifurcation of humanity into those with strong egos and weak egos. These ideas are for Lacan "just so many ways of ducking the issues raised as much by the understanding of the neuroses as by the handling of the technique" (*The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book I: Freud's Papers on Technique, 1953-1954*, Jacques-Alain Miller [ed.], John Forrester [trans.] [New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1991], 12). In the same year he railed against the notion that there is a "sane part of the ego, about the ego which must be strengthened, about the ego which isn't sufficiently strong to support us in doing an analysis, about the ego which should be the ally of the analyst, the ally of the analyst's ego, etc." (Ibid., 68).

[49] Lacan refers several times to the work of Anna Freud, whose *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense* describe the ways the ego denies and represses key unconscious contents and therefore can be a prime obstacle in the analytic process.

[50] This process is similar to that of mourning. In *Mourning and Melancholia*, Freud speaks of "the absorption of the ego in morning work" (Sigmund Freud, *Mourning and Melancholia* in *Sigmund Freud on Murder, Mourning, and Melancholia*, Shaun Whiteside [trans.] [New York: Penguin, 2005], 205.

of his or her affection, the other is replaced by an internal representation that significantly modifies the structure of the ego.[51] For Freud, this is a key insight into how the ego is constituted: the relocation of the lost cathected object within. This dynamic of identifying with something external and internalizing it is crucial for understanding Lacan's theory of the formation of the ego in the mirror stage. Freud's notion of identification is also a crucial precursor of Lacan's mirror phase. For Freud, the most important identification is with the father, and this psychical alignment becomes the source of the ego ideal, whose formation solidifies the structure of the nascent ego.[52] For Freud, the resolution of the Oedipal complex, primary repression, and the formation of the ego ideal coalesce to form a key moment in the concrescence of the ego. But Freud still acknowledges that there is an ego before any of this happens and never definitively says how the ego begins to form. Thus, the door is left open for Lacan to theorize the ego's formation.

III. Lacan and the Pre-Egoic Subject

We are now in a position, with this Freudian background, to appreciate Lacan's theorization of the development of the ego. But in order to grasp this Lacanian concept, it is imperative to understand the conditions that precede the advent of the ego. Before the ego forms, the child is immersed in the Real. I do not here have the space to launch into a thorough description of the Lacanian Real. Indeed, an entire monograph could be penned about the topic.[53] Moreover, I aver that there is not a single, consistent Lacanian Real. Rather, Lacan uses the term (*reél*) to do various tasks for him throughout the different phases of his oeuvre. I wish to focus here on the Real of the early Lacan. During this phase, the debt to Kant and post-Kantian continental philosophy in general is significant. An element of the Real of the early Lacan is much like the Kantian noumenal: reality

[51] Freud, *The Ego and the Id,* 23.
[52] Ibid., 26.
[53] See, for example, Tom Eyers, *Lacan and the Concept of the 'Real'* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

as it is apart from the categorical impositions of our phenomenality. Lacan stresses the dissonance between the division introduced by language and the seamlessness of the Real that discourse covers over. The symbolic order introduces lack and rupture, whereas the "real is without fissure."[54] But the negation of the continuous plenitude of the Real is not solely the work of the symbolic. As we will see, the ego, though not completely separate from the operations of the symbolic order, to be sure, also effects a division between the inside of the subject and all externality, and this division must also be seen as an existential cancellation of access to the Real. As Lacan writes, "Remember this, regarding externality and internality – this distinction makes no sense at all at the level of the real."[55] The Real is thus largely off limits for the subject (after infancy), and, for Lacan, "we have no means of apprehending this real . . . except via the go-between of the symbolic."[56] A go-between between the ego and the Real that is, in a strong sense, always already estranged from the Real.[57][58]

Thus, the child's movement into the imaginary through the mirror stage is the beginning of the displacement of its immersion in the Real. And this Real soup from which the subject is drawn is a domain without division. This lack of any rending is most markedly the case in that the infant

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[54] Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book II: The Ego Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis:: 1954-1955*, Jacques-Alain Miller (ed.), Sylvana Tomaselli (trans.) (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1991), 97.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid.

[57] At the same time, Lacan can speak as if the Real, symbolic, and imaginary operate harmoniously. For example, he can write of the imaginary that it is framed and supported by a Real that can "include and, by the same token, locate the imaginary." And this relationship is further situated by the symbolic order: "It means that, in the relation of the imaginary and the real, and in the constitution of the world such as results from it, everything depends on the position of the subject. And the position of the subject … is essentially characterized by its place in the symbolic world, in other words in the world of speech" (Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book I: Freud's Papers on Technique: 1953-1954*, 80). According to this picture, the image is not utterly estranged from the Real which supports it, and all is enveloped by the symbolic order and a concomitant subject position.

[58] For Lacan, the symbolic cancellation of the Real is not necessarily a disadvantage. As he writes, "[I]t's by way of metaphor, by the play of the substitution of one signifier for another in a given place, that the possibility is created not only of signifying developments but also of the emergence of ever new meanings, always tending towards refining, complicating, deepening and giving its sense of depth to what in the real is nothing but pure opacity" (Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book V: Formations of the Unconscious*, Jacques-Alain Miller [ed.], Russell Grigg [trans.] [Malden, MA: Polity, 2017], 25). The symbolic order, for Lacan, allows for the meaning-making, dynamism, and complexity that the Real is said to lack.

experiences itself as, first and foremost, united with its mother, and to a lesser extent, one with its environment. Therefore, the formation of the ego is the beginning of the emergence of a separated subjectivity. This is an important point to remember as we try to negotiate a discussion between psychoanalysis and Zen. Much psychoanalysis, following Freud[59], has dismissed Buddhism's transcendence of the ego as a mere regression to this pre-subjective matrix. I acknowledge an element of truth in this assessment, but ultimately find it reductive. There is, in my estimation, a degree of recuperation of this state in Buddhism, but only a degree, for subjectivity is not thereby dissolved along with the ego.

IV. Lacan and the Mirror Stage

The mirror stage generally lasts between the ages of six and eighteen months. Thus, the formation of the ego is not simply an immediate occurrence. It is not as though there is a once and for all time recognition by the child of its image, and, *voila*, the ego forms. The recognition happens repeatedly, and it is usually facilitated by the encouragement of doting adults: "Look! That's you!" Furthermore, the mirror stage should not be limited to the child's experience of its image. The child also identifies with children of a similar age and comes to form itself by assimilating its own subjectivity to theirs. The mirror is what we might call a paradigmatic case.

When the child does see its reflection as its own, there is a noticeable alteration in her affect: the phenomenon "immediately gives rise in a child to a series of gestures in which he playfully experiences the relationship between the movements made in the image and the reflected environment, and between this virtual complex and the reality it duplicates – namely, the child's own

[59] See the opening pages of *Civilization and Its Discontents, Standard Edition, 21*, 55-145.

body, and the persons and even things around him."[6061] Thus, there is a release of narcissistic libido in this experience. The child begins to take itself as an object of pleasure, even as the very agency evinced in this movement begins to take shape in the process. Moreover, the impression generated by this occurrence has lasting effects. Lacan notes how an infant who is still quite physically and intellectually incapable nevertheless takes a keen interest in its image, even as it shows signs of aiming towards its retention: the child "overcomes, in a flutter of jubilant activity, the constraints of his prop in order to adopt a slightly leaning forward position and take in an instantaneous view of the image in order to fix it in his mind."[62]

And what is fixed in the mind is a gestalt, the overall impression of a totality. This gestalt is not simply internalized, though; it is also identified with. Writes Lacan, "It suffices to understand the mirror image in this context *as an identification*, in the full sense analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image – an image that is seemingly predestined to have an effect at this phase, as witnessed by the use in analytic theory of antiquity's term, 'imago.'"[63] We must remember the process of identification from Freud. Recall that in Freud, melancholia entails the identification with and incorporation of a lost cathected object, and that this is a primary mechanism of ego formation. Here we have a variation on that theme in which, on the one hand, the external object is in fact the subject's own image, and on the other hand, cathexis and internalization coincide. That is, in Lacan's modification, the object, which is the image of one's own self, does not have to be lost in order to be incorporated. Yet, to complicate matters a bit, for Lacan, there is not a sense in which the subject can really make (its own) image its

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[60] Lacan, *Ecrits*, 75.

[61] According to Lacan, "Fascination is absolutely essential to the phenomenon of the constitution of the ego. The uncoordinated, incoherent diversity of the primitive fragmentation gains its unity in so far as it is fascinated" (Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book II: The Ego Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis:: 1954-1955*, 50).

[62] Ibid., 76.

[63] Ibid.

own. There remains a disparity within the child between the unitary totality it introjects and its actual experience of itself. Also recall that for Freud the signal event of ego consolidation is identification with the father (and the law he represents). Nevertheless, Freud admitted that the ego must exist before this resolution of the Oedipal crisis. Thus, Freud never really articulated a definitive theory for how the ego comes to be. Lacan steps in and borrows the notion of a seminal moment of identification to theorize the inception of the ego, but in this case with the image of the self as the key object, and with the articulation of an ideal ego (the gestalt image) preceding the ego ideal (which will come with the resolution of the Oedipal complex). Moreover, it is imperative that we note here that for both Freud and Lacan, the ego, which forms the internal/external dichotomy as a seeming absolute and tends to attribute an originary agency to itself, is formed through the internalization of an externality.

The formation of the ego marks the child's entrance into the imaginary order.[64] The ideal ego becomes "the root stock of secondary identifications."[65] In other words, the same process of identification and incorporation is replicated in the child's encounter with other images, including images of other people. According to Lorenzo Chieza, "[I]f the ego is introjected by the subject, the ideal ego is in its turn *projected* by the subject *qua* ego onto all other subjects as well as onto all objects."[66] The ideal ego, the gestalt image of the self that is internalized, becomes a kind of prism through which all other objects are experienced. This process facilitates a degree of relationality

[64] For Luce Irigaray, Lacan's imaginary is inherently masculinist: "And when [Lacan] says that in the constituent effects of the mirror image, the sex of one's like(ness) does not matter … and also that "the mirror-image would seem to be the threshold of the visible world' [p. 3] isn't this a way of stressing that the feminine sex will be excluded from it" (Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Catherine Porter [trans.] [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985], 117)? On the one hand, there is a significant amount of empirical evidence supporting Lacan's theory of the mirror stage, and that evidence involves many male and female subjects. Therefore, it does seem that the mechanics of the imaginary and the ego as Lacan describes them apply to both sexes. On the other hand, as I will show, the imaginary is inextricably intertwined with the symbolic order, which can be markedly patriarchal. While Irigaray's dismissal of the Lacanian imaginary is not completely convincing, then, there may be an element of truth in her characterization.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Lorenzo Chiesa, *Subjectivity and Otherness* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2007), 19.

with other objects even as, given the significant element of projection, it occludes their being. Furthermore, as Lacan writes, what forms is "the most general structure of human knowledge, which constitutes the ego and objects as having the attributes of permanence, identity, and substance."[67] Thus, the subject's experience of the world as a universe of things that perdure in their substantiality is largely an effect of the ego, which is itself a fictitiously enduring unity.[68] Moreover, the boundary between self and other becomes blurred even as it is established, as that gestalt which constitutes the self is a signal element of what constitutes the other and the ego itself is a kind of other, an introjection of a reflection that is derived and devoid of the being of self. In the process, the child's imaginary universe is formed, a universe in which a degree of independence is achieved but in which projection and mere images occlude the Real.

Lacan almost adamantly emphasizes the unreality and alienation of the ego and its concomitant imaginary domain.[6970] For example, he writes, that the ego directs the subject "in a fictional direction" toward an "alienating destination" and initiates a "discordance with his own

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[67] Lacan, *Ecrits*, 90.

[68] For Lacan, "Literally, the ego is an object – an object which fills a certain function which we here call the imaginary function" (Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis: 1954-1955*, 44). And this object comes to project an ontified phenomenality: a world of separate objects. What is more, Lacan writes that "The image of his body is the principle of every unity he perceives in objects" (Ibid., 166). We might add that this projected principle of unity is also a principle of division, for the ego separates the body from the external world and therefore separates external objects, projectively conceived through the body, as separate.

[69] He writes, "The fundamental absurdity of interhuman behavior can only be comprehended in the light of this *system* … called the human ego, namely that set of defenses, of denials, of dams, of inhibitions, of fundamental fantasies which orient and direct the subject" (*The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book I: Freud's Papers on Technique: 1953-1954*, 17). In another text, he says that "the fundamental function of the ego" is "misunderstanding" (Ibid., 53).

[70] At the same time, there are instances in Lacan's early lectures in which this alienation is not absolute. For example, Lacan says, "Misrecognition is not ignorance. Misrecognition represents a certain organization of affirmations and negations, to which the subject is attached. Hence it cannot be conceived without correlative knowledge. If the subject is capable of misrecognizing something, he surely must know what this function has operated upon. There must surely be, behind his misrecognition, a kind of knowledge of what there is to misrecognize" (Ibid., 167). Based on this assertion, misrecognition is not based on absolute falsity. This attenuation of misrecognition can be tied to the previously noted ambivalence in the relationship between the Real and the imaginary. In one respect, the imaginary cancels the Real. In another respect, the Real frames the imaginary, and the two are continuous, even as they are disparate.

reality."[71] The child misrecognizes an image, a reversed and derived projection on a surface, as self. And the formation of the ego, far from initiating a pure unity, brings forth a division within the subject. There is a marked discordance between the unity of the gestalt image and the child's experience of its own corporeality.[72] The identification with the ideal ego is in part a compensation for the incapacity and disunity that are the child's felt reality. And once the image is introjected, a conflict is initiated between the seemingly masterful gestalt and a felt embodiment of divergent energies and drives[73] and considerable motor incapacity. But this disunity will not simply disappear when the child matures, for the ego remains an indwelling alterity, always beholden to its provenance as a merely reflective externality. It remains the internalization of something outside and derived and though it will masquerade as the totality of the subject, it remains an outsider to a great extent at odds with much of the rest of the subject. The ego is an other, even as imaginary relations with others have an element of one's own projected ego. And for this reason, the confusion of self and other, the modality of knowledge that the ego will develop is paranoiac. Furthermore, the cognition of the ego is also fundamentally flawed in that it is unable to recognize its own alienation. Thus, as Chiesa points out, there are two signal components of the ego's alienation: first, it takes an alterity as self, and second, it is oblivious to this mistaken identity.[74]

Lacan also sees egoism as static and resistant to the dialectical movements through which the subject evolves. The ego and its imaginary form a dyadic universe in which there is only self and other and a lack of the third term (the Other) through which dialectical exchange can occur. I will

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[71] Lacan, *Ecrits*, 76.

[72] Lacan writes that "the sight alone of the whole form of the human body gives the subject an imaginary mastery over his body, one which is premature in relation to a real mastery" (*The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book I: Freud's Papers on Technique: 1953-1954*, 79). It is premature because the infant is still a body in bits and pieces; its drives are not yet unified. The mastery is then fictitious. But given that the ideal ego is primordially external, can the subject ever align with it and can real mastery happen at all?

[73] Lacan speaks of "the anarchy of [the infant's] elemental drives" (Ibid., 168), which remain at odds with the unity of the image.

[74] Chiesa, *Subjectivity and Otherness*, 16.

have more to say about the Other in Chapter 3. Suffice it to say here that the Other is the symbolic order working in and through the unconscious of the subject.[75] Egoic fixation is resistance to this depth of influence and remains in a mistaken domain of images and signifieds fallen away from the deep dynamics of the signifier. When egos interact with each other, there is an element of synthesis, for as noted above, egoism involves a confusion of self and other, but this is not the sort of productive dialectic that would be facilitated by an openness to the movement of the Other through the unconscious. Instead, egoic exchange is a static and alienating confrontation between two mistaken identities that are cut off from the indwelling Other through which discursive dynamism and the mutual recognition of subjects is enabled. In the clinical setting, the ego is perhaps the foremost impediment to progress. The ego, blind to its alienation and the complex mechanisms of unconscious desire and architect of repression and denial, actually resists the sort of interventions through which the subject can realize a degree of liberation. And ego psychology, which Lacan abhorred, was for him a process of trying to rectify and strengthen an element of subjectivity that is recalcitrantly blind.

But it would be wrong to see the formation of the ego as unequivocally alienating. Ego establishment is necessary to further development. For Lacan, the mirror stage "seems … to manifest in an exemplary situation the symbolic matrix in which the *I* is precipitated in a primordial form, prior to being objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject."[76] Thus, the symbolic matrix is already

[75] For example, Lacan writes in *Ecrits*, "The primordial condition for this is that the analyst should be thoroughly convinced of the radical difference between the Other to whom his speech should be addressed, and the second other who is the one he sees before him, about whom and by means of whom the first speaks to him in the discourse it pursues before him. For, in this way, the analyst will be able to be the one to whom the discourse is addressed" (358). There is thus a deeper level to discourse, an Other that connects analyst and subject and which cannot be reduced to the imaginary other on the couch. This Other is an unconscious depth, constituted by the internalization of the symbolic order and the desiring of its subjects, which is the true locus of meaningful discourse.

[76] Lacan, *Ecrits*, p. 76.

operative in the imaginary universe of the young child and the mirror stage is a necessary moment in the movement towards the subject's receptivity to language as the Other that somewhat displaces the "little other" that is the ego. Moreover, as Yannis Stavrakakis writes, "the specular image has to be ratified by the symbolic Other in order to start functioning as the basis of the infant's imaginary identification: every imaginary position is conceivable only on the condition that one finds a guide beyond this imaginary order, a symbolic guide."[77] Thus, while in a certain sense the image predominates the formation of the ego, the imaginary order is not disconnected from the symbolic matrix, which serves as both a foundation to the domain of images and a guide in the further development of the subject. In Stavrakakis' reading, the role played by the imaginary is "completely taken up and caught up within, remolded, and reanimated by the symbolic order."[78] We might conceive of the symbolic and imaginary orders as symbiotically connected elements of a pervasive cultural order, with the latter playing the dominant structural role, even in those instances when the imaginary seems determinative. It would be wrong to conceive of the egoic child as completely estranged in a sea of projected images, for even though there is not a well-developed relationship to the Other, the symbolic is still playing an integral role. Moreover, the post-Oedipal dentification with the same-sex parent can only make sense in light of "a primary identification that structures the subject as rivaling with himself."[79]

Nevertheless, the ego creates an imaginary division between subject and world (object). As Lacan writes, "Indeed, the specific domain of the primitive ego, *Urig* or *Lustig,* is constituted by a splitting, by a differentiation from the external world – what is included inside is differentiated from what is rejected by the processes of exclusion, *Aufstossung,* and of projection. From then on, if there are any notions which are placed at the forefront of every psychoanalytic conception of the primitive

[77] Yannis Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political* (New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 19.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Lacan, *Ecrits,* 92.

stage of the ego's formation, it is clearly those of container and contained." [80] For purposes of our comparative work, it is key to note that his is the root cause of the dualism that Buddhism has consistently said stems from egoic consciousness. The ego, coalescing around the image of the body, creates a sharp division between the body and all that is outside of it. As Lacan writes, the ego becomes a kind of container, and an absolute distinction is drawn between what is inside the container and what remains outside. Yet this divide is artificial, for "regarding externality and internality – this distinction makes no sense at all at the level of the real. The real is without fissure."[81] The fissure then between self and Real, a rending through which we all come to be, is constructed and does violence to the seamlessness of the Real. Dualism, along with the ego, is a fiction that occludes the undivided Real.

This particular aspect of Lacan's analysis dovetails nicely with Masao Abe's description of the human condition. Writes Abe, using the notion of self-consciousness to mean egoic subjectivity, "To be a self-conscious existence is for a human being to be conscious of the distinction between self and others. From the dimension of consciousness the self regards others as objects against which the self stands as subject. Out of the subject-object dichotomy thus created, consciousness grasps everything from that dichotomous point of view. Putting itself at the center of the world, the self regards all others from the outside, as existing peripheral to itself."[82] As in Lacan, we have a violent bifurcation between the self and externality. What is added here is that this fundamental divide affects all of the subject's mental life, as "consciousness grasps everything from that dichotomous point of view." Therefore, for Abe, not only does the ego existentially separate the subject from the outside world, but it also thoroughly conditions his or her consciousness to operate

[80] Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book I: Freud's Papers on Technique: 1953-1954*, 179.
[81] Lacan, Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis: 1954-1955*, 97.
[82] Masao Abe, B*uddhism and Interfaith Dialogue*, Steven Heine (ed.) (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995), 64.

according to this split and view everything through dualistic lenses. This objectifying dualism, in turn, rebounds to the ego, heightens its sense of subject-object dichotomization, and thereby exacerbates the subject's self-centeredness: "From the dichotomous point of view, the self regards others not only as objects of cognition, but also as objects of emotion and volition, that is, as the objects of like and dislike, love and hate, affection and detestation. In this way, the human self becomes inextricably involved in the subject-object dichotomy and the persistent self-centeredness engendered by it."[83]

Yet, for Abe the great divide does not exist solely between the subject and external objects; the subject is also divided against herself or himself: "[T]hrough consciousness the very human self is divided into two entities: self as the subject of consciousness and self as the object of consciousness. Self-consciousness implies the self's split into these two entities, and thereby self-attachment and self estrangement."[84] The ego which divides the universe into the domain of the subject and a realm of objects also divides the subject into the knower and the known. The ego which masquerades as absolutely unitary is itself the cause of an inner split, and the result is that to identify with the self is also to be cut off from the self. Lacan's subject is also split, but the cut is different: Lacan emphasizes the divide between the subject of the unconscious and the conscious ego. Regardless of how this dichotomy is parsed, though, there is in both cases a rent subject estranged from the Real, *wherein there is no division*.

V. Modernity Made in the Mirror, Part I: Perspective in Art

Despite Lacan' perspicacious understanding of ego formation, I want to argue that his conception of the mirror stage is both too universalizing and too limited. It is too universalizing

[83] Ibid., 65.
[84] Ibid.

because it assumes the cultural centrality of the mirror, which has not been the case in every culture. It is too limited because in the modern West, mirroring has formed subjectivity extensively throughout the duration of subjects' lives. The modern Western ego in certain respects has been born in and sustained by gazing at the looking glass and homologous dynamics of self-reflection, and in the process it has grown increasingly estranged from the Real. As Morris Berman writes,

> To anticipate for a moment, the history of the physical mirror would seem (as far as I can determine) to run parallel to the development of consciousness itself; it itself mirrors the larger cultural milieu of which it is a part … Periods of strong self-awareness are curiously accompanied by sharp increases in the use, distribution, or manufacture of mirrors, with the heaviest emphasis occurring in the modern period. Thus, the mirror emerges, strangely enough, both as an archetype *and* as an indicator of pathology.[85]

We need not conceive of the archetype of the mirror as simply a physical entity; the glassy object is both reflective and partially constitutive of the way the play of the gaze has formed modern Western subjectivity. Let us not forget that all Narcissus needed was clear water and that the famous tale has had countless echoes throughout the history of Western subjectivity.

In early childhood, the ego, both subject and object, develops a relationship to itself that is coterminous with the way it uses the reflections of itself in experience and others to further constitute its identity. And this self-creating and self-estranging mirroring continues throughout one's lifetime.

From roughly 500-1000 C.E. there were very few mirrors in Europe and concomitantly a relatively minimal development of self-consciousness in much of the population. Mirrors became a bit more common thereafter, only to see a drastic increase in Italy during the Renaissance, and by extension and by degree, in the rest of Europe as well. By 1500, the titles of more than 350 published *books* referred to mirrors in some fashion, and in the period between 1550-1650, as early

[85] Morris Berman, *Coming to Our Senses: Body and Spirit in the Hidden History of the West* (Brattleboro, VT: Echo Point Books and Media, 2015), 45.

modernity increasingly displaced medieval forms and subjectivities and the nation-state and the individual became freshly formidable, self-fashioning entities, this number became astronomical.

The development of perspective in painting was inextricably bound up with the increasing incidence of mirrors, which themselves demonstrated the translation of three-dimensionality onto a two-dimensional surface that was taken up by artists. Mark Pendergrast suspects that Giotto, one of the earliest of Renaissance perspectivists, was inspired by what he saw reflected in mirrors.[86] Giotto included himself in three of his frescos and would not have been able to do so without a mirror.

The art of the Renaissance and early modernity manifested its indebtedness to the mirror in the appearance of reflective surfaces in paintings. The mirror both demonstrated how three-dimensionality and perspective could be translated to two dimensions and was portrayed in painting to provide a revelatory vantage point other than the painter's own. Jan van Eyck's most famous painting, *The Arnolfini Portrait*, includes a mirror. Located in an elevated and central position on the back wall, it reflects the two central figures in miniature from behind. In 1555, Titian painted *Venus with a Mirror*, in which the goddess, attended by two cherubim, adores her form in a looking glass whose reflection is partially available to the viewer. This painting was copied by several other artists, including Rubens and van Dyck. According to Pendergrast, Leonardo da Vinci was deeply influenced by mirrors. He wrote about them in his journals and used them to evaluate his paintings. "The mind of the painter should be like a mirror," he said, "which always takes the color of the thing it reflects, and which is filled by as many images as there are things placed before it." The artist must "keep his mind as clear as the surface of a mirror."[87]

The mirror-inspired perspectivism of the Renaissance and early modern art was reflective and partially constitutive of a newfound cultural sense that there were divergent egos with various

[86] Mark Pendergrast, *Mirror Mirror: A History of the Human Love Affair with Reflection* (NY: Basic Books, 2003), 131-132.
[87] Ibid., 138.

viewpoints and the capacity to reflexively relate to themselves in increasingly complex ways. In the medieval age, the symbolic order ruled. An aristocratic-religious alliance engendered stasis and subjects' alignment with conferred roles and positionalities. The Other reigned supreme, and while the Other is internalized particularly, its manifestations in persons are quite consonant with each other, usually varying only according to the subject positions that it allocates. In the Renaissance, the Reformation, and early modernity, particular egos began to step out from role identities and assert themselves as viable agents in their own right, apart from an accession to historical inertia. And with these newfound egos came a perspectivally conceived imaginary and a novel sense that there was multifariously more to heaven and earth than was dreamt of by a synoptically conceived tradition.

In *The Order of Things*, Foucault introduces the "Classical" (early modern) episteme with a detailed description of *Las Meninas*, a famous 1656 painting by Diego Velázquez.[88] At the center of this work, as Foucault illustrates in great depth, is the interplay of gazes - a relay, traversing, and crisscrossing of perspectives - replete with revelations and occlusions. The leftmost figure in the work is the artist himself. Flanked by the five-year-old Infanta Margaret Theresa and several of her attendants, he is standing to the side of his easel, of which the viewer can only see the back. The viewer of the work and the subjects whom the painter (of the painting) is depicting occupy the same position in the foreground beyond the reach of that which is directly portrayed. Yet a mirror on the back wall, standing out from everything else on its plane in clarity and emphasis, captures the two subjects of the portrait, King Philip IV and Queen Mariana. In Foucault's analysis, as in the geometry of the painting itself, the mirror is uncannily central: it is "that tiny glowing rectangle which is nothing other than visibility, yet without a gaze able to grasp it, to render it actual, and to enjoy the suddenly ripe fruit of the spectacle it offers."[89] Mirrors in early modern paintings usually

[88] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (NY: Vintage Books, 1994), 3-16.
[89] Ibid., 7.

replicated a portion of the contents of the works on a different scale. The mirror in *Las Meninas*, however, only reflects the absently focal royal pair and contains nothing of the contents of the room. Moreover, only the viewer of the painting, and none of the portrayed subjects, sees this visual recapitulation of what the artist portrayed in the painting is representing on his canvas. And the point which is reflected in the mirror is the very position occupied by the viewer, who is displaced by that reflection which only she can see.

Foucault summarizes the optics of this painting thus: "[T]here, in the midst of this dispersion which it is simultaneously grouping together and spreading out before us, indicated compellingly from every side, is an essential void: the necessary disappearance of that which is its foundation – of the person it resembles and the person in whose eyes it is only a resemblance. This very subject – what is the same – has been elided. And representation, freed finally from the relation that was impeding it, can offer itself as representation in pure form."[90] Early modern representation as the elision of the subject. Perhaps. But was not this elision coterminous with a new assertion of the subject? Was not the growing sense of perspective indicative of an increasing cognizance of the vantage point of the individual, and concomitantly with new forms of the egoic seeking of advantage? Does it not point to a new sense of the particular that resulted from stepping out from the identification of subjectivity with a historically conferred subject position? And was not representation coterminous with a new emphasis of the one who represents and the other who is represented? At the same time, the Western ego that was starting to assert itself was covering over that void which both Lacan and Zen have insisted is at the root of subjectivity, so the very accentuation of the subject may well have been accompanied by a sense of the emptiness which individualism has never been able to overcome and to which Foucault points as being groundlessly foundational for representation.

[90] Ibid., 16

Modernity Made in the Mirror, Part II: Protestantism

Mirroring and the play of gazes were also integral to the development of Protestantism. The young Martin Luther was both obsessively concerned with his standing before the gaze of God and neurotically introspective. His theology became predicated on reflections and lines of sight. His opponents were subjects who, though gazing in the mirror, could not actually behold who they really were. They too trusted in the distortingly self-reflective character of good works, which for Luther were inherently deceptive and, at root, usually more vicious than praiseworthy: "[V]ery many have been deceived by this outward appearance and have presumed to write and teach concerning good works by which we may be justified without even mentioning faith."[91] Those who teach a doctrine of works are "blind leaders of the blind." One must give up allegiance to them through a redirection of the gaze: one "must look beyond works … Turning his eyes from works, he must look upon the person and ask how he is justified."[92]

One must look at oneself, but not at the outer person; one must penetrate the specious external forms that masquerade as righteousness and see the rot within: "Thus the first step in Christianity is the preaching of repentance and the knowledge of oneself."[93] One must turn to the Law, which, contrary to the works that seem to accord with it, functions to reveal my corrupted true self. The Law for Luther is not strictly identifiable with the Mosaic code or the Hebrew Bible. It comprises all the commandments in scripture, and they serve primarily to show the subject how far she or he has fallen from the divine standard. They both reveal the subject to himself or herself and demonstrate his or her status of condemnation before the gaze of God: "Thus the proper task of the

[91] Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," in Martin Luther, *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings,* ed. John Dillenberger (NY: Anchor Books, 1961), 42-85, 71.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians, 1535, Chapters 1-4*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1963), 126.

Law is to lead us forth from our tabernacles, that is, from our peace and self-confidence, to set us into the sight of God, and to reveal the wrath of God to us."[94]

From the despair-inducing vision of one's wayward condition, one must turn one's gaze to Christ ("Therefore when the Law accuses and sin troubles, he looks to Christ."[95] "He commands us to look to him and believe."[96]). Christ imbues the faith directed at him with color and splendor: "[F]aith takes hold of Christ and that He is the form that adorns and informs faith as color does the wall."[97] The ugly sinfulness unveiled by the Law is transferred to Christ, whose spotlessness becomes the righteousness imputed to the redeemed subject. And having recognized this newfound good standing with God, one must keep one's gaze fixed on Christ and not look at oneself: "But here Christ and my conscience must become one body, so that nothing remains in my sight but Christ, crucified and risen. But if Christ is put aside and I look only at myself, then I am done for."[98] Keeping Christ in view, one aligns one's vision with the gaze of God, which has been redirected from the marred condition of the sinner to the perfection of Christ. The savior's very being then inhabits and purifies the inner substance of the formerly miserable one, who, if trusting in the mirroring of his or her deeds, would be a wretched sight.

The subject can now stand before the gaze of God with assurance, for those unsightly sins for which she or he deserves condemnation have been covered. Sin is indeed still present, but it belongs to the outer person of false visibility and not the inner person who is justified by faith and sanctified by the indwelling presence of Christ. Sin remains, but Christ prevents the gaze of God from beholding it and attributing it to the subject:

> [S]in is always present, and the godly feel it. But it is ignored and hidden in the sight of God, because Christ the Mediator stands between; because we take hold of Him by faith, all our

[94] Ibid., 150
[95] Ibid., 134
[96] Ibid., 151
[97] Ibid., 129.
[98] Ibid., 166

> sins are sins no longer. But where Christ and faith are not present, here there is no forgiveness of sins or hiding of sins. On the contrary, here there is the sheer imputation and condemnation of sins. Thus God wants to glorify His Son, and He Himself wants to be glorified in us through Him.[99]

God's pursuit of God's glory, a theme that is ubiquitously present in Calvin, is important for Luther as well. And glory is inextricably bound up with visible splendor and magnificence. The subject then moves from a false visibility that trusts in the reflecting power of works to a true sense of her or his own condition elicited by reflection on one's failure to keep the Law. This induces despair, which then prompts the sinner to redirect her or his gaze away from her or his malignant personhood and fix her or his eyes on Christ. Christ exchanges his own perfection with the subject for the latter's sinfulness. The gaze of God therefore perceives the righteousness of Christ when it beholds the subject. And this whole movement is grounded in God's desire for glory, which amounts to the Christian's grateful genuflection before the splendor of his invisible visibility.

The imaginary character of so much of this soteriological language strongly suggests a fixity on the ego: an attempt to achieve a saved ego and a beatifically immortal ego. There is a subtle divergence from a culture of mirroring: the self that one beholds by human means is to be transcended. However, the fixation on the gaze and one's egoistic standing in relation to its divine form of it testifies to a beholdenness to the imaginary sphere of fictitious individualism. Before Luther the gaze of God was mediated and diffracted by a whole symbolic apparatus. With Luther, suddenly one stands immediately before God as one would gaze at oneself instantly, seemingly directly, and proximately in a mirror.

And though there is a greater sense of divine hiddenness in Calvin, the latter nonetheless opens *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* with an articulation of the primacy of self-observation: "For, in the first place, no man can survey himself without forthwith turning his thoughts toward

[99] Ibid., 133

the God in whom he lives and moves …"[100] For Calvin, it is typical of the subject to trust himself or herself. But this positive self-assessment goes awry by relying on comparison with other fallen subjects. Our vision can seem quite good in the middle of a sunny day when we are beholding terrestrial objects. However, should we turn our eyes to the sun, we would immediately be struck by our optical incapacity. Likewise, the subject who rests contentedly in a relative goodness according to human measures has failed to turn her or his gaze to God and thereby recognize, by way of contrast, her or his own depravity. As in Luther, self-observation is crucial, but worldly means of self-assessment fail to reckon with the divine standard according to which the human subject is justifiably condemned.

If the Lutheran could trust in her or his adoring gazing upon Christ, there really was not a concomitant source of soteriological certainty for Calvinists. Both Luther and Calvin believed in predestination, but the doctrine was much more pronounced in the latter. And belief itself, for the Reformed subject, was not a sufficient source of assurance of one's ultimate status. The doctrine of double predestination further magnified the gaze of God upon the single individual, without leaving the individual any recourse for affecting whether the will behind the gaze would elect her or him to the company of the redeemed or consign her or him to perdition. This could be a frightening and lonely predicament. Weber grasped it well: "In what was for the people of the Reformation age the most crucial concern of life, their eternal salvation, man was obliged to tread his path alone, toward a destiny which had been decreed from all eternity. No one and nothing could help him."[101] The preacher was of no assistance, for the truth of the Word could only be discerned by the elect. The sacraments were not deemed by Calvinists as at all soteriologically implicated. Belonging to the Church, while necessary for salvation, was far from sufficient. And what became known as the "L"

[100] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, tr. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), I.1.1.
[101] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism and Other Writings*, tr. and ed. Peter Baehr and Gordon C. Wells (NY: Penguin Books, 2002), 73.

in TULIP[102], standing for limited atonement, meant that Christ had only died for the elect. Hence, not even God could be counted on to help.[103] The fraught ego needed that which it could *behold* as a confirmation of its status as predestined for immortal blessing and which would serve as assuring fruits that would stave off the possibility of its perdition. Note the optical diction in Weber:

> It was quite different for the epigones [than it was for Calvin] – this was already true of Beza – and especially for the broad category of ordinary people. For these the *certitudo salutis*, in the sense of the possibility of *recognizing* one's state of grace, necessarily became elevated to absolutely overriding importance, and so it is that wherever the doctrine of predestination was established, the question continued to be asked as to whether there were definite distinguishing features by which membership of the *electi* could be recognized.[104]

Early modern Calvinists were desperate for something that would *reflect* election and thereby ease their troubled minds.

Luther had already sanctified work in a way that was unheard of in the medieval world. Prior to Luther, labor was part of the order of things but not particularly blessed unless it was part of that cordoned off work devoted to God performed by monks, nuns, and the clergy. But for Luther, the milk maid could milk cows to the glory of God. According to Weber, Reformed clergy seized upon this exaltation of work and counseled the insecure members of their flocks that it was in their vocations where the fruit of regenerate righteousness would be manifest. Civic space, for Protestants, was given by the providential hand of God and performing well in its ambit would redound to his glory. Moreover, success in business would demonstrate that cerebral and spiritual mastery of the corporeal, a theme traceable to Greco-Roman forms of self-cultivation and taken up by and absolutized in Christian morality. And accumulation of capital with minimal expenditure would testify to self-control and temperance. Work would become a form of reflection wherein the tenuous Reformed ego could *see evidence* of its ultimate condition and thereby become assuredly

[102] "TULIP" is an acronym created by Calvin's followers to summarize his soteriology. The letters stand for total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints.
[103] Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 73-74.
[104] Ibid., 76-77.

reified. And, as Weber highlights, capitalism initially flourished most where Calvinism was concentrated.

Modernity Made in the Mirror, Part 3: Philosophy

Mirroring has also been central to the incipience and perdurance of modern philosophy. Richard Rorty, the most important American philosopher of the late twentieth century, held that the trope of mind as mirror dominated philosophy from Descartes through his own epoch, an epoch that still, in many respects, persists:

> It is pictures rather than propositions, metaphors rather than statements, which determine most of our philosophical convictions. The picture which holds traditional philosophy captive is that of the mind as a great mirror, containing various representations – some accurate, some not – and capable of being studied by pure, nonempirical methods. Without the notion of the mind as mirror, the notion of knowledge as accuracy of representation would not have suggested itself. Without this latter notion, the strategy common to Descartes and Kant – getting more accurate representations by inspecting, repairing, and polishing the mirror, so to speak – would not have made sense.[105]

In other words, we have been dominated by a conception of the mind that, while indebted to the constructedness of the modern Western mirror stage and the egoic imaginary, has masqueraded as a fixed truth that can deliver unimpeachable verities. The very framework by which we have been conditioned to conceive of and measure truth is itself tenuously based on the evanescence of historical contingency. An image delivered by cultural construction and accidental prevalence, the mirror, has served as the tenuous basis of foundationalist discourse, humanistic certitude, and rationalistic egoism. But notice how Rorty too is captive to the very same imaginary in his insistence that pictures and metaphors are determinative and therefore that the imaginary trumps the symbolic.

[105] Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 30th Anniversary Edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 12.

First comes the belief that the mind is a mirror and that some of its representations are accurate and some not. Knowledge is then defined as "an assemblage of accurate representations."[106] Next comes the quest to identify specific representations whose accuracy is indubitable (Of course I know that's I when I gaze in the mirror. My features are recognizable.). These undoubtedly verified representations thereby become the foundations of knowledge, and since every domain of culture operates on the basis of a set of knowledge claims, philosophy can serve as the prime adjudicator of the foundation of every cultural expression. Yet if there is an aporia in philosophy's own ground …

This grounding framework of philosophy, then, has been epistemologically centered; its claims to truth about the mind are not just about the mind but are more broadly about truth in general: "To make it deep and philosophical, one must believe, with Descartes and Locke, that a taxonomy of mental entities and processes will lead to discoveries which will provide one with a method of discovering truth, and not just truth about the mind."[107]

The prime instigator in the establishment of this construct masquerading as absolute was Descartes. As Rorty writes, "In Descartes's conception – the one which became the basis for 'modern' epistemology – it is *representations* which are in the 'mind.' The Inner Eye surveys these representations hoping to find some mark which will testify to their fidelity."[108] For Descartes, faithful ideas were those which were clear and distinct, like a reflection in a stainless mirror: "And thus I now seem able to posit as a general rule that everything I very clearly and distinctly perceive is true."[109] He resolved "to apply my judgments to nothing but that which showed itself so clearly and distinctly to my mind that I should never have occasion to doubt it."[110] This is to say that the

[106] Ibid., 163.
[107] Ibid., 249.
[108] Ibid., 45.
[109] René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 3rd ed., tr. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993), 35.
[110] René Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, tr. Arthur Wollaston (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1960), 50.

originator of the great bifurcation between the *res cogitans* and the *res extensa* defined the former in terms of the perception of extensive materiality.

Before Descartes, Western Europe's universal mediator to Truth was Christ. But Protestantism and the religious wars had divided Christ in two. And a Christ divided against himself could not stand. Therefore, Descartes set about the task of finding a new, less divisive, and indisputably universal foundation for access to the Truth. He arrived at the Mind as Mirror. And the primal Truth was the immediate absoluteness of the ego as thinker. In other words, the poisoned wellspring of modern philosophy, like the estranging beginning of the individuation of each subject, was the experience of an ego (mis)recognizing itself in a mirror. For Lacan, the identification with the image reflected in the mirror is the beginning of an alienating misunderstanding of subjectivity and reality. Moreover, the subject is where she is not thinking and thinks where she is not. *Cogito ergo alius*. Thus, at the beginning of modern thought and subjectivity and at the foundation of our modern political projects was the distorting reflectivity of a mirrored egoic selfhood which was other than the subject himself.

Modernity Made in the Mirror, Part 4: France

Mirrors were extremely popular in the early modern France of Descartes. According to Pendergrast, "Nowhere was the mirror's transformation more evident than in seventeenth-century France."[111] In 1633, the French queen attended a ball where six rooms were lined with Venetian mirrors. As Pendergrast writes, this set off a nationwide mirror craze. In 1651, an archbishop threw a party for the Duchess of Longueville and decorated his home with fifty mirrors, "elaborately framed in carved gilt wood adorned with fruits, flowers, and angels."[112] Guests to this affair wore

[111] Pendergrast, *Mirror Mirror*, 148.
[112] Ibid., 148-149.

mirrored bracelets and necklaces and used silver chains to attach small mirrors to their belts. Around this time mirror rooms became fashionable for the aristocracy. Cardinal Mazarin, who ruled France when Louis XIV was a boy, routinely gave away mirrors as prizes. And in 1684, the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles was completed. "Louis XIV, the Sun King, had found the perfect reflection for his glory …"[113] It contained seventeen enormous composite mirrors, each comprising eighteen squares, nestled in window casements. These mirrors stood opposite real windows and reflected the elaborate gardens and grounds of Versailles. The mirrors created the illusion that the hall was much larger than it actually was and was transparently enclosed with "airy, invisible walls."[114] Over the next century, similar mirrored halls sprung up throughout Europe. As France moved into the eighteenth century, mirrors became ubiquitous: they adorned chairs, desks, beds, candelabra holders, chimneys, and overmantels.[115] They could be found in grottos, alcoves, and galleries. And the possession of ornate mirrors became a sine qua non of aristocratic status.

Into this culture stepped Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau distinguished between two forms of self-love, *amour de soi*, a natural and moderate form of care for oneself, and *amour-propre*, a passionate form of self-concern that can be derailed by the subject's comparison of himself or herself with others and that often induces insatiable desire.

> Self-love, which regards only ourselves, is contented when our true needs are satisfied. But *amour-propre*, which makes comparisons, is never content and never could be, because this sentiment, preferring ourselves to others, also demands others to prefer us to themselves, which is impossible. This is how the gentle and affectionate passions are born of self-love, and how the hateful and irascible passions are born of *amour-propre*. Thus, what makes man essentially good is to have few needs and to compare himself little to others: what makes him essentially wicked is to have many needs and to depend very much on opinion.[116]

[113] Ibid., 152.
[114] Ibid., 152.
[115] Ibid., 155.
[116] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*, tr. Allan Bloom (NY: Basic Books, 1979), 213-214.

I submit that *amour-propre* is greatly exacerbated by a culture of mirroring, in which one sees oneself as another and through the other, in which the ego is one other among many others, and all are vying for the coveted gaze, seeking to be objects of the desire of the Other. As Morris Berman writes, this is how the mirroring culture of modernity has been "so totally Other-directed and Self-preoccupied at one and the same time."[117] For Rousseau, the will to power is not a natural given as it is in Nietzsche but is instead coterminous with a treacherously untamable *amour-propre*: "But the desire to command is not extinguished with the need that gave birth to it. Dominion awakens and flatters *amour-propre*, and habit strengthens it. Thus, whim succeeds need; thus, prejudices and opinion take their first roots."[118] Thus, power in the modern mirror stage is coterminous with a will to be seen as prominent and to know in accordance with a fashionable episteme, and the will to rule is coincident with being ruled by the "prejudices and opinion" of the herd. Through *amour-propre*, the one who would be master becomes a slave.

This mirror culture of course produced the great philosophes of eighteenth-century France and all those salons where the literate and seemingly independent gathered to share knowledge and debate. These were rational egos performing for the mirroring gaze of other rational egos, polishing the mirrors of their minds. This dynamic was taken to be the exercise of a universal reason, yet this ostensibly enlightened exchange was rooted in Descartes' historically particular misrecognition of himself in his distorting cognitive reflection.

Eventually newly minted subjects produced through mirroring were declared to have natural rights. The French Revolution and Napoleon ensued, and all of Europe was consequently transformed. Yet as reason and individuality ascended, religious commitment waned. There was a need for a new form of social control now that fewer subjects believed in a panoptic, ethically

[117] Berman, *Coming to Our Senses*, 49
[118] Rousseau, *Emile*, 68.

demanding, and punitively efficacious God. And it was necessary to produce subjects who could be cogs in the emergently industrial capitalist machine. Yet it would also be expedient to employ optical modalities consonant with a culture steeped in mirroring. In stepped the panopticism of discipline.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault demonstrates how the late modern individual has been wrought from a pervasive disciplinary power structure that constantly observes and manipulates bodies. Clearly, while Foucault's individual is formed on the foundation of on an already constituted ego and an already Oedipalized subject, the subject that is further constituted under the gaze of late modern power must involve to a great extent the intensification of the ego, which is wrought and continues to grow through the observation and separation that mirroring initiates. Yet this is not an egoism of willful assertion; it is an imaginary subjectivity that accords with a potent formation. Therefore, Foucault's work demonstrates how egoic subjectivity has not only been aggrandized in late modernity, but also has become the bearer of oppressive forces that, even as they form the subject, seek to extend themselves through it.

Foucault hyperbolically and tendentiously charts what he takes to be a dramatic and almost sudden historical shift from the amorphous crowd to individualized groupings and from the focus of subjectivity at the apex of power to its concentration on the masses and even the marginal. In fact, as we have seen, the formation of individualized modern egos had begun with the Renaissance. The era beginning with the French Revolution marked an important shift that exacerbated Western egoism; it did not, however, as Foucault declared, produce the individual ex nihilo.

For Foucault, in this new era, bodies were organized spatially, practically, and discursively into individualities who could be monitored, and from whom could be extracted the maximum output. Foucault's name for the power that effected this transformation is discipline, and discipline, throughout late modernity, has been employed in schools, workplaces, prisons, the military,

hospitals, mental institutions, and other sites where the management and use of individual bodies has been paramount. Writes Foucault,

> Its aim was to establish presences and absences, to know where and how to locate individuals, to set up useful communications, to interrupt others, to be able at each moment to supervise the conduct of each individual, to assess it, to judge it, to calculate its qualities or merits. It was a procedure, therefore, aimed at knowing, mastering, and using. Discipline organized an analytical space.[119]

And this analytical space produced a form of individuality even as it observed and manipulated bodies. Thus, in modernity there has been a shift from undifferentiated masses to tightly structured arrangements of particular, situated bodies. But contra Foucault, this movement was well underway before 1800. This transition, which began in the Renaissance, in fact mirrors the development of each subject's ego, which emerges from a state of undifferentiation to separated individuality.

Supervision is central to the operation of discipline. Subjects conditioned by inhabiting a culture of reflection came to be further subjectified by the gaze. Discipline "implies an uninterrupted, constant coercion, supervising the processes of the activity rather than its result and it is exercised according to a codification that partitions as closely as possible time, space, movement."[120] Power and the gaze become conjunctive: observation[121] induces effects of power, and the use of power makes the object-subject on whom it is applied clearly visible.[122] The power operative in a military camp is a "network of gazes,"[123] each positioned to train bodies that will

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[119] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, Alan Sheridan (trans.) (New York: Vintage, 1977), p. 143.
[120] Ibid., 137.
[121] In *The Birth of the Clinic*, Foucault calls attention to the rigorously empirical medical gaze: "The gaze will be fulfilled in its own truth and will have access to the truth of things if it rests on them in silence, if everything keeps silent around what it sees. The clinical gaze has the paradoxical ability to *hear a language* as soon as it *perceives a spectacle*. In the clinic, what is manifested is originally what is spoken" (*The Birth of the Clinic*, A. M. Sheridan Smith [trans.] [New York: Vintage Books, 1994], 107). Foucault's diction also indicates how the imaginary of the gaze interpenetrates the symbolic. Bracketing discourse to look is here a form of reading, and medical empiricism has of course been conjoined with abounding practices of writing. And though I do not emphasize it here, the interpenetration of imaginary and symbolic mechanisms is also emphasized in *Discipline and Punish*, where the subject who is observed is also the subject with a file.
[122] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 170-171.
[123] Ibid., 171.

extend the power invested in them, meticulously observe and record these bodies' movements, and relay information to the top. In the factory, as operations became more complex, observation became more intense, ubiquitous, and specialized. Observation ran alongside of and throughout the production line and begat a whole class of workers whose job it was to visibly survey the operations.[124] Surveillance also became an integral element of pedagogy. Students were recruited to extend the limited gaze of the teacher so that, effectively, all could be seen at once, and in being seen be formed and molded. Moreover, pedagogy and observation became conjoined. Instruction became not just a matter of discursive dissemination, but also a means of monitoring and regularly adjusting students to the normalizing standards being communicated and promulgated.[125] Late modern power has been a force that, relying on mirroring prevenience, sees expansively and extends itself through those who are seen.

Thus, the formation of a new type of individuality was coterminous with this preponderantly scopic disciplinary power. The observed subject was being constantly constructed in accordance with the normality of the pervasively peering order in which he or she was situated. The late modern subject has been a watched ego who is to perform in accordance with the dictates of the structure in which both the watcher and his object are situated, and extend, through the operations of his or her body, the power that provokes, monitors, and encompasses. Moreover, visibility in late modernity has been so extensive that the subject has acquired a sense, like the prisoner in the panopticon, that he or she can always be surveilled. The subject therefore becomes a watcher of herself or himself. The inner eye operates with the same subjectifying strictures as the disciplining external gaze.

[124] Ibid., 174.
[125] Ibid., 176.

To be seen is fundamentally aspirational for the subject[126], for the ideal ego is the glimpsed totality prehended in the mirror. To be observed, then, must be to some extent gratifying for the disciplined subject. But in the mirror stage, the gestalt, though idealized and internalized, can never be fully realized. Therefore, built into the pleasure of being seen is the failure of fully being the seen ideal. It is in this gap between wanting to be viewed and never fully being able to locate oneself as the desired object of the gaze that discipline does it work. The ambivalence of the subject's wanting to be seen and failing to realize this desire perpetually motivates the individual to accommodate herself to power. Here the object of the gaze is also the subject who performs and conforms. Here, in this conjunction, the docile subject is born … and the ego is born again. Through this mechanism, modern power cultivates agreeable egos that serve as vehicles through which it extends itself.

Modernity Made in the Mirror, Part 5: The Twentieth and Twenty-first Centuries

In the twentieth and twenty-first century, seeing perhaps has become as important as being seen, as capitalism has produced a pacifying, image-saturated mass culture as a regime-maintaining reprieve and consumption-inducing stimulus for disciplined subjects already conditioned to be captive to the gaze. Movies, television, magazines, video games, advertising, ostentatious retail stores, celebrity, conspicuous consumption, and now the internet have perpetually put late modern culture on display for its subjects and made the imaginary order even more predominant. Our

[126] We should recall the importance of recognition in the Hegelian-Kojèvian trajectory of Continental thought. Being recognized plays a central role in Hegel's master-slave dialectic. For Hegel, "Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged" (G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, A. V. Miller [trans.] [New York: Oxford, 1977], 111). Kojève, entertaining the possibility of an absolutely solitary human, writes, "[H]e would no longer be, he would not be, a *human* being, since the human *reality* is nothing but the fact of the *recognition* of one man by *another* man" (*Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, Allan Bloom [ed.], James H. Nichols, Jr. [trans.] [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1969], 41). Kojève, whose seminar Lacan attended, consistently emphasized the importance of recognition in his lectures on Hegel.

cultural machines have concocted opportunities for a fleeting release from the iron cage that in turn makes emancipation impossible. We are offered Dionysian escapes from a thoroughly rationalized order which only makes a disproportionately Apollonian subjection inevitable. Mass media, entertainment, and sports are the opiates of secularized masses condemned to enslavement to an alienating culture of excessive visibility. And yet even within highly rationalized professional and civic domains, there are ubiquitous display and pervasive presentation. As Guy Debord wrote in the 1960's, "In societies where modern conditions of production prevail, life is presented as an immense accumulation of *spectacles*. Everything that was directly lived has receded into a representation."[127]

Part of the reason for our increasingly spectacle-laden culture is a secularizing transition from the subject seeing herself as operating under the panoptic eyes of God to being increasingly constituted by the gaze of peering peers. The Calvinists who led the capitalistic charge were originally quite restrained in their spending. They were primarily performing for God and their own peace of mind, and the accumulation of capital by itself, for which thrift was integral, was sufficient to mirror one's elect status. But they also helped to set in motion a monstrous machine with rules of its own whose seeming *manifest* destiny would eventually outstrip pious restraint.

Though the theological underpinnings of capitalism would become less and less important, the commodity would become religiously invested and seemingly agential: as Marx said, relationships between subjects came to masquerade as relationships between things, as the commodity became a fetishized entity with a seemingly pneumatic exchange value. These economic dynamics combined with a rationalistic attenuation of religious authority and subjects' egoically and mutually mirroring estrangement from a sense of standing in the divine line of sight to make the visible display of the fruits of economic success increasingly common. For much of modernity, an old guard of hegemonically situated, WASPish blue bloods would sneer at the ostentation of the nouveau riche,

[127] Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, tr. Ken Knabb (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2014), I.1.

but in the 1920's and then during the postwar period increasingly extravagant expenditure became normalized, envied, and emulated. Once wealth itself was sufficient testimony of one's salvation. Now that subjects are increasingly secular and more markedly beholden to the gaze of other humans, material success must be translated into a bifocal mirror-exhibition of one's socioeconomic standing.

It is important to remember that the rudiments of capitalism's alienating subject-object relationality are as old as the human ego. In Lacanian terms, the ego, though limitedly agential, is first and foremost an object. It is therefore of a piece with the external object; the ego is the object's "identical correlate."[128] The ego is described by Bruce Fink as a "seat of fixation and narcissistic attachment,"[129] and it fixates on and clings to both its own self and its kin, which are other cathected objects. In the process, it reifies both itself and its world, thereby obscuring the interdependent, impermanent character of all things. For Lacan, the ego is the site of "systematic misrecognition and objectification."[130] In fact, these two processes are part of the same movement, for to substantialize oneself and project a world of objects is to fail to see the emptiness of Reality. And because the ego unwittingly seeks a primordially lost object that cannot be found, no object can sate the very longing that ceaselessly seeks fulfillment in objects. The ego fruitlessly cathects one object after another in an occasionally pleasurable but fundamentally dukkha-saturated, Sisyphean quest.

The ego is located in the imaginary order; its objects and its own self are alienatingly bound to and constituted by *imagos*. The reflection in the mirror which the young child introjects and the other children with whom she or he identifies are fundamentally self-constituting images. For Lacan,

[128] Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book 2: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis*, 52
[129] Fink, *The Lacanian Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 37.
[130] Lacan, *Ecrits*, 94.

imagos "establish a relationship between an organism and its reality,"[131] but they can accrue to displace that for which they supposedly mediate. According to Fink, after the internalization of the primordial image, "[o]ther ideal images are similarly assimilated by the child which stem from the image of him or herself reflected back from the parental Other: 'a good girl' or 'a bad girl,' 'a model son,' and so on."[132] These images coalesce to form a strong sense of self which is in fact a severe distortion. As the child grows, he or she will increasingly use reflection and imaginarily situated objects to attempt to buttress and solidify this false self-image. And the ego, though initially formed on the basis of a perceived gestalt and attempting to maintain diachronic continuity, will be ceaselessly undone by an inner fragmentation traceable to the disparateness of the *imagos* used to constitute its "alienated, virtual unity."[133] "The subject is no one. It is decomposed, in pieces. And it is jammed, sucked in by the image, the deceiving and realized image, of the other, or equally by its own specular image."[134]

The condition of Marx's subject, alienated in his labor, separated from the fruit of his labor, and falling short of the species self, is only an exacerbation of the ego's long-lived estrangement from true Being. And the power of commodities to structure the social is inexplicable apart from the climbing, pursuing, collecting, objectifying, and self-adorning ego, which assimilates itself to that which it seeks and thereby becomes another fetishized commodity with an artificial, trumped-up exchange value that is separate from real utility. Thus, people increasingly speak of *branding* themselves, thereby testifying to the alienating commodification of their personhood. Lukács called this process reification. To quote him, "the reified mind necessarily sees [the commodity] as the

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[131] Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book 2: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis*, 78

[132] Fink, *The Lacanian Subject*, 36.

[133] Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book 2: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis*, 50.

[134] Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book 2: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis*, 54.

form in which its own authentic immediacy becomes manifest and – as reified consciousness – does not even attempt to transcend it." And later: "Just as the capitalist system continuously produces and reproduces itself economically on higher and higher levels, the structure of reification progressively sinks more deeply, more fatefully and more definitively into the consciousness of man."[135]And the seemingly unitary but utterly fragmented subject is further divided, as disintegration disfigures both the commodity and the ego that is inextricably and constitutively tethered to it. As Lukács writes, "this fragmentation of the object of production necessarily entails the fragmentation of its subject."[136] Reification's movement from a commodity-based society to the extensive and penetrating colonization of the subject herself testifies to the insightfulness of Lacan's intuition that the ego is an object before it is a subject and is constituted by its connections with other objects. By appealing to the object that is the ego and privileging the imaginary which is the formative and operational domain of the ego, capitalism makes the subject more like another damn thing.

As the Lacanian object is also an image, a commodity-driven environment must become a culture of the spectacle. As Debord writes, "The fetishism of the commodity – the domination of society by 'imperceptible as well as perceptible things' – attains its ultimate fulfillment in the spectacle, where the perceptible world is replaced by a selection of images which is projected above it, yet which at the same time succeeds in making itself regarded as the perceptible par excellence."[137] Representation replaces Reality as an alienated and alienating amplification of the reifying force of exchanged things. Technologistically enframed (Heidegger) late capitalist culture has been dominated by a mass-produced, titillating visibility through which already alienated egos have become increasingly distant from each other and their own very selves. The Real is relentlessly blotted out by an endless parade of transient forms and sound bites that hurry past signifiers to

[135] Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, (NY: Bibliotech Press, 2017), 74.
[136] Ibid., 70.
[137] Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 36.

arrive at inane, widely disseminated, imaginary signifieds. All the while, the spectacle, in its distance from and cancellation of the Real, both mirrors and exacerbates our own exiled captivity to the ego, the object, and the image.

For Debord, the spectacle is totalizing. It functions as a more efficacious but fundamentally visual equivalent of ideology, a dominating supplement that makes the existing order seem natural: "In both form and content the spectacle serves as a total justification of the conditions and goals of the existing system. The spectacle is also the *constant presence* of this justification since it monopolizes the majority of the time spent outside the modern production process."[138] But it is not simply other than discursively produced fictions. It is "a worldview that has actually been materialized, that has become an objective reality." And the *Weltenschaung* at its root is that of a mirror-made mind, formed through reflection to be self-referential yet always beholden to the gaze. As Christopher Lasch has written, "We live in a swirl of images and echoes that arrest experience and play it back in slow motion. Cameras and recording machines not only transcribe experience but alter its quality, giving to much modern life the character of an enormous echo chamber, *a hall of mirrors*. Life presents itself as a succession of images or electronic signals, of impressions recorded and reproduced by means of photography, motion pictures, television, and sophisticated recording devices."[139] Lasch was writing before the internet, which has greatly exacerbated the cultural saturation of recording and images. Moreover, as he implies, the spectacle is not simply that which we observe; it is also that into which our own subjectivities are constantly translated. Images bring us together but divide us even in our conjunction, for engagement with the other increasingly becomes "a social relation between people that is mediated by images."[140] The spectacle is a cancerously invasive fiction that insinuates itself

[138] Ibid., I.6.
[139] Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 1979), 61, italics mine.
[140] Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, I.4.

throughout reality in order to displace it, just as the ego, upon being introjected by the subject, cuts off the latter from the fullness of her being. And then modern subjects were created; male and female, they were created; in the image of the image, they were created.

One increasingly lives for the egoic image of oneself. The subject depends on the mirroring reflectivity and cultivated display of her appearance, possessions, socioeconomic and professional status, and elliptical connections. She or he has become increasingly vain and narcissistic, constantly using others as mirrors to reflect her or his self-image. Lasch wrote in 1979 of a dynamic that is even more true today: "Today men seek the kind of approval that applauds not their actions but their personal attributes. They wish to be not so much esteemed as admired. They crave not fame but the glamor and excitement of celebrity. They want to be envied rather than respected. Pride and acquisitiveness, the sins of an ascendant capitalism, have given way to vanity."[141] Success, defined in egoistic and imaginary terms, must always be "ratified by publicity,"[142] and leaders increasingly fret not about their performance but about public perception. Management attracts narcissists who are skilled at manipulating the impressions of others while keeping a calculated emotional distance.[143] One puts oneself on display online. What is posted is the projection of oneself onto the digital mirror of social media, and the responses one receives are the reflection of an alienating self-image back to the subject. And one is undone by *amour-propre*, ceaselessly comparing oneself with the falsifying online presentations of others.

Discipline is not as oppressive and thoroughgoing as it was in the early nineteenth century context Foucault depicted. But one aspect of discipline is that it so ingrains itself in the subject that the latter eventually can propagate the power with which she has been invested apart from external force. Thus, collectively and historically, we have been so shaped by discipline and a mirroring

[141] Ibid., 75
[142] Ibid., 76
[143] Ibid., 57

modernity that we now willfully fashion ourselves as docile, conforming subjects operating in accordance with a panoptic gaze. And digital social media have become prime abettors to this process. Our technologies of the self are fundamentally alienating.

Imaginary predominance also causes the ego to identify more and more with the persona. According to Carl Jung, deploying the etymology of "person," the persona is "a kind of mask, designed on the one hand to make a definite impression upon others, and on the other to conceal the true nature of the individual."[144] The persona, not identical with the ego but coincident with certain aspects of it, projects an image so that it is well received by the mirroring other. And in a culture in which appearance is paramount and seeming consistently trumps being, the subject comes to see herself as the mask, and the sense that there is a deeper reality within that is being concealed disappears. In a society of the spectacle, the subject takes herself to be her culturally accommodating self-presentation.

The most common source of the persona is the professional role. Conditioned by Protestantism, capitalism, and discipline to see our work as a reflection of our being, we increasingly come to identify with the roles we assume to make a living and the masks we don to achieve professional renown. And this alienating dynamic is much more common with status-conferring white-collar work. In wage labor, alienation in the traditional Marxist sense is still the foremost problem, but in higher end positions it is identification with and ownership of one's work that is the chief snare. Furthermore, in the latter forms of employment, there is often a considerable amount of accession to a given discursive formation. One prides oneself on the intellectual skill exercised on the job but is unaware of the great extent she has become an epistemically limited vector of a power-knowledge apparatus and concomitantly how much of the professional identity which instills a separating sense of exaltation is really the result of an assimilating accommodation to the Other.

[144] Carl G. Jung, *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*, tr. R. F. C. Hull (London: Routledge, 1953), 190

In Debord there is still a sense that there is a reality that has been occluded, just as in the Marxist concept of ideology, there is held to be a discursive truth that is non-ideological. Yet Baudrillard, writing a little more than a decade after Debord, insisted that the Real had disappeared. For him, there is only a hyperreal in which the distinction between representation and reality is no more, simulacra have no real model, and there is pervasive simulation without a prior actuality. What in Debord was a hegemonic imaginary that could still be resisted became for Baudrillard a fictionality that had so permeated society that it had displaced and absorbed the Real and canceled itself by dissolving its intrinsic subsequence. Consequently, the dichotomy of reality vs. representation is for Baudrillard no longer viable. Baudrillard charts the historical sequence of the image:

> It is the reflection of a profound reality;
> It masks and denatures a profound reality;
> It masks the *absence* of a profound reality;
> It has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum.[145]

In Debord there is a sense that the image "masks and denatures a profound reality" in such a way as to make that reality unreachable. But with Baudrillard reality and with it the notion of an imaginary which is less real than something else disappear. For him, the hegemony of the imaginary has canceled the imaginary itself by dissolving the distinction which makes representation secondary to an actuality. While I do not completely agree with him, I would add that this collapse, to the extent that it is actual, is reflected subjectively in the egoic investment in a persona which is so thoroughgoing that the sense of an inner reality that the persona misrepresents disappears. Thereby, like the imaginary that is so totalizing that it is no longer itself, the persona is no longer a persona; it has become the person as simulacrum.

[145] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, tr. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994), 6

Perhaps the most powerful part of Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* is an analysis of the sociological function of the spectacle-saturated American creation called Disneyland: "Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, whereas all of Los Angeles and the America that surrounds it are no longer real but belong to the hyperreal order and to the order of simulation. It is no longer a question of a false representation of reality (ideology) but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real, and thus of saving the reality principle."[146] Not a pleasant escape from reality but a hyperbole of a pervasive unreality that, by way of contrast, makes the rest of the country seem to be grounded in an actuality that does not exist.

Roughly twenty years after Baudrillard wrote this, reality television emerged as a pervasive force in entertainment. Of course, with the camera rolling, what is portrayed cannot be utterly authentic. But is there a completely realistic realm that can be contrasted with it? The advent of reality television was only possible because the spectacle had become so dominant and playing the part of a persona performing for the mirroring other had become the norm. All the world had become a stage populated by poor players estranged from Real significance. Displaying unscripted egoic depravity on television was an obvious next step. Moreover, reality television was preceded by a technologized dynamic that Lasch put his finger on more than forty years ago: "Modern life is so thoroughly mediated by electronic images that we cannot help responding to others as if their actions – and our own – were being recorded and simultaneously transmitted to an unseen audience or stored up for close scrutiny at some later time."[147] Everyday life conducted with the background sense of having one's sayings and doings recorded, transmitted, and preserved was well underway before *Big Brother* and *The Real World*. Now we have been so inundated with images and recordings and so conditioned to translate our high points into displays on social media that a natural existence

[146] Ibid., 12-13
[147] Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism*, 61-62

that is not appealing to the eye of the other as if it were a camera is virtually unseen. Disneyland is to everyday America as reality television is to public life; reality television is just a slight exaggeration of a general condition of subjectivity that is marked by the ego's constant performance and posing for the gaze, the mirror, and the camera. The fictional element of reality television therefore pertains also to the diurnal events of those who watch it. While reality television does not portray an authentic reality, our everyday lives are often just as ersatz.

However, Baudrillard is less than careful in his use of Lacanian categories. He translates what for Lacan are the primarily subjective domains of the Real, the symbolic, and the imaginary into sociological categories, and he wrongly equates the unreal with human construction. For Lacan, however, the Real is not simply the natural; it is everything as it is apart from the subject's imaginary and symbolic projections. In Lacanian terms, even Space Mountain (a ride at Disneyland) as it is in itself is Real. Therefore, Baudrillard is hasty and misguided in his insistence that the Real has been abolished. The Real persists as it is, even alongside of societally produced subjective estrangement, and aligning with the Real is still possible. Baudrillard refers to a fable of a map that completely covers the territory it represents. For him, "The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory – *precession of simulacra* – that engenders the territory, and if one must return to the fable, today it is the territory whose shreds slowly rot across the extent of the map. It is the real, and not the map, whose vestiges persists here and there in the deserts that are no longer those of the Empire, but ours. *The desert of the real itself.*"[148] The Real as the desert, an empty locale laden with spiritual significance. But the desert of the Real does not simply exist in isolated pockets to which simulacra do not extend, it is the fundamentally empty condition of each subject, accessible when nonattached witnessing displaces the gaze and its alienated ego.

[148] Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 1.

VIII. Sartre and Unreflected Consciousness

Sartre came close to discovering the witness but identified witnessing with thinking in a way that cannot be reconciled with either Lacanian theory or Buddhist spirituality. Nevertheless, he can help us resist Lacan's overly negative view of consciousness and move in the direction of recognizing that within consciousness which is not the product of reflection. For Lacan, the mirror is the fundamental metaphor through which consciousness can be understood: "What is the image in the mirror? The rays which return on to the mirror make us locate in an imaginary space the object which moreover is somewhere in reality. The real object isn't the object that you see in the mirror. So here there's a phenomenon of consciousness as such."[149] Yet the image is not utterly divorced from the object, and we must distinguish between that which appears in phenomenality apart from egoic and symbolic transmogrification and that which has been morphed by projection.

Lacan, who is in many respects following both Kant and Christian orthodoxy, posits that consciousness always entails a (mis)representational unreality. Consciousness for him necessarily only encounters a realm of verisimilitude that is divorced from what truly is. For Lacan, consciousness is the domain of the ego and the imaginary through and through. But this is not to say that Lacan does not practically make use of a trans-egoic dimension of consciousness. In order for a psychoanalytic patient to access the unconscious, she must delve into this realm. One of the functions of the ego is to repress unconscious contents, so the delving into unconscious contents through free association, for example, necessitates transcending the ego within consciousness. Furthermore, spiritual adepts often describe the beginning stages of meditation or contemplative prayer as treacherous. Through these practices, the ego is transcended, its repressive mechanism

[149] Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954-1955*, Sylvana Tomaselli (trans.), Jacques-Alain Miller (ed.) (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1988), p. 46.

released, and at least initially, a flurry of formerly unconscious images and ideas flood the mind. But before we make our way to the spiritual world of Buddhism, let us turn to Jean-Paul Sartre for a theoretical elaboration of unreflected, trans-egoic consciousness.

Sartre, in *The Transcendence of the Ego*, aimed to show that the ego is not the summit of the subject but rather *a reflected object within a consciousness that transcends egoic capture*.[150] One of Sartre's aims is to rebut a post-Kantian line of thought that identifies an ego with the operation of the categories. Sartre distinguishes between his phenomenologically inspired procedure and Kant's. For Sartre, it is important to recognize that Kant, in elaborating the categories, was not trying to describe actual experience but to explain the necessary noetic elements that make experience possible. It would therefore be erroneous to hypostatize those conditions in the form of a transcendent ego that is an element of existence.[151]

Phenomenology, on the other hand, describes reality as it is encountered, and for Sartre, justifiably discerns a higher plane of consciousness within the subject. But is this higher plane the realm of a transcendental ego? For Husserl, the answer was yes. The Husserlian project entailed bracketing received ideas and attending directly to raw experience as it was given to consciousness. Phenomenological bracketing ostensibly transcends the empirical ego, but Husserl posited that there is still a transcendental ego that unifies all experience. Sartre borrows the phenomenological method, but disagrees that the domain of this higher consciousness, which he calls "unreflected consciousness," is egoic. And in light of the above discussion, we cannot overestimate the

[150] Scholarship on the intersection of Sartre and Lacan has recently focused on the question of responsibility. Betty Cannon ("What Would I Do with Lacan Today? Thoughts on Sartre, Lacan, and Contemporary Psychoanalysis," in *Sartre Studies International* 22[2]:13-38) is critical of Lacan for insufficiently emphasizing personal responsibility. Blake Scott ("Sartre, Lacan, and the Ethics of Psychoanalysis: A Defense of Lacanian Responsibility," in *Sartre Studies International* 22[2]:3-12) responds that personal responsibility is an important point of emphasis for Lacan, but that the locus of this responsibility is the unconscious.

[151] Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Transcendence of the Ego*, Forrest Williams and Robert Kirkpatrick (trans.) (New York: Hill and Wang, 1960), 33.

fittingness and importance of the word "unreflected." According to Sartre, "It is ordinarily thought that the existence of a transcendental *I* may be justified by the need that consciousness has for unity and individuality. It is because all my perceptions and all my thoughts refer themselves back to this permanent seat that my consciousness is unified."[152] Indeed, this is a common mistaken assumption. But what are the sources of this assumption? First, this line of thinking is clearly egoic and attributes the assumed unity of the ego to a realm that surpasses it. Furthermore, the concept of "the One" has been so influential in the history of the West that occidental thinkers are conditioned to posit it automatically. Therefore, Husserl's assertion that there is a transcendental ego unifying experience may stem from the sort of discursive inheritance that he supposedly bracketed.

For Sartre, on the one hand, the unity of consciousness stems from the unity of the object that it intentionally prehends. On the other hand, consciousness, apart from the synthesis of an ego, operates on a stored history of consciousnesses to achieve the subject's sense of a unified temporal duration. He thus concludes, "[T]he phenomenological conception of consciousness renders the unifying and individualizing role of the *I* totally useless. It is consciousness, on the contrary, which makes possible the unity and the personality of my *I*. The transcendental *I*, therefore, has no *raison d'etre*."[153] But Sartre perhaps overlooks the contributions of the empirical ego (not the Husserlian transcendental ego) to the subject's (fictitious) sense of unity. If the unity of the object that consciousness grasps is an element of what funds the unity of the subject, we might say that the ego is the quintessential object, whose apparent unity (derived from the gestalt of the image in the mirror) becomes attributed both to the totality of the subject and the ostensibly discrete "object" prehended. And a significant element of the subject's pretense to being a perduring essential being must stem from his or her egoic identification with both the future of his or her body and a personal

[152] Ibid., 37.
[153] Ibid., 40.

past through memory, whose instances can be seen as cathected *imagos* that add to the accretion of internalized images that constitutes the ego. Sartre wants to preserve a unity without the ego, but I am arguing that the unity he tries to preserve is an effect of the ego. Nevertheless, I want to affirm Sartre's intention to clear unreflected consciousness of the detritus of the ego, for this aim coincides with the goal of Zen.

Sartre also takes aim at Descartes. For the former, the cogito unwarrantedly yokes the "I" and thought. The "I," or the ego, is, on the one hand, an opacity, and on the other hand, a derivative form of consciousness not to be identified with the consciousness that thinks. It masquerades as being the source of consciousness when in fact it is not: "To be sure, the *I* manifests itself as the source of consciousness. But that alone should make us pause. Indeed, for this very reason the *I* appears veiled, indistinct through consciousness, like a pebble at the bottom of the water. For this very reason the *I* is deceptive from the start, since we know that nothing but consciousness can be the source of consciousness."[154] In Lacanian terms, this is an element of the deceptiveness of the imaginary. The ego presents itself as a unified source when in fact it is rooted in the introjection of a distorting alterity. It pretends to be a prime mover when in fact it is always involved in a charade. If Lacan emphasizes the deception of the ego and the imaginary, Sartre consistently notes the opacity of the "I." To be sure, for Sartre, there is something transcendent about the ego, for it is not reducible to the instant; it persists through many instances. But he is adamant that this form of transcendence should not be identified with the transcendence of unreflected consciousness. If for Descartes, the impossibility of doubting that the thinker exists entailed a unity of thinker and thinking, for Sartre this unity is unwarranted. The "I" is not the provenance of thought.

[154] Ibid., 51-52.

I want to affirm Sartre's recognition of a dimension in consciousness that transcends the ego, which I will call the witness; but need we identify thought with unreflected consciousness? And is there not a linguistic and psychological naivete in associating thought with a realm of pure freedom, as Sartre tries to do? Lacan's understanding of cognition is more nuanced and convincing. I will unfold this element of Lacan's theory in the subsequent chapter. Suffice it to say here that, for Lacan, thought always springs from the signifier. He wrote, for example, that "the signifier . . . represents a subject for another signifier."[155] In humanistic terms, we use words to communicate with other subjects. Words are media for pure expressivity. From a Lacanian perspective though, the symbolic order precedes us. We come to be subjects through the priority of a linguistic matrix that largely determines the structures of our expression. Words are not our media; we are words' media. Therefore, in the realm of cognition, while there is not absolute determination, there is no absolute freedom. While I want to preserve Sartre's notion of an unreflected consciousness and an element of his critique of Descartes, I find it hard to identify the unreflected realm with the reflection of cognition.

Furthermore, as we move in a Zen direction, we will find that breaking the subject's captivity to inherited thought patterns is essential to realizing an emancipation more profound than a Sartrian freedom which, in holding cognition to be unfettered, is quite misguided and confined. Zen incorporates the Taoist move to break free from the stasis of conceptuality, even as meditation, mindfulness, and the pursuit of the direct perception of the Real in its suchness (*tathātā*) radically disrupt the subject's habitual relationship to chains of signifiers. It would be misleading to identify enlightenment with freedom from thought, but it is clear that Zen attempts radically to transform the subject's relationship with his or her cognition. Zen delves into the domain of unreflected consciousness and finds there a freedom from cognition-dominated, reflective subjectivity. While

[155] Lacan, *Ecrits*, 157.

Lacan is to an extent right to emphasize the priority of the signifier, there is an element of subjectivity, which is to a great extent coincident with Lacan's own Real, that escapes a habitual subsequence to images and words. And this dimension is precisely the unreflected consciousness that Sartre partially points to and the awakened Buddhist inhabits.

Conclusion

The mirror stage, on the level of the subject, is the span of the infant's life when introjected images form the alienating basis of the ego. But the modern West is still captive to its own mirror stage, and postmodernism, and post-postmodernism, while being significant intellectual movements that have emphasized the symbolic and the Real respectively, have not been able to overcome our deeply embedded thralldom to the imaginary order. We late modern Westerners have been subjectified extensively through mirroring, images, and the dynamics of the gaze and desperately need a spiritual solution to our plight. Would it not be wise to adopt practices such as mindfulness, meditation, and centering prayer wherein we detach from the gaze and its alienated ego and realize the empty expansiveness of the unreflected witness which we have neglected?

Chapter 2: Bound by Signifying Chains: Fallenness and the Lacanian Subject

Introduction

We have dealt with the imaginary and the ego, even as we have seen how modernity and capitalism have intensified the latter and made the former preponderant. The ego, inextricably bound up with cultural forces, is not just the prime culprit of personal blindness; it is also a key component of structural sin. In this present chapter, I will work more extensively on developing the connection between personal brokenness and macro waywardness. This effort will involve a critical examination of the symbolic center of Lacanian thought, even as I begin to move towards the Zen pursuit of a phenomenality beyond the delusions of the ego and the projections of language.[156] But to do this I will be using a frame. I have found this framing necessary because there are blind spots in Lacan's conceptions of culture that must be corrected. On the one hand, there is a lack of commitment to justice in the Lacanian oeuvre.[157] To be sure, he has opened doors for scholarship that is committed to justice. And he in many ways exposes *aporiae* in an overarching patriarchal structure. On the other hand, he affirms this structure at the same time. Lacan deems the exogamous exchange of women, identified by Lèvi-Strauss as the pivotal element in the emergence of human civilization (more on this below), as a still crucial ingredient of the cultural order. It is necessary, he writes, "for one half of humanity to become a signifier of exchange."[158] And while Lacan describes gender positions as far from naturally given, he affirms a problematically heteropatriarchal goal of subjectification.

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[156] I understand that this contention runs counter to the basic tenets of deconstruction and is the promotion of a kind of logocentrism. As I will argue, though, it is only the enlightened subject's consciousness that breaks free of the grip of the signifier, not the totality of the subject.

[157] The same can be said of Zen. But we shall cross this bridge when we come to it.

[158] Jacques Lacan, *Formations of the Unconscious, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book V,* Jacques-Alain Miller (ed.), Russell Grigg (trans.) (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2017), 268.

Just as troubling is the way he presents the symbolic order, the realm of culture, as so universal and determinative in its established form that there is no room to alter it significantly. For example, in the programmatic essay to *Écrits*, "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter,'" he reads Edgar Allen Poe's story in such a way as to show how the signifier always returns to its place ("That is why what the 'purloined letter,' nay, the 'letter *en souffrance*,' means is that a letter always arrives at its destination."[159]) and thereby the regnant order from which the signifier springs, in its basic structure, must persist. When we combine this contention with the claim that Poe's story demonstrates "the major determination the subject receives from the itinerary of a signifier"[160] we have the picture of subjects constituted to accord with the indwelling aims of the symbolic order and little ability to alter that conformity. Though there may be minor deviations, figured in the tale as the disturbance of order initiated by an official's pilfering of the queen's letter, whose contents, if widely known, would upset the heteropatriarchal-polictical hegemony figured in the stability of the royal pair, signifier and subject for Lacan must return to their places in the overarching structure. The re-pilfering of the letter by the canny detective Dupin and its return to its rightful owner represent for Lacan the inevitability of the persistence of the basic structures of society and the inability of the deviating subject and signifier to maintain that eccentricity effectively. Derrida has also objected to this sense of the inevitability of the *exitus-reditus* formula in Lacan's reading:

> Lacan leads us back to the truth, to a truth which itself cannot be lost. He brings back the letter, shows that the letter brings itself back toward its *proper* place via a *proper* itinerary, and, as he overtly notes, it is this destination that interests him, destiny as destination. The signifier has its place in the letter, and the letter refinds its proper meaning in its proper place. A certain reappropriation and a certain readequation will reconstitute the proper, the place, meaning, and truth that have become distant from themselves for the time of a detour or of a non-delivery.[161]

[159] Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, Bruce Fink (trans.) (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), 30.
[160] Ibid., 7.
[161] Jacques Derrida, *The Postcard*, Alan Bass (trans.) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 436.

Indeed, Lacan's emphasis on the need for reappropriation is the positing of the necessity of truth. And this truth is no mere proposition. It is the truth of the symbolic order that must have its way in and through us. Derrida's alternative, of course, is *différance*: letters, or signs, do not return to their proper place; they always differ from other iterations of their own selves and defer the arrival at any finalizable truth ad infinitum. Derrida's project thus entails an unraveling of structure from within the structure. With Zen, I am trying to point to an inner space not absolutely removed from the movements of language but in some sense capable of detachment from a pervasive "writing" that has not colonized the subject's entirety. But this movement, I will argue, is insufficient if it does not facilitate a direct challenging of the prevailing order itself.

Of course, even as I critique Lacan's conservatism[162], I must acknowledge that this project comparing Lacan with Zen is not *primarily* invested in advocating for significant cultural change. But a component of my aim is to argue that, given that we all have been so shaped by unjust structures, radical personal change is a necessary ingredient of the commitment to justice. Therefore, it would be wrong of me to bracket attention to structural change altogether, out of some sort of fidelity to Lacan and Zen. The point is that structural justice and personal transformation cannot be separated. And though the accent in this work is on the personal dimension, attention to the alteration of the macro realm through which we are formed cannot be sidelined. Therefore, I will have to nudge Lacan and Zen where they don't naturally go, but I will do so by using doors that they partially open.

These doors will be opened fully by my two framing tropes for this chapter: fallenness and emergence. With the concept of fallenness, which I am borrowing from Christian theology and applying to both Lacanian subjectivity and the unusual dynamics of sociological emergence, I point primarily to the disproportionate force of top-down cultural influence, primarily through the medium of language, on the human subject and the ego's tendency to identify with the effects of this

[162] To be sure, this conservatism is paired with an anthropological radicalism.

unhappy endowment as its own product and a testament to its identity. Fallenness is also estrangement from the Real, which is the givenness of the cosmos apart from symbolic and imaginary projection. On the other hand, we are not simply bound by what the symbolic order bequeaths to us; the cultural domain of language and law, where the signifier rules, is also an arena of grand human achievement. The signifier confines and enables simultaneously, and our fallenness is also forwardness. Traditionally, the Fall has only been deemed positive (*felix culpa*) insofar as it has been a necessary condition for salvation. I am arguing that apart from salvation or enlightenment, there are still significant benefits to fallenness. We are enabled by what confines us, yet Zen provides a path to be less substantially confined. However, enlightenment tends to forfeit elements of our forwardness, which I argue can be recuperated by cooperating with God's initial aim and the qualified symbolic and personal investment that this entails.

In the late nineties there was a movie called *Phenomenon*, starring John Travolta. In the film, Travolta's character, an ordinary man, suddenly develops paranormal capacities and preternatural intellectual abilities. As it turns out, these gifts are the result of a brain tumor; his condition, like the human condition in general, is a coincidence of brokenness and brilliance. Yet Travolta's character refuses to reduce all his experience to materiality. He claims that his abilities enabled him to tap into the human spirit and realize something more than could be explained by neurochemistry. In a certain respect, human civilization has become a cancer to our earthly home. And yet, the achievements of human civilization are astonishing. Civilization is the source of our discontent and our planetary demise. Yet it is also our glory; our fallenness and forwardness are commingled. And from a Lacanian perspective, cultural precedent is also the prime source of our subjectivity. We are fallen first structurally and then personally. Might it not be possible to tap into the human spirit's capacity to overcome our introjected brokenness and then unite to rectify our wayward structures?

En route to addressing this question, I will treat fallenness both historically and personally. I will begin with Lèvi-Strauss's account of the formation of human society through the exogamous exchange of women, an origin narrative that is persistently in the background of Lacan's thought. The subversive work of Luce Irigaray will then be used to draw out the implications of this ostensible inception from a feminist perspective. I will argue that Lèvi-Strauss has targeted a critical juncture in our becoming fallen but not an absolute line of demarcation. Fallenness is by degree; it therefore both preceded the officialization of exogamy and grew in its wake. Lacan's account of the Oedipal process and castration will follow in Lèvi-Strauss' wake, providing us with the personal dimension of our becoming fallen, which, like the macro-historical, is predicated on the yoking of the prohibition of incest and the movement into acculturated subjectivity. We will then move to a description of the fallenness of the castrated subject, which in Lacanian terms centers on the lack at the center of our being which motivates our negotiation of the symbolic order but cannot be fully overcome. I will argue that fallenness is not primarily to be located in this ontological deficiency but in the subject's attempts to compensate for it. Lack does not entail distance from the empty Real but connection to it; as Zen teaches, liberation lies in inhabiting the nothingness of lack itself.

If it is possible to unite personal and societal transformation, then it must also be the case that the symbolic order is less fixed and structurally inevitable than Lacan avers. The top-down force of cultural forms is no doubt great, but I contend that there are also bottom-up processes that constitute these forms. That is, the structuralist conception of society, which unwarrantedly tended to translate Saussure's linguistically methodological preference for synchrony into a too fixed portrayal of culture, emphasized macro-to-micro influence but did not sufficiently account for the alteration of the macro level by micro activity. As this chapter will argue, an emergentist sociological perspective is needed to correct the one-sidedness of a structuralist determinism.

Emergence is a trans-disciplinary theory[163] that seeks to navigate between the Scylla of reductionism and the Charybdis of dualism.[164] According to emergence, as we move from physics to chemistry to biology to psychology to sociology, genuine novelty[165] appears at each level that is irreducible to the laws of the prior level. In other words, what happens on the chemical level cannot be completely explained by physics and what happens on the sociological level cannot be exhaustively described by psychology.[166] At the same time, each subsequent sphere supervenes on the prior one. No chemistry, no biology. No biology, no psychology. At each emergent level, then, there is dependence on the prior domain but not reducibility to that lower domain's laws. The dependence or supervenience precludes dualism, and the irreducibility forestalls reductionism. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of emergence, though, is that higher levels are held to exert downward causal influence on the lower-level domains on which they supervene. It is here that Lacan is particularly insightful, as he is constantly describing the downward activity of the sociological upon the psychological and even the biological. But an emergentist pushback that understands the sociological domain as not simply orchestrating from a fixed position but also dependent upon the activity it constrains and enables is necessary to move towards a radical personal transformation that, when multiplied and combined with the pursuit of macro transformation, can engender significant structural change.

The human subject thus exists at the nexus of emergent domains: the psychological emerging from the biological while being downwardly influenced by the sociological. For Lacan, the

[163] Matthew Croasmun calls emergence a trans-ordinal theory, "a system for relating causal explanations rendered at various different levels of analysis" (Matthew Croasmun, *The Emergence of Sin* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017], 23).

[164][164] The preface of Philip Clayton's *Mind & Emergence* ([Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004], v) opens by differentiating emergentists form both physicalists (reductionists) and dualists.

[165] Here we have an interesting connection to the thought of Alfred North Whitehead.

[166] Strong emergentist attribute ontological novelty to the emergent whole. Weak emergentists argue that the higher level is only epistemologically irreducible.

subject is thoroughly transmogrified by her or his situation in the symbolic order. That is, the sociological level acts powerfully to predetermine the destiny of the human person. In this respect, symbolic emergence or sociological emergence is not only novel in that it does not reduce to the activity of individuals but also in that the degree of downward causation at this level is more pronounced than in other emergent structures. And herein lies our fallenness. Typically, the downward causation of an emergent level on the lower domain is spoken of in terms of the establishment of boundary conditions without the significant alteration of the constituent parts. As Matthew Croasmun writes, "The key is *structure*. The mechanism of the control that higher-level emergent exercise is the *structural constraint* within which they restrict lower-level mechanisms to operate. They provide the *context* within which lower-level entities indeed follow laws relevant to their level of scale and complexity."[167] But from a Lacanian perspective, the symbolic order, the domain of language and law, does far more than provide a context; it forcefully intervenes on a psychological and even biological level. Yet at the same time, given the nature of language and the complexity of the human mind, the range of options within this framework is far greater than it is for the constituents of any other emergent phenomenon. Symbolic or sociological emergence is a queer animal with paradoxically more far-reaching downward causation and greater liberty in its component members than other complex orders. I am naming the eccentricity of this form of emergence as an important dimension of both our fallenness and forwardness. Our fallenness is in the way we have been warped by cultural precedence and the signifier; our forwardness is in the creativity with which we have collaborated and made use of signs.[168]

I will conclude, drawing on Judith Butler's work on performativity, that identity, while practically necessary, works powerfully to conceal this downward causation. The ego conditions us

[167] Matthew Croasmun, *The Emergence of Sin*, 39.
[168] I am aware that this claim is in some sense consonant with the thought of Hegel.

to attribute the prime cause of the subject's speech and deeds to an indwelling, personal essence and thereby conceals the hegemonic force of introjected cultural power operating in and through her or him. Thus, the spiritual commitment to realize *anatman* can be seen as an overcoming of the chief hindrance to recognizing the downward causation of the cultural order within oneself and a vehicle for cultivating the ability to detach from the desire, cognition, and affect that result largely from this indwelling of the macro. Furthermore, the detachment and peace that spiritual growth entails ought to be considered a necessary but insufficient form of resistance to the evils of cultural hegemony. In short, Zen spirituality can help us deal with the personal inhabitance of fallenness but needs to be supplemented by a theistically rooted, rational, and practical resistance to structural evil itself.

A Foundational Dynamic: Exogamy

Lacan is always presupposing Lèvi-Strauss' account of the origins of human society from *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*. For Lèvi-Strauss, the institution of the incest prohibition and the concomitant practice of exogamy catalyzed humans' movement from nature to culture. For Lacan, this explanation coheres perfectly with the Oedipal process, which for him is the working out of the incest prohibition and becoming cultural for the individual subject. Moreover, both Lèvi-Strauss and Lacan locate the rudiments of the primordial structure of society not simply in history but also both in our present cultural forms and the depths of our psyches. It is therefore fitting to take a closer look at Lèvi-Strauss' account of cultural beginnings, particularly given that doing so will help us to understand some of Lacan's grounding assumptions and further develop our framing tropes of fallenness and emergence.

Lèvi-Strauss studied a host of indigenous tribes and found that at the root of their social structure was the exogamous exchange of women between families. Sex with immediate relatives was proscribed, for females were goods for prospective bartering and not to be tampered with.

According to Lèvi-Strauss, "[B]ehind the superficially negative expression of the rule of exogamy, of the final principle which, through the prohibition of marriage within prohibited degrees, tends to ensure the total and continuous circulation of the group's most important assets, its wives and its daughters."[169] In other words, at the inception of human society, an economy was formed and the focal nugget of capital was the female body, to some extent fetishized by a primal male desire but, more markedly, made to be a fetish through the economy itself. In other words, the male desire which funded this economy was also amplified through its mechanisms. Human sexual desire is not simply natural, for in Lacanian terms, desire is of the Other[170] and the Other is the symbolic order as it confronts and forms the subject from deep within. Lèvi-Strauss thereby posits male desire as a cause and fails to grasp the extent to which it is an effect of this grounding arrangement.[171] This failure is coupled with the fact that he fails to see in the arrangements he describes the basic elements of a primal and enduring brokenness. I will argue instead that we are all cursed by this fall into a heteropatriarchal structure, and our desires and productions are deeply formed by a regime founded on this oppressive human bartering system. But at the same time, we are all indebted to this order, for, as I will show, the society that emerged was not strictly reducible to its founding violence. And justice is inconceivable apart from the inception of law[172], which, for both Lèvi-Strauss and Lacan, would have been impossible without the incest prohibition and exogamous exchange. Fallenness is always also forwardness.

For Lèvi-Strauss and Lacan, the exchange of women by men was a kind of glue that was necessary for the emergence of a stable social order: "Exogamy provides the only means of

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[169] Claude Lèvi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, James Harle Bell, John Richard von Sturmer, and Rodney Needham (trans.) (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 480.
[170] Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits*, Bruce Fink (trans.) (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), 38.
[171] This is my critique of Lèvi-Strauss, not Lacan's.
[172] Derrida carefully distinguishes justice from law, but in the process shows how they are inextricable: "One must constantly remember that it is even on the basis of the terrible possibility of this impossible that justice is desirable *through* but also *beyond* right and law" (*Specters of Marx*, Peggy Kamuf [trans.] [New York: Routledge, 1994], 175).

maintaining the group as a group, of avoiding the indefinite fission and segmentation which the practice of consanguineous marriages would bring about."[173] Marriage between members of different families facilitated a bond that made a whole range of exchanges possible: "It is not exaggeration, then, to say that exogamy is the archetype of all other manifestations based upon reciprocity, that it provides the fundamental and immutable rule ensuring the existence of the group as a group."[174][175][176] This observation is consistent with a basic tenet of emergence, which holds that the birth of a higher order is predicated on "sufficient number of units and a sufficient density of interconnections."[177] The proliferation of exchange which exogamy facilitated would have greatly amplified the relational density necessary for the engendering of macro novelty. In Lacanian terms, exogamy was the necessary condition for the emergence of a symbolic universe in which, for Lèvi-Strauss, all practices could be analyzed with the tools of Saussurian linguistics and, for Lacan, the human subject came to be determined by the precedence of the signifier. Both our fallenness and our forwardness are traceable to a linguistic and nomistic saturation of both society and subject, and, for both Lèvi-Strauss and Lacan, exogamy was the necessary solvent that made this saturation possible.

Fallenness and the Status of Women

[173] Lèvi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, 480.
[174] Ibid., 481.
[175] Throughout *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche emphasizes the violence of human origins. He seems only to have been able to conceive of the emergence of order through the force of will. Lèvi-Strauss paints a different picture, in which reciprocity becomes the key to the development of societal structure. Emergentism, in which order can emerge spontaneously, provided there are a sufficient number of articulations, is more compatible with Lèvi-Strauss' insight that exchange and the relationality that accompanied it engendered structure. Of course, this exchange was not utterly irenic: the oppression of women funded it.
[176] Understanding the centrality of exchange to the social order is necessary for the full appreciation of Derrida's gift that transcends exchange. In the words of Caputo, the gift "escapes the closed circle of checks and balances" (*The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida* [Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997], 160).
[177] Croasmun, *The Emergence of Sin*, 105.

Lèvi-Strauss and Lacan are thus both attuned to a pivotal development in our becoming fallen, but they are both problematically mute about the oppressiveness of those roots. We must therefore look elsewhere to tease out the hamartiological implications of our becoming cultural. Luce Irigaray, the leading voice of second wave feminism after Simone de Beauvoir, offers a materialist account of the condition of women. Launching from Lèvi-Strauss's identification of the inception of culture with the exchange of women, she uses Marx to tease out the implications of what she deems to be the still extant pervasiveness of female commodification. She both assumes that the exchange of women is still at the root of the societal order and challenges that very foundation: "The society we know, our own culture, is based upon the exchange of women. Without the exchange of women, we are told, we would fall back into the anarchy (?) of the natural world, the randomness (?) of the animal kingdom."[178] In this exchange, women's value is therefore determined by men in an order run by men and for men:

> all the systems of exchange that organize patriarchal societies and all the modalities of productive work that are recognized, valued, and rewarded in these societies are men's business. The production of women, signs, and commodities is always referred back to men … and they always pass from one man to another, from one group of men to another. The work force is thus always assumed to be masculine, and 'products' are objects to be used, objects of transaction among men alone.[179]

There is thus a circular economy with men as the alpha and omega and signifiers, goods, and women the media of exchange. The exchange of women which Lèvi-Strauss described and which for him, Lacan, and Irigaray still substantially, if not identically, grounds the cultural order, is analyzed by Irigaray through the terms of economic exchange. The woman's value, she avers, is determined by a phallocratic economy, and she is split into the dimensions of use and exchange: "*As commodities, women are thus two things at once: utilitarian objects and bearers of value.*"[180] Certain subject positions can

[178] Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Catherine Porter (trans.) (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 170.
[179] Ibid., 171.
[180] Ibid., 175.

gravitate towards either the object or value pole. Mothers tend to be strictly identified as utilitarian objects, whereas the virgin is a bearer of value pure and simple . . . until she is deflowered. The prostitute, however, is both an object and bearer of value simultaneously. Regardless of which part of this dichotomy a particular woman gravitates towards, her worth is determined by a masculinist material and signifying economy that assigns her a worth that is always extrinsic to her being:

> The exchange value of two signs, two commodities, two women, is a representation of the needs/desires of consumer-exchanger subjects: in no way is it the 'property' of the signs/articles/women themselves. At the most, the commodities – or rather the relationships among them – are the material alibi for the desire for relations among men. To this end, the commodity is disinvested of its body and reclothed in a form that makes it suitable for exchange among men.[181]

Clearly Irigaray has pinpointed an I-It dynamic between the sexes that goes back to the origins of human civilization and, in many ways, still persists. As Martin Buber writes in what could be taken as a prophetic statement about the dynamics of patriarchy, "What has become an It is then taken as an It, experienced and used as an It, employed along with other things for the project of finding one's way in the world, and eventually for the project of 'conquering' the world."[182] For Buber, the I-Thou relationship is fundamental to a fully human existence, but the objectifying intersubjective modality of I-It deforms one's whole life. But perhaps, there is no such thing as an I-It relationship: "When man lets [the I-It relationship] have its way, the relentlessly growing It-world grows over him like weeds, his own I loses its actuality …"[183] Every I-It relationship is really an It-It relationship. Patriarchy, we may infer, has not only oppressed women; it has also deformed the subjectivities of men. It is imperative to emphasize how we men have benefited from the order we have established, but it is also crucial to note both that this irreducibly emergent order dominates us and that we have

[181] Ibid., 180.
[182] Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, Walter Kaufmann (trans.) (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970), 91.
[183] Ibid., 95-96.

been marred by both the ways in which we have temporally been rewarded and the ways in which we have been ruled.

This is an important point to remember, because perhaps the foremost temptation of the feminist is to risk idealizing what has been denied to her. The barred subject is the desiring subject, and what is desired is phenomenally formed by the condition of being barred. The fence itself heightens the greenness of the grass on the other side. Zygmunt Bauman has written insightfully of an oppressiveness that can become seductively contagious: "The most seminal impact of envy consists, however, in transforming 'the ideas of the dominant' into the 'dominant ideas.' Once the link between the privileged position and certain values has been socially constructed, the disprivileged are prompted to seek redress for their humiliation through demanding such values for themselves – and thereby further enhancing those values' seductive power and reinforcing the belief in those values' magic powers."[184] Resisting patriarchy then is not a simple task because there is always the possibility of being seduced by demanding a fallen "good" that patriarchy itself has constructed.

In a certain sense the woman's cultural position has historically been like that of the signifier itself: "What characterizes a signifier is not that it's substituted for the subject's needs – which is the case in conditioned reflexes – but that it's capable of being substituted for itself. A signifier is essentially substitutive in nature in relation to itself."[185] At the root of the symbolic order is the exchange of one woman for another. For Lèvi-Strauss and Lacan, it is impossible for this order to exist apart from this grounding barter. One woman for another, like one signifier for another. This is of course quite oppressive, but not absolutely so. For signifiers, when they collaborate, are capable of generating signification quite apart from the egoic will of the (masculine) subject.

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[184] Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1993), 216.
[185] Jacques Lacan, *Formations of the Unconscious. The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book V*, Jacques-Alain Miller (ed.), Russell Grigg (trans.) (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 1998), 320.

Moreover, each woman is integral to the functioning of the order she is excluded from. And because she is integral to culture she is not utterly excluded, or completely commodified. She is somehow both included and excluded.

Furthermore, power is never just wielded from on high by persons who possess it; it is the pervasive and wayward dynamism which is equivalent to the fallenness of the emergent symbolic order that envelops us all. Therefore, the energy used to dominate never simply belongs to the dominator.[186] Moreover, the oppressor is never unequivocally a beneficiary; he too is under the thumb of an irreducibly emergent and downwardly causal power. This aspect of Foucault's theory of power (which I of course am adapting with a Lacanian and emergentist twist) is consonant with the dynamics of Hegel's master-slave dialectic, in which the dominant position is weakened by its very dominance[187] and the inferior slave gains power through the work he is forced to do.[188]

The element of inclusion of the woman is a potential opening that, even in its combination with marginality, can engender the disruptive hybridity and mimicry which Homi Bhabha, drawing on both the Hegelian dialectic and Lacanian intersubjective ambivalence, has pointed to.[189] Irigaray

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[186] "It seems to me that power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization" (Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction: Volume 1*, Robert Hurley [trans.] [New York: Vintage Books, 1990], 92.

[187] "In this recognition the unessential consciousness is for the lord the object, which constitutes the *truth* of his certainty of himself. But it is clear that this object does not correspond to its Notion, but rather that the object in which the lord has achieved his lordship has in reality turned out to be something quite different form an independent consciousness. What now really confronts him is not an independent consciousness, but a dependent one. He is, therefore, not certain of *being-for-self* as the truth of himself. On the contrary, his truth is in reality the unessential consciousness and its unessential action" (G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, A. V. Miller [trans.] [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977], 116-117). In Buberian terms, the I needs a Thou, a reflecting consciousness, in order to be, but when the Thou on which it depends becomes an It, the I is no more.

[188] "[I]n fashioning the thing, he becomes aware that being-for-self belongs to *him*, that he himself exists essentially and actually in his own right" (Ibid., 118).

[189] See Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994). Bhabha's insights of course are rooted in colonial and postcolonial situations. But they can readily be applied mutatis mutandis to gender dynamics. In Lacanian terms, subjectivity is achieved through a parting with the mother and an identification with the father. The girl thus is in the same position as the colonized subject, who is enjoined to assimilate to and imitate the foreign culture but not too well. Likewise, the girl, while directed into the historically masculinist symbolic order is a kind of interloper who will become a hybrid of the mother, always construed by Lacan as otherwise than fully acculturated, and the public, speaking subject.

operates with a strong notion of language and culture fixedly belonging to men and therefore excluding feminine representation and agency. But Bhabha's work shows clearly that a discursive formation that seems to belong to a dominant group is never simply possessed by the latter and that even as the oppressor employs language to subjugate another group, the slippery signifier can subvert his hierarchical (but ambivalently formulated) intentions.

As noted, the objectified and exchanged female body has historically been like a signifier, which, in conjunction with other signifiers, is capable of generating meaning. But perhaps the traditional position of women is akin most of all not just to any signifier, but to the phallus. Of course, Lacan famously states that the woman seems to be the phallus, and by this he primarily means that the woman is the signifier of the desire of the Other. The symbolic order for Lacan is not just discursive and nomistic, even though at times Lacan can describe it in strictly these terms, but it is also constitutive of and constituted by desire. And going back to Lèvi-Strauss, this desiring economy is inceptively based on the exchange of women, greatly desired and therefore highly valued by men. Thus, in saying that the woman is the phallus, Lacan is pointing not simply to the fact that men desire women but also to the foundational claim that this subject position is intrinsic to the functioning of society. She is the signifier of the desire of the Other, not simply the other. This is a position of both subjection and power. The phallus is also the concealed signifier that structures the subject's relationship to all other signifiers.[190] It is simultaneously integral and hidden, and we can say that this ambivalence has often been the tragic case for women throughout history: in patriarchal settings, women have been integral to the functioning of the symbolic order but excluded from its esteemed public roles.

[190] "The phallus is the signifying element that is subtracted from the chain of speech, insofar as speech is involved in any and every relationship with the Other" (Jacques Lacan, *Desire and its Interpretation. The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book VI.* Jacques-Alain Miller [ed.], Bruce Fink [trans.] [Medford, MA: Polity Press, 2019], 23).

Gender is thus a salient component of our fallenness.[191] In spite of the openings I have pointed to, an oppressive and dualistic relationship between men and women (in tandem with the very production of binary gender categories) is coterminous with the formation, propagation, and basic structure of society, which in turn inwardly structures the depths of our subjectivities. Problematic gender dynamics have marked and marred all of us not only directly but also indirectly in that we all have been interpellated and subjectified by a culture colored everywhere with the hues of heteropatriarchy's palette. Yet the remedy for this situation must be more than simply political, discursive, and practical. Fallenness penetrates us to the marrow, so an integral element of addressing the internalized brokenness of gender dynamics must be spiritual, and it must reconfigure the core of our identities, which are always profoundly mixed up with introjected gender categories, and concomitantly with the violence that has attended them.

Fallenness without a (Single) Fall

We need however to qualify Lèvi-Strauss's assertion, seconded by Lacan, that the incest prohibition definitively marks the break of culture from nature. We might say that there is only fallenness by degree (but with points of radical disjuncture, the incest prohibition being one of them) and not absolute fallenness.[192] Derrida is critical of Lèvi-Strauss' quest to locate the absolute rupture of culture from nature. He writes of "the entire system of differences between *physis* and its other (the series of its 'others:' art, technology, law, institution, society, immotivation, arbitrariness, etc.)"[193] and definitively rejects this dichotomizing. According to Derrida, Lèvi-Strauss at times

[191] I could include racism, heterosexism, ableism, classism, etc. as dimensions of our fallenness. But I am focusing on what is most primordial.
[192] I would even say that in the beginning there is fallenness.
[193] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (trans.) (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 103.

"bases himself on this difference."[194] If the nature/culture binary is absolute for Lèvi-Strauss, then the incest prohibition is the point of no return. But as Derrida points out, there is an ambivalence here that could impugn and ought at least to qualify any assertion of an unequivocal divide:

> And it would be risky to decide if the seam – the prohibition of incest – is a strange exception that one happened to encounter within the transparent system of difference, a 'fact,' as Lèvi-Strauss says, with which 'we are then confronted' (p. 9) [p. 8]; or is rather the origin of the difference between nature and culture, the condition – outside of the system – of the system of difference. The condition would be a 'scandal' only if one wished to comprehend it *within* the system whose condition it precisely is.[195]

Lèvi-Strauss operated with the assumption that what is natural is universal and what is cultural is idiomatic. Yet he found the incest prohibition to be at the root of every culture he studied, so what initiated the turn to cultural specificity was scandalously heteronomous in its universality. This gets at the heart of Derrida's critique of origins: they are often made to do the double work of being in the necessarily exterior position of the foundation and in the imperatively interior position of partaking of the normality that they engender. In Derridean terms, Lèvi-Strauss calls the incest prohibition a scandal because he needs it to be both externally causal and internally consistent with what it elicits. The discourse of origination thus deconstructs itself; the ambivalence of origins precludes an absolute genesis (or fall).

What is more, Lèvi-Strauss indicates what I would call a degree of fallenness[196] as already present in the ostensibly inceptive exogamous structure. When describing exogamy he presupposes that women had already been seen as valuable assets.[197] A prior masculine tendency to commodify women suggests patriarchy was underway before extensive social organization. Furthermore, there must have been at least a primitive language that made the *systematic* exchange of women possible. And for Lacan, the signifier cancels the Real, so insofar as there was language before an exogamous

[194] Ibid.
[195] Ibid., 103-104.
[196] Lèvi-Strauss remains ethically neutral on this front.
[197] Lèvi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, 479.

structure, there was already a significant amount of what I would call cultural fallenness. To be sure, the social cohesion and proliferation of homosocial exchange that exogamy facilitated no doubt engendered a linguistic expansion that moved us towards the human condition that Lacan describes, in which the subject is thoroughly colonized by the signifier. But the beginning of the cancellation of the Real, or the movement into a greater degree of fallenness, through both language and an incipient patriarchy, had to be underway when the incest prohibition was formalized.

Furthermore, there are biological reasons to question Lèvi-Strauss' location of the avoidance of incest strictly on the side of culture rather than nature. Incest increases the incidence of homozygous recessive genotypes in offspring, which in turn can lead to significant phenotypic dysfunction, as problematic traits which would, in an exogamous context, be phenotypically suppressed by the dominant alleles of more distantly related sexual partners, become expressed. And of course, a phenotypically marred human is often less fit to survive and reproduce and is therefore selectively disadvantaged evolutionarily. Hence, it is plausible that there were evolutionary and proto-cultural mechanisms that made family members of pre-symbolic but still highly intelligent hominids refrain from sexual relations with each other. Lèvi-Strauss points to incest in other primates to dispel this notion, but other primates may not be sufficiently proximal to us evolutionarily to make this assertion. We would need to study other hominids, but other hominids no longer exist. Moreover, even if incest was common before primal hordes of fathers conspired to put women on the market, the incest prohibition can be read naturalistically as a phenomenon that engendered more evolutionarily fit offspring and therefore not an utterly divergent occurrence (from long-standing patterns of natural selection) definitively enacting an absolute division between nature and culture.

Insofar as we conceive of our fall in Lacanian terms as the emergence of a preponderantly semiotic[198] order, it is imperative to remember that semiosis is not a human invention. Terrance Deacon argues that "it is essential to recognize that biology is not merely a physical science, it is a semiotic science, a science where significance and representation are essential elements . . . [Evolutionary biology] stands at the border between physical and semiotic science."[199] Lacan writes frequently of the code.[200] The code is the Saussurian linguistic structure as allied with the law (founded through the incest prohibition and recurrently administered through castration). The subject confronts the code unconsciously and from thence derives the message which, when spoken, must in (re)turn be authenticated by the code. The code, representing the linguistic dimension of the Other, has determining force for Lacan. We do not speak or think on our own but are always beholden to the code and the nomistically supported linguistic order it represents.

Let us shift gears a bit to genetics and proteomics. Lacan's code is not the only potently conditioning symbolic structure. There is also the genetic code, a system of material signifiers which, when it responds to intracellular signals, initiates the production of most of our physical structure. And in emergentist terms, structure is often informational.[201] The signification that DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid) encodes is read and recorded by messenger RNA (ribonucleic acid) in a process tellingly called *transcription*. Then, in a subsequent activity aptly named *translation*, transfer RNA reads and records this message before encoding the amino acid sequence. Amino acids are the building blocks of proteins. They are signifiers that form long signifying chains that become

[198] I am using the term now in its common sense of referring to relationships between signs, not in the specific sense that Kristeva gives it.
[199] Terrence Deacon, Evolution and the Emergence of Spirit," SSA workshops, Berkley, CA, 2001-2002, unpublished paper, 6. Quoted in Philip Clayton, *Mind and Emergence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 20.
[200] In "The Famillionaire," for example, he explains how the code is necessary for there to be any recognizable discourse at all (*Formations of the Unconscious*, 11). Elsewhere, he describes how the message is funded by the code and must return to the code to be authenticated (Ibid., 138).
[201] Clayton, *Mind and Emergence*, 20.

sufficiently complex in structure (and information) to develop emergent properties (Consider all the varieties and functions of proteins.) not reducible to the sum of the signifiers (amino acids) that constitute them, and the result of this encoded complexity, when compounded though the further emergence of cellular, tissue, organ, system, and organismal levels, is the vast majority of our physicality (and mentality).

For Lacan, we internalize signifying chains and these networks, constituted by units of signifiers and phonemes, form complex structures in the unconscious and generate emergent novelties as intricate and irreducible as symptoms and even personalities.[202] Language is not utterly unnatural. Still, the irruption of linguistic signifiers contributed to a significant departure from purely biological semiosis which nevertheless drew on the latter's Really significant resources.

Let us say that the movement from nature to culture was not as definitive as Lèvi-Strauss portrays it. It is nevertheless possible to assert significant discontinuity, if not a sudden and absolute precipitousness. Moreover, our destruction and contamination of the natural order necessitates recognizing the culpability of our fallen dimension of nature. Given that the pollution that threatens the biosphere is exclusively anthropogenic, it is necessary to emphasize both human deviation from the rest of the natural order and our coterminousness with it.

Gayatri Spivak has said that there is catachresis at the origin. Catachresis is the deploying of a term in a way that jars with the signification of its prior iterations.[203] Catachresis at the origin

[202] For a discussion on how signifying chains inhabit the unconscious and from there insist repetitively, see "The Famillionaire," in *Formations of the Unconscious*, 5.

[203] Or, to put it differently, a catachrestic term has no literal referent. Spivak, for example, cites "History," as such a signifier (*A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991], 331). Traditionally a term supporting the powerful, who have traditionally composed historiography and tailored it to their ends, "History" can rather be viewed as a term that, when deployed by the colonizer, covers over all kinds of alterity and discontinuity and therefore has no viable referent at all. But she also points out how the terms of the colonizing culture can be appropriated subversively and "misused" by the colonized. In this latter modality, the signifier is preceded by iterations with which it is both continuous and discontinuous. Likewise, I am arguing that the inception of civilization can be viewed as catachrestic in that, while containing an element of continuity with what precedes it, still deviates from that precedence markedly.

means that there is no pure (or utterly impure) origin but still the possibility of significant divergence from the preceding signifying chain. Catachresis entails continuity and discontinuity simultaneously. Or to use a metaphor from biology, we can describe our movement into culture as something like a cancerous mutation: a development that is simultaneously natural and unnatural. With our subsequent fall into modernity, the virulent but accomplished Western iteration of this "cancer" metastasized, but like the Travolta character from *Phenomenon*, grew even more extraordinarily gifted and prolific in its disease (for fallenness is also forwardness).

Thus, the Lacanian subject, ever beholden to the signifier, did not appear all at once. Some remaining indigenous traditions maintain sensibilities that have not wholly been colonized by symbolic precedence. Lame Deer, the Lakota philosopher, describes his understanding of a pot of soup on the stove:

> The bubbling water comes from the rain cloud. It represents the sky. The fire comes from the sun which warms us all – men, animals, trees. The meat stands for the four-legged creatures, our animal brothers, who gave of themselves so that we should live. The steam is living breath. It was water; now it goes up to the sky, becomes a cloud again. These things are sacred.[204]

Lame Deer's symbolic is not as separated from the Real as modernized Western culture is.[205] In fact, the Real here is recognized as being able to signify on its own. Subsequently he writes, addressing Westerners, "To you, symbols are just words, spoken or written in a book. To us they are part of nature, part of ourselves – the earth, the sun, the wind and the rain, stones, trees, animals, even little insects like ants and grasshoppers. We try to understand them not with the head but with the heart, and we need no more than a hint to give us the meaning."[206] Such a seeing with the heart requires

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[204] John Fire/Lame Deer and Richard Erdoes, *Lame Deer: Seeker of Visions* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972), 108.

[205] Of course, Lacan insisted that the signifier cancels the Real, but he was working in a strictly Western context. It is probably more accurate that as we move into the imaginary and then the symbolic there is an attenuation of the Real but not an utter negation.

[206] Ibid., 109.

operating from that dimension of the subject which is not simply subsequent to the Other and the signifier; it necessitates an attunement to the Real. So does the apparent absence of a symbolically constituted, humanistic separation from nature: "men, animals, trees" all benefit from the sun and the meat in the soup that is from "our animal brothers."

The paradigmatic geometrical shape for Lame Deer is the circle, for "[n]ature wants things to be round. The bodies of human beings and animals have no corners . . . The nation was only a part of the universe, in itself circular and made of the earth, which is round, of the sun, which is round, of the stars, which are round. The moon, the horizon, the rainbow – circles within circles, with no beginning and no end."[207] Just as there is no division in the Real, Lame Deer's circles enfold and do not exclude. Moreover, his words harken to an era in which human culture was more harmoniously connected to the cosmic order, not so in thrall to cognition, and not ceaselessly trying to hurry past the present moment. For "no beginning and no end" entails an absence of Western teleology, a refusal to idolize progress, and a contentment with the simplicity of Being. But still there is fallenness in Lame Deer's context too, as is evidenced by the patriarchal and martial elements of this very text.

In contrast to the roundness of the Lakota imaginary, white civilization is for Lame Deer oppressively rectilinear:

> The white man's symbol is the square. Square is his house, his office buildings with walls that separate people from one another. Square is the door which keeps strangers out, the dollar bill, the jail. Square are the white man's gadgets – boxes, boxes, boxes and more boxes – TV sets, radios, washing machines, computers, cars. These all have corners and sharp edges – point in time, white man's time, with appointments, time clocks and rush hours – that's what corners mean to me. You become a prisoner inside all these boxes.[208]

A manufactured, Occidental space-time continuum that is thoroughly segmented and compartmentalized. The Western subject, conceived historically in the accelerated abstraction of

[207] Ibid., 112.
[208] Ibid., 112-113.

Ancient Greek culture[209], in which (Pythagorean and post-Socratic) philosophy was devised according to the principles of geometry and all its idealized angularities, linearities, symmetries, and deductions, is now the prisoner of his[210] progress. It is crucial to remember that for Lacan the Real lacks division and that we experience reality in bits and pieces because our horizons are conditioned by the letter that carves (and kills) as it creates. But in Lame Deer's juxtaposition of the Lakota and the white man, we see that in the Western symbolic, this division, in the materialized and temporalized forms of appointments, segments, squares, and boxes, is much more marked; Western fallenness, which in modernity has metastasized and spread throughout the globe, is accelerated and severe. Yet it is not unequivocally evil, as it has brought with it many liberation movements, not least that of feminism. Still, there has been increasing alienation from the Real. And Lame Deer, among others, testifies to the fact that the thoroughgoing symbolic saturation (and estrangement from the Real) of culture and subject of which Lacan constantly speaks has not always been the case.

The Personal Fall

There is also a personal process of falling forward which weds the subject to the lapsed symbolic order. We all undergo individually the movement from nature to culture that our distant ancestors made collectively. For Lacan, "becoming castrated" is the process by which the child gives up its incestuous connection to the mother, become a symbolically situated subject, and incurs an ontological deficiency. Yet, as both the prior discussion of the institution of exogamy and Lame Deer's witness demonstrate, this dichotomy of nature and culture is not absolute. Contra Lacan, the

[209] This is an important part of Adorno and Horkheimer's argument on the genesis of "enlightenment." See their genealogy in "The Concept of Enlightenment," in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Gunzelin Schmid Noerr (ed.), Edmund Jephcott (trans.) (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 1-34.
[210] Or "her," but I want to emphasize masculine culpability.

Real is not utterly abrogated by signifiers; rather, the subject's consciousness of his or her prehension of it is diminished.

The primordial subject is bound libidinally to the mother. This relationship for Lacan is incestuous, potentially stifling, and on the side of nature. But culture, for him, must triumph over nature. Originally, this victory was achieved through the incest prohibition, so each subject must break free from its incestuous enmeshment with the mother and move into a castrated, normally sexuated subject position. In my terms, the fall forward into the glorious cancer of civilization must ceaselessly repeat itself. To paraphrase Walt Whitman, fallenness is a cradle endlessly rocking.

This whole process therefore begins with the child, the mother and desire. And what the child desires most of all is not the mother herself, or her touch, but her desire: "What does the subject desire? It's not simply a matter of appetition for the mother's care or even her presence, but of appetition for her desire."[211] Concomitant with this cathexis is a primordial form of symbolization which begins the child's movement toward castration. The mother, this dominant other being whose desire I ceaselessly desire, becomes rudimentially signified as such and then as either present or absent. The primitive binary of *fort/da*, observed by Freud[212] in a young child's game and posited by him to be the child's development of a degree of verbal mastery over the mother's uncontrollable comings and goings, is indicative of this nascent movement from the vicissitudes of maternal presence into the symbolic. I cannot control her presence and absence, but I can verbalize the signifiers that indicate it. Still, though, the young child is quite powerless: in Lacanian terms not yet a subject but a "subject-to": "He is a subject-to because he experiences himself and feels himself initially as profoundly subject-to the capriciousness of what he is

[211] Lacan, *Formations of the Unconscious*, 165-166.
[212] Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, James Strachey (trans.) (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2015), 8-9.

dependent on, even if this capriciousness is articulated capriciousness."[213] But note here how Lacan inscribes the mother as operating whimsically and therefore not aligned with law. Recall that for Lèvi-Strauss law was forged in a homosocial community of men who agreed to exchange their daughters. Lacan preserves this alignment of law with men and paternity and therefore automatically collates the mother with a capriciousness that threatens the child and therefore must be overcome in the movement towards the father and his law, which is also for him, the movement towards castrated subjectivity.

This process begins to open up the symbolic universe for the child, and therefore inculcate in her or him the desire for something Other. At the same time the child begins to sense more and more that the desire of the mother which she or he so covets does not orbit around her or him but is largely bound to that Other. And the center of gravity in her orientation to the Other is the phallus, a multivalent concept for Lacan that straddles the imaginary and symbolic orders and in this instance is primarily the signified of the mother's desire and the hinge that links her to the order to which the child must eventually orient himself, but only through the abnegation of a centripetal allurement that confines her to the orbit of the mother. Nevertheless, the child continues to vie for the mother's attention and strive to be her primary object of desire. In the mirror stage, detailed in the prior chapter, the self that recognizes itself in the mirror and thereby begins to constitute itself as a self is conceived in accordance with the centripitality of the maternal orientation: this is the self that the mother desires. Yet just as this nascent ego is incomplete, an introjection of an alterity that can never be self-sufficient, even as it continues to project and reflect itself in other objects, so too is there a deficiency in the perceived embodiment of maternal affection, for, as noted, this affection is never solely directed toward the child; the mother is a castrated subject with a symbolic orientation, and the child is not her phallus.

[213] Lacan, *Formations of the Unconscious*, 173.

The first stage of the direct intervention of the father in moving the child beyond the Oedipal knot is his prohibition of the mother. And herein is the crux of the connection to Lèvi-Strauss, and thus to our primordial fallenness. Let us say that historically the incest prohibition marked a decisive moment (but not the absolutely definitive one) in our lapse forward into society. For Lacan, Lèvi-Strauss and Freud come together in that what happened long ago happens individually for each subject, mutatis mutandis, with the same decisive paternal prohibition of the incestuous bond. For Lacan, as in Lèvi-Strauss' primitive collective, daddy's no is in a real sense (and quite problematically) predicated on his possession of his spouse: "As object, she is his, she isn't the child's. This is the level at which this rivalry with the father, which engenders aggression quite by itself is established."[214] And this aggression in the male child is projected onto the father, who is imagined as a potential threat to the former's genitals. And though this conception is fantastical, all children, if they prove to be normally neurotic and not psychotic, will have to accept a symbolic castration eventually whereby a rootedness in the Real and a naturally incestuous libido are replaced by an ability to move within the desiring economy of the cultural order while accepting a deprivation of being rooted in a lack of a forfeited Real. But we are not there yet.

The father intervenes not just as himself but as the bearer of law. As noted, Lacan follows Lèvi-Strauss in identifying the establishment of an ordered society with the incest prohibition, so in a sense, for him, all societal law - the very order, often unseen, in which we live and move and have our being - is rooted in the father's no. Since the father's no makes possible all cultural regularity, the father is consistently and inextricably bound up with law for Lacan. The primordial law for him is still active and renewed time and again as the father intervenes to disrupt the mother-child dyad and move the child in the direction of triune (because mediated by the Other) intersubjective exchanges.

[214] Ibid., 156-157.

"However, the father enters into play – this is not in doubt – as the vehicle of the law and prohibitor of the mother as object."[215]

In the next movement of the process, the locus of castration is the mother, who comes to be seen as deprived of the phallus by the father. Earlier we noted that the child has begun to recognize that he is not the center of the mother's desire, but that the latter is oriented to an Other and that the phallus is the nexus between the mother and this Other. At the same time, the mother, in seeming to be the phallus, lacks the phallus, so at this stage in the movement, the father comes to be seen as the one who has deprived her of it. Here Lacan is forced to acknowledge the mother's pivotal role, but because he unswervingly aligns paternity with the power of law and maternity with a stifling connection that must be broken, he (quite problematically) casts her as a vehicle ventriloquized by the father:

> He appears as mediated in the mother's discourse.[216]
>
> [T]he father's words effectively intervene in the mother's discourse.[217]
>
> [W]hat he declares is a prohibition, a 'not,' transmitted at the level at which the child receives the expected message from the mother.[218]

Yet the important takeaway is that at this stage, the mother is recognized as lacking that phallus which is to be a hinge in the child's transformation into a castrated being, even as the father is recognized as being imbued with the power to remove it.

In the third and final stage of this process the one who deprives becomes the one who possesses. The child comes to see that the father has the phallus, and this fosters an identification with him, the internalization of the ego ideal, and the beginning of the formation of the superego. At the same time, it is clear that the phallus, while never strictly the penis, is, if you will pardon an

[215] Ibid., 171.
[216] Ibid., 185
[217] Ibid.
[218] Ibid., 186.

appropriate double negative, not exactly not the penis. The father possesses what the mother lacks, and this is the phallus, which is both the penis and the polyvalent signifier-signified. Thus, Lacan writes, "On account of [the father's alignment with law], the third moment of the Oedipus complex can be gone through, which is the stage of identification at which, for the boy, it's a question of identifying with the father as possessor of the penis and, for the girl, of recognizing the man as the one who possesses it."[219] Here we see that the masculine possession of the phallus is inextricably bound up with, though not reducible to, anatomy. At the same time, the possession of the penis by the father is something more than anatomical in that it is imbricated with law. Furthermore, the perceived threat of castration for the boy makes the possession of his penis tenuous until the resolution of the Oedipal complex, which allows him to eventually (after the latent phase) possess his penis securely. Therefore, the anatomical appendage is never for Lacan a simple biological given but rather something laden with the imprint of cultural signification. The girl, who can never have a penis, can compensate for this lack both by seeming to be the phallus (and thereby gain access to someone who has the phallus[220]) and, in a certain sense, possess it in the form of a child. And she must align with the paternal bearer of the phallus to initiate this process.

As in virtually all things Lacanian, there is a salient linguistic component to this whole process. It is imperative to remember that Lacan borrows the exaltation of the number three from Hegel (who himself borrowed it from both Heraclitus and Christian theology). Ideal communication for Lacan is always a matter of three and not two. Communication between two is of the imaginary. It is ego over against ego, two little others both reflecting and misunderstanding each other. Similarly, the relationship between the infant and the mother is a dyad, and as such lacks that which could engender dialectical movement beyond its ambit. At times Lacan speaks of the

[219] Ibid., 180.
[220] A husband, that is. For Lacan, men seem to have the phallus.

father himself as a signifier or metaphor who injects dialectical dynamism—as a third "word"— into the potentially static pairing of his spouse and child. He thus writes that "the father is a signifier substituted for another signifier."[221] We have already shown how there is a movement toward symbolization already in the primordial dyad. However, insofar as the mother is signified, she cannot be a signifier (in this case) in the fullest sense, for she is not substituting for another signifier, and the word's substitution of itself for another of its kind is a sine qua non of being a signifier. Thus, there is nascent symbolization in the mother-child pair but not the metaphorical and metonymic processes that are the wellspring of signification. The father then becomes the third term, a signifier substituting for another signifier (the mother), that is the necessary catalyst propelling the child into the symbolic order, from whence all signification comes.

At other times Lacan will speak of the Name-of-the-Father as the critical signifier. This iteration of the triangular dynamic. emphasizes the symbolic precedence of the whole process, or in emergentist terms, the downward causation of the emergent sociological level operating not simply as the (symbolic) father but also before him and beyond him. For the Name-of-the-Father precedes the father. It is simultaneously before him and that which can issue from him to intercede and move the child from the mundane sphere of domestic limitation and into the realm of cultural transcendence. And the significant precedence of the Name-of-the-Father is inextricably bound up with law, which primordially is the incest prohibition but also includes the established and normalized conventions of society, which are indebted to the founding gesture. The Name-of-the-Father channels all of this and delivers it to the child so that the latter might become a functional part of the order that is her or his benefactor. Linguistically, there is a vast signifying chain of cultural order that the child must latch onto, and the Name-of-the-Father is the master signifier that helps her or him do this.

[221] Ibid., 158

We might conceive of a family as a constituent signifying chain of the symbolic, accumulating signifiers (subjects) generationally. And what is the constant in this chain? The surname, of course. Lacan does not explicitly link the surname to the Name-of-the-Father, but surely the two cannot be severed. The surname is a perduring signifier that links the various familial subjects in a common chain. And when does a child begin to use the surname extensively? When it is time for school, which coincides with both a great expansion of acculturation and the resolution of the Oedipal complex, a conclusion which is predicated on the internalization of the Name-of-the-Father. The Name-of-the-Father is a mechanism of the cultural order itself to produce and reproduce subjects who will continue to allow it to expand even as it replicates its integral forms.

It is important to remember that while Lacan consistently identifies paternity with the symbolic, he at times speaks as if the father himself is inessential. The vaunted Name-of-the-Father often trumps the actual father. The former is "a requirement of the signifying chain"[222] and not simply a signifier that points directly, referentially, and representationally to the father himself as a transcendent, if not transcendental, signified. Furthermore, Lacan himself writes, "It was then noticed that an Oedipus complex could be very well formed even when the father was not there."[223] This is an interesting admission given that Lacan spills considerable ink identifying the father with the symbolic and accentuating his role. Just a bit later he says that "the father is there even when he isn't there."[224] Lacan accentuates the role of the father, then undercuts it, then through the sort of prestidigitation that only an abstruse Continental genius can pull off, tries to reinstall the father as a pivotal force of (the movement beyond) nature even in his absence. But is this father who is there even when he is not really the father or is this role actually an omnipresent symbolic subject position carved out by an irreducibly emergent and downwardly causal order which precedes daddy and

[222] Ibid., 165
[223] Ibid., 151.
[224] Ibid., 152.

therefore can operate without him in the flesh, even if his incarnation is invoked in the exercise of the rule for which he himself is dispensable?

And even when Lacan does emphasize the role of the father, he does so in a way that is deconstructable. Though he identifies the father with law and therefore with societal order, he sometimes fails to recognize the extent to which this identification can actually evacuate from the father a significant element of his potency. Lacan writes: "The close connection between the mother's deferral to a law that is not hers but an Other's and the fact that the object of her desire is in reality sovereignly possessed by this same Other to whose law she defers provides the key to the Oedipal relation. What gives it its decisive character is to be identified as a relation, not to the father, but to the father's speech."[225] This highlighting of the mother's deference to the Other and the distinction between the father and his speech is crucial, but perhaps it does not go far enough. For Lacan speech does not issue simply from the primacy of a subject's originary will but is beholden to the Other, which is the symbolic order operating in and through the subject and often in spite of or as the subject. Thus, Lacan is here pointing to a maternal directionality that does not simply point to the father as the lord of the manor but points beyond him to a higher power that acts through him. In other words, Lacan is gesturing toward what emergentists would call the downward causality of the sociological level. But whereas emergentists tend to restrict the downward causation of the emergent realm to the establishment of boundary conditions that do not greatly alter their particular constituents, here we see a far more marked intervention, such that there is a script which activates a kind of patriarchal rule but also shows the term "patriarchy" to be quite limited in that the father is always first and foremost beholden to an overarching force that circumscribes his actions. Thus, in spite of the common sense of the English term for male

[225] Ibid., 176.

domination, in a Lacanian framework, *archē* (ruler[226] or beginning) always precedes and even significantly determines the *patēr*.

Despite the way that patriarchy is undercut by the structuralism that is always informing Lacan, all of this is nevertheless quite problematically phallocentric. But it is important to remember that, his investment in theory and his seemingly intentional opacity aside, Lacan is for the most part trying to be descriptive and not prescriptive. And given that virtually all recorded human history is phallocratic, it stands to reason that a deep and insightful investigation of the domestic formation of the subject will reveal a salient masculinist influence. On the other hand, there is no such thing as pure empiricism. In the vast majority of cases, the signifier precedes the gaze, and even in those rare examples (as in the instance of the enlightened Zen Buddhist) when the subject has overcome the occlusions and projections of the word, the halting description of what is Real is ineluctably funded by the very discursivity that was overcome in order to taste what cannot be described directly. In Lacan's case, then, there is clearly a combination of preternatural insight and an oppressively patriarchal prejudice that taints his vision. But how can we discern what is the functioning of male domination in the object of his investigation and what is his own masculinist eisegesis? There is clearly no easy answer to this question, which itself perhaps presupposes a false dichotomy, for surely Lacan's projections are ultimately inextricable from the formative dynamics he describes. And the corollary of this admission is that that which phallocratically colors the Lacanian gaze may actually help him see what is there. In Gadamerian[227] terms, there is in this case a primordial fusion of horizons, and some insight might inhabit the subject based on a commonality with the observed

[226] I am not thinking of one particular ruler but the rule that the emergent power structure wields apart from a human engineer.

[227] For Gadamer, the hermeneutical task, is the encountering of a historical horizon which, always to an extent, opens into and includes the present horizon (Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd revised ed., Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall [trans.] [New York: Continuum, 1975], 301-305.

field, even though we will ultimately have to resist the effects of what this prevenient perspicacity delivers.

We might conclude, then, that there are strong and enduring patriarchal elements to the formation of subjects and that this masculinist molding of persons is a signal element of our fallenness.[228] On the other hand, Lacan doubtlessly exaggerates the strict alignment of the father with law and culture, even as he markedly diminishes the pivotal role of the mother in symbolic subjectification. But, as we have seen, Lacan himself provides an opening to recognize the operation of an emergent realm that precedes and exceeds the father even as it conscripts conforming subjects on whose compliant activity it supervenes.

The Nature of the Subject's Fallen Condition

Lack is central in both Lacan and Zen. Literal castration is an excision of part of one's being. Likewise, in Lacanian castration, though the mechanism is primarily symbolic, the effect is similarly to deprive one of the fullness of being. The castrated subject is bereft of an ontological plenitude, and the being that it does retain is largely borrowed from the Other, for in Lacanian terms, we cannot conceive of a human subject apart from the intervention of language. Thus, the first lack, for Lacan, is symbolic: the subject is lacking because she is dependent on the signifier, which is not her own but belongs to the Other.[229] Or to put it differently, while there is significant gain in being able to negotiate the symbolic order, there is a price to pay in order to do so, and this price is an indwelling privation that motivates the negotiation but, for Lacan, can never be overcome through that movement. There is also a lack which Lacan terms second, but which is actually

[228] There are of course many other dimensions of oppression, many of which intersectionally influence each other. I am focusing here, though, on what is most primordial.
[229] Lacan, *Ecrits*, 205.

temporally prior: it is the being-toward-death of the sexually reproducing creature.[230] There is then a lack which is not simply the effect of castration, a lack that is of the Real. But this is not necessarily problematic; Zen insists that when we push through to what is most fundamental, we find Emptiness.

For Lacan, an ontological lack is the impetus of desire. In common sense terms, desire is always associated with lack at least implicitly: we desire what we do not have, what we lack. But for Lacan, there is a more fundamental void beneath our non-possession of certain objects and a more profound desire beneath our conscious wanting. This desiring ensues as a result of the primary privation, even as it is transmogrified by the deeply internalized movements of language. Thus, "Desire is a relation of being to lack. This lack is the lack of being properly speaking. It isn't the lack of this or that, but lack of being whereby the being exists."[231] Behind desire is the lack of being of the one who desires, yet through the dynamics of desire and language a symbolic being is born which acquires novel qualifications and compensates for the primary deficiency … but never sufficiently. Yet in Zen, by delving into this lack and realizing it as the essence-less essence of oneself, one gains the serenity that comes from not having to be the plaything of that never fully sated desire which for Lacan is fundamentally the Other's.

The Lacanian subject also lacks self-presence and autonomy. Desire, which is the prime mover of the person, is primarily unconscious; the subject is mostly unaware of that within which is directing her. As Lacan writes, "It is in so far as his desire is beyond or falls short of what she says, of what she hints at, of what she brings out as meaning, it is in so far as his desire is unknown, it is in this point of lack, that the desire of the subject is constituted."[232] What she says, while in some

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[230] Ibid.

[231] Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book II. The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954-1955.* Sylvana Tomaselli (trans.) (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1988), 223.

[232] Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XI. The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis.* Alan Sheridan (trans.) (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1977), 217-218.

sense inextricable from her desire, cannot name desire as such, which is born of a deep opacity. Moreover, the depths of the subject are never simply idiomatic; the desire which resides there is an introjected externality, the desire of the Other, and the signifiers through whose metonymic and metaphorical displacements desire morphs and grows belong primarily to this Other … even though they may be nearer to the subject than the subject is to herself.

The poststructuralist decentering of the subject is greatly indebted to two pioneers: Hegel and Freud. Hegel emphasized cultural priority by making the subject the object of history. Freud problematized autonomy and self-presence in a more strictly anthropological fashion by positing the indwelling and determining alterity of the unconscious. In Lacan, Hegel and Freud come together in a subject driven by an unconscious populated with culture's signifiers and laws. The Freudian libido thereby becomes coextensive with the Other. And the latter, while in some respects beholden to structuralism's synchronic stasis, is nevertheless haunted by Geist. The consequent subject, always outstripped by a vast precedence translated as a concealed, labyrinthine inwardness, can never fully know herself or be master of her destiny.

Still, what the fallen subject lacks primarily is what is taken to have been lost, not a misapprehended autonomy and self-presence which were never accurately attributed. Broadly speaking, that which the subject has lost is immersion in the Real, but the sense of what has been lost is ineluctably colored by the radically divergent consciousness that the ego and castration engender. Thus, the forfeited something, with its attendant *je ne sais quoi*, must remain unknown, at least to the ego and reason. One name for the subject's sense of what has been lost is jouissance. As Yannis Stavrakakis writes, "In Lacan, this lack is, first of all, a lack of *jouissance*, the lack of a pre-symbolic, real enjoyment which is always posited as something lost, as a lost fullness, the part of ourselves that is sacrificed/castrated when we enter the symbolic system of language and social

relations."[233] Jouissance is a fullness of enjoyment that can only be known in part in the world of human affairs. And yet, the subject unconsciously believes that it once had access to this plenitude of pleasure, has surrendered it, and can regain it through the movements of desire. However, the latter operate in accordance with a culturally configured course that is estranged from the Real; the imposition of the letter perpetually forestalls a telic sating of the deep longing for unmitigated bliss. In Lacanian terms, to be human is to be a wanting subject who knows enjoyment only in part. Hence, we will turn to Zen for a way beyond all wanting and the dukkha that it engenders, but with the recognition that there is something misleading about the goal of *jouissance*.

Jouissance is unconsciously conceived as what was lost, but this sense of forfeited pleasure is inevitably misleading, for it is formulated in accordance with the conditions that separate the subject from That. Analogously, whenever we describe the Eden that we forfeited or the Golden Age which declined, the terms we use to depict pristine primacy are always borrowed from the culture that is nonetheless posited as severed from the primordial paradise. The Garden is thus the site of a patriarchal establishment with God as the chief lawgiver and Eve derived from and subordinate to Adam. Conceptions of prelapsarian conditions are always colored by postlapsarian lenses, and it is generally not recognized that what has been lost is precisely That which is beyond conception.

Likewise, there is something misleading about the subject's unconscious sense of a once accessible jouissance; it reads the prelapsarian ideal in contrapuntal accordance with the aims of the postlapsarian, pleasure-seeking condition and fails to comprehend the extent to which that which is deemed to be lost is an effect of that which engendered the loss in the first place. According to Stavrakakis, "The trick of the Law is that it creates desire as a result of the lack imposed by the prohibition of incest. In that sense one can argue that it is the prohibition itself, the performative

[233] Yannis Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political* (London: Routledge, 1999), 41-42.

institution of symbolic Law, that makes possible the desire to 'recapture' the impossible *jouissance*."[234] Law precedes and informs the desire to move beyond law, and desire, while operating with the deeply embedded conviction that it can overcome this precedent, can nevertheless only exist in accordance with the nomistically configured symbolic. Furthermore, Law itself colors the unconscious conception of what was lost through the decree. As Stavrakakis writes, the unconscious striving to recover what is deemed to be a sacrificed plenitude of pleasure, which motivates desire's movement, defines the goal not only according to its pleasure-seeking ways but also as the inverse of the lack that castration effects, and therefore, in a twofold manner, according to its own distorting postlapsarian terms: "It means that it is lack that introduces the idea of fullness and not vice-versa. It means that it is an act of power, an act of exclusion, that retroactively produces the fullness we attribute to what was excluded, to that unknown impossibility."[235] Fallenness, as I am employing it, therefore names a lack of the epistemic capacity to grasp what one is really seeking in the diurnal movements of desire and, to the extent that the latter are understood as a quest for the Real, to know what that goal really is.

With Lacan (and with Paul) we can infer that the subject fails to account for is the capacity of law for generativity.[236] The subject senses the imposition of the father's no and castration but fails to account for the striking capacity of the prohibition to engender all kinds of possibilities, even those which can masquerade as existing beyond patriarchy's reach or being capable of recuperating a supposed pre-nomic bliss. Ironically, many of the aspirations for a jouissance beyond law, indebted as they are to law itself, keep the subject committed to a desiring economy that must remain within a restrictive societal ambit. In emergentist terms, the downward action of the sociological level is such that it keeps the subject within its confines by creating the illusion that she can break free by heeding

[234] Ibid., 43.
[235] Ibid.
[236] Hence Foucault's failure to acknowledge that the psychoanalytic no was never simply a no.

the very desire which is inextricably bound up with the enclosure. The symbolic order thereby retains the human constituents upon which it supervenes and therefore depends by using illusions of escape as shackles.

Another Lacanian frame for articulating fallenness centers on the lost object and the desiring subject's subsequent relationship to all the objects which substitute for the surrendered one but can never fully replace it. One of his terms for this elusive starting point is *Das Ding* (the Thing). We might think of this object in Kantian terms as the thing-in-itself, which, through the categorical assimilation of its phenomenal semblance, must remain external.[237] Yet the sense of a primordial noumenal knowledge remains integral to the subject and engenders the desire to recover it in subsequent objects. These substitutes, however, whose presence is always mediated by the imaginary and symbolic orders, can only be known and enjoyed in part, and so the quest is endless and ultimately fruitless. "That object will be there when in the end all conditions have been fulfilled – it is, of course, clear that what is supposed to be found cannot be found again. It is in its nature that the object as such is lost. It will never be found again."[238] The pearl of great price, conceived as something external to be acquired, will lure as if it is discoverable as I keep searching, but inferior pearls incessantly intervene and forestall the realization of the ultimate possession. Somehow, though, perhaps because the mechanisms of this motivation are largely unconscious and the illusions created by the emergent symbolic and its imaginary accomplice are so powerful, the quest usually continues ad infinitum.

In this case as well, the sense of what is lacking is colored by the conditions of the lacking subject. The imaginary-symbolic complex constitutes the world as consisting of discrete things, so to place the thing (in itself) in the realm above is projective. The ego is ontic in its self-conception

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[237] Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book VII. The Ethics of Psychoanalyis, 1959-1960.* Dennis Porter (trans.) (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992), 52

[238] Ibid.

and thereby populates its imaginary pheomenality with other *ontoi*: "What analysis teaches us, on the other hand, is that the ego is an absolutely fundamental form for the constitution of objects."[239] And signifiers, fixed and separate as they appear to be, create the fictional, individuated perdurance of specific referents, which they also paradoxically annihilate.[240] *Das Ding*, then, accords too much with a primary modality of the alienated phenomenality; thingness is an effect of fallenness. Or in the terms of Zen, all objects lack self-being. Nevertheless, despite imaginary and symbolic distortion, the subject's unconscious sense that Something Real has been surrendered is quite accurate and needs to be brought into consciousness.

Attunement to lack itself can both make the longing for the Real conscious and move one towards Realization. The motivational center of the fallen subject fixates on recovering the genitive, the lack *of* This or That: the surrendered jouissance or *Das Ding*. And yet the directionality of this yearning is also fallen, and so misguided in its emphasis. The key to overcoming[241] fallenness is not to pursue what is conceived as lost, but rather to inhabit the lack itself, for privation is coterminous with the *emptiness* of the Real. The fallen subject rightly senses that it is estranged, but its unconscious estimation of what has been surrendered is tainted by castration's coloring and thereby facilitates an investment in symbolically configured goals that, even in being realized, cannot bring lasting satisfaction. In Zen terms, the path to liberation goes through the nothingness of lack itself, which thereby divests the subject of symbolic and imaginary attachments and delivers an inconceivably empty Real.

Emergence and Fallenness as Extensive Downward Causation

[239] Lacan, *The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis*, 244.
[240] Consider the realism of Parmenides as an extreme example.
[241] Since fallenness is forwardness, overcoming fallenness can readily entail losing out on some of the forwardness.

Let us get at fallenness from a different angle: fallenness as the extensive downward causation of the emergent symbolic order. Emergent structures are simultaneously dependent on their constituent parts and irreducible to the elements of their constitution. What is more, they are known to exert causal influence on the lower-level components on which they supervene. Lacan is perspicacious in his analysis of the manner by which the symbolic order, as the Other, acts downwardly upon subjects to affect us significantly. However, his structuralist tendencies lead him to portray society as holistically static and not amenable to substantial modification through subjects' activity. In other words, in Lacanian thought, there is a strong notion of the irreducibility and downward causality of the emergent symbolic order, but, apart from the notion of productive speech, there is a considerable lack of discussion of the supervenience of this order upon human activity. Consequently, there is a problematic conservatism in Lacan; he consistently affirms the established law and order of society and holds it incumbent on the particular subject to adapt to this seemingly immutable structure. A more balanced, indeed an emergentist, approach can correct this one-sidedness and move us towards my goal of yoking personal and structural transformation.

Lacan, perhaps as much as anyone in the history of psychology and psychoanalysis, has shown how the sociological level is integral to the constitution of the subject. However, his sociology is informed mostly by post-Hegelian strands of Continental philosophy and structuralist anthropology. His significant dependence on the latter further illustrates how problematically static his conceptions of society are: he treats studies of extra-modern indigenous tribes, believed to illustrate primordial patterns, as revelatory of structures that are still determinative in the modern world. This is not to say he is unequivocally wrong in doing so, but this move does evince a conservative endorsement of the immutability and power of fundamental heteropatriarchal norms. We will thus try to open Lacan up a bit by bringing in some emergentist sociological interlocutors. And in the process, we will find that Lacan has much to contribute to their own discussions.

Emergent structures supervene upon a base. As Matthew Croasum explains, supervenience entails that given a particular lower-level configuration, only one emergent is possible.[242] Croasmun uses the example of a baseball game. A particular score, say four for the home team and two for the away team, can only engender one result: victory for the home team. The result is thereby beholden to the elements engendering it. Sociologically, the symbolic order is constrained by the activity of the subjects who constitute it. Margaret Archer, though she does not sufficiently emphasize the downward causality of culture upon the subject, strongly stresses this upwardly acting constitution of the macro level by human agents, writing that society "is open because it is peopled, and being peopled can always be reshaped through human innovativeness."[243] But cultural forms are remarkably resilient, largely because subjects are deeply inhabited by and therefore unwittingly accord with them, even in their "innovativeness."[244] Consequently, the radical alteration of society for the better, while possible in that the latter supervenes on collections of subjects, depends on the profound transformation of particular persons and communities.

The key elements forging the macro from the micro parts are communication and relationality. Lacan recurrently accents the centrality of speech, but his masculinist and structuralist commitments to the law and the letter lead him to downplay the importance of a connectedness that does not simply reduce to oral verbality. Furthermore, he fails to theorize how the symbolic order can be altered by the accumulation of verbal, relational, and practical divergences. R. Keith Sawyer studied the impact of communication differences in artificial societies and found that "different collective properties emerge and the processes of their emergence are different when the agent

[242] Croasmun, *The Emergence of Sin*, 32. Or, as R. Keith Sawyer writes, "If a collection of lower-level components with a given set of relations causes higher-level property *E* to emerge at time *t*, then on every other occasion when the same collection of components in that same set of relation occurs, *E* will again emerge" (*Social Emergence* [Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005], 66).
[243] Margaret Archer, *Realist Social Theory: The Morphogenetic Approach* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 166.
[244] I will justify this claim below.

communication is changed."[245] The structure of the symbolic order does not simply precede speech as the determining Other, but also changes as eccentric forms of communication and activity accumulate. Sawyer stresses the importance of "process, interaction, symbolic communication, and social mechanism"[246] as catalyzing the emergence of higher order societal structures. Clearly speech is an integral part of the equation, but Sawyer's pillars point to a communally incarnational complexity that does not reduce to the spoken word.

In every type of emergence interaction is central. The wetness of water does not belong to the particular water molecule but to the combined effect of water molecules joining together. It is the coming together, then, fostered by the intermolecular attraction of the polar units (which in turn relies on the valence level bonding of hydrogen and oxygen atoms), that catalyzes the emergence of the wetness that we experience when we jump into a pool or wash our hands. Kevin Laland called the emergentist or systems level approach to biology "the new interactionism" because it studies not just the component parts of biological systems, but how those parts communicate to generate forms not strictly determined by their elemental constituency.[247] Conway Lloyd Morgan, the most famous of the early British emergentists, frequently spoke of emergence in terms of interconnection: "There is perhaps no topic which is more cardinal to our interpretation … than that which centers round what I shall call relatedness."[248] He described the novelty that comes about through emergence as "new kinds of relatedness." Durkheim said that the irreducible whole of society comes about through "the very fact of [the component elements'] fusion."[249] The symbolic order, then, does not

[245] Sawyer, *Social Emergence*, 188. In "Chapter 8: Simulating Social Emergence with Artificial Societies," Sawyer details how computerized multi-agent societies developed their own emergent orders with minimal initial input directing the agents. Their interactions generated complex structures that acted downwardly to causally impact the particular agents and thereby add an additional nomic structure to their interactions.
[246] Ibid., 209.
[247] Kevin Laland, "The New Interactionism," *Science* 300 (June 20, 2003): 1879-80. Quoted in Philip Clayton, *Adventures in the Spirit* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 68.
[248] C. Lloyd Morgan, *Emergent Evolution* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1923), 7.
[249] Emile Durkheim, *Sociology and Philosophy*, D. F. Pocock (trans.) (London: Cohen & West, 1953), 27.

simply precede us as the vast architect of our fate; it is also derived from our interactions, with the latter being not simply reducible to speech but also necessarily including incarnational and relational activity and affectivity.

At the same time, the society that our interactions produce is not simply a predictable, linear derivative of its causes; it is novel and irreducible. In Sawyer's study of artificial societies, variations in linguistic programming produced divergent macro results, but the latter could not be anticipated through an analysis of the inputs.[250] The strong, ontological form of this idea was famously articulated by Morgan: "[T]he emergently new is incompatible in 'substance' with the previous course of events before the turning-point was reached."[251] There is often an evolutionary component to emergentist thought.[252] In the history of the cosmos, chemical, biological, psychological, and sociological structures, when they successively appeared, brought forth something radically new which, while drawing on what preceded them, introduced what Morgan calls a "turning point" which was "incompatible in 'substance' with the previous course of events."[253] Lèvi-Strauss, in pointing to the impact of the incest prohibition and exogamy, may have identified a fulcrum that, by engendering complex forms of relationality, helped to facilitate the emergence of a novel sociological structure.

Durkheim famously tied the irreducibility of society to that of the mind:

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[250] Sawyer, *Social Emergence*, 145-169

[251] Morgan, *Emergent Evolution*, 207.

[252] This is a central part of Philip Clayton's theological emergentism. In Chapter 5 ("Emergent Realities: The Evolution of Life and Mind") of *Adventures in the Spirit* ([Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008], 75-87), he ambitiously charts an emergentist evolutionary history from the micro to the macro, even as he tries to tie discussions of consciousness to the emergence of life and of novel structures within and among living things. Concluding, he writes, "We have seen that natural history begins with the world of physics and runs through a large number of stages of emergent complexity, each associated with its own unique qualities, dynamics, and regularities … We see in the natural world an open-ended process of increasing complexity, which leads to qualitatively new forms of existence" (87).

[253] Ibid. The emphasis of novel substance makes Morgan a strong emergentist. A weak emergentist, while acknowledging that epistemologically the novel order cannot be explained by the laws of its lower-level base, would insist that ontologically nothing radically different appears. This distinction is important to note, but my argument does not hinge on parsing this difference.

> Representational life cannot be divided among and ascribed to particular neural elements, since several of these elements combine for its generation; *but it could not exist without the whole formed by their union, just as the collective could not exist without the whole formed by the union of individuals*. Neither the one nor the other is made up of particular parts that can be attributed to the corresponding parts of their respective substrata. Each mental condition is, as regards the neural cells, in the same condition of relative independence as social phenomena are in relation to individual people.[254]

Apart from neurobiology, there is no thinking. At the same time, cognition is emergent. While it depends upon the brain, it cannot be located in any of the particular neural elements. It is only properly said to be located in the whole. This whole requires the sum of the parts, but it is more than the sum of the parts. Likewise, society depends on individual persons but is something more than the aggregate of their influence. Individuals, like neurons, come together to form an emergent structure which both needs them and surpasses them, even as it enfolds them. The weakness of Durkheim's analogy, though, is that he fails to consider the great extent to which "representational life" is funded by the symbolic order. For Lacan, the signifier belongs not to the individual but to the Other. Yet there must be an emergent element of the mind that is not dependent on the downward influence of societal forms. In my estimation, it is precisely this intelligence that Zen taps into, and which might be called *Prajñā*. But let us not get ahead of ourselves. We need to dwell on irreducibility a bit longer.

To return to Croasmun's baseball analogy, while a win for the home team is the only possible result of a score of four for the home team and two for the visiting team, there are many different scoring outcomes that could beget the same terminal consequence. Thus, while emergent forms are superveniently tethered to their bases, a given higher level order can supervene on more than one base. Take A for a set of base elements and B for the structure that emerges from it. The conditional, if A, then B, while true in this case, does not logically imply the converse, if B, then A. B might also supervene on C, D, or X. The technical term for this rule is "multiple realizability."

[254] Emile Durkheim, *Sociology and Philosophy*, tr. D.F. Pocock (London: Cohen & West, 1953), 27-28.

Describing this phenomenon as applied to the philosophy of mind, Sawyer writes that "although each mental state must be supervenient on some physical state, each token instance of that mental state might be implemented, grounded, or realized by a different physical state."[255] For Sawyer, multiple realizability does not in and of itself imply irreducibility. However, if the bases are sufficiently different and separate, or in his terms, "wildly divergent," then the emergent phenomenon can be said to be irreducible.[256] For Sawyer, society is replete with collective entities that supervene on wildly divergent bases.

Lacan speaks of *the* symbolic order. But is there simply one symbolic order? Or are there not various cultural totalities, overlapping and interpenetrating each other to be sure, but often constituted by radically different forms of connection, discourses, practices, and micro-symbolic collectivities? Furthermore, while the laws and practices of heteropatriarchy may once have been signal elements of every cultural base, the irreducibility of the cultural order entails that it can supervene on wildly divergent bases lacking what was for a long time deemed integral. Law and order are possible without the same old laws and the same historical rudiments of order.

Moreover, Lacan is right to stress the centrality of law. Yet there is a founding law and then a nomism that emerges on its own in the collective. In Sawyer's study of artificial societies, he found that individuals' behavior was always law-governed, but only part of that nomic influence was from the initial programming. Through the interactions of agents, newly emergent laws developed that were always unforeseen. When Lacan points to law, he tends to focus on founding instantiations: the incest prohibition, the pact, the father's no. Yet he does not sufficiently emphasize the more important and influential nomism that is unplanned, organic, and not beholden to the primacy of a male actor.

[255] Sawyer, *Social Emergence*, 67.
[256] Ibid., 68.

If thus far, the dimensions of emergence which we have examined have allowed us to critique Lacan, in this next facet to be discussed, we will find that Lacan provides ample resources both to qualify and to enhance the insights of emergentists. Downward causation has been called both the most controversial and the most important element of emergence.[257] This notion holds that emergent phenomena and structures can exert downward causal influence on their constituent parts. Initially, this capacity of emergents to alter their constituent elements might seem to contradict supervenience, which is the higher level's ontological dependence on the lower. How can something causally affect that upon which it depends for its structure? And if it does have such a capacity, how is this not explainable in terms of the dynamics of the lower-level components? The prior discussion on irreducibility, though, helps to clarify this apparent contradiction. The key is that when emergence occurs, a novel whole is formed through the relational combination of various parts that, while dependent on its components, is more than the sum of those elements. It therefore possesses a kind of agency that does not exist in its constituents and can alter the latter.

The standard thinking on the nature of downward causation is that the emergent operates on lower-level boundary conditions without markedly affecting the ontology of the particular elements upon which it supervenes. According to Michael Polanyi, "Within an organism, each higher principle controls the boundary left indeterminate by the next lower principle. It relies for its operations on the lower principle without interfering with its laws ..."[258] The cell, then, does not interfere with the fundamental ontology of the protein within it; it rather facilitates a positionality and directionality that is conducive to the overall functioning of the emergent unit. Likewise, the tissue constituted by groupings of cells does not markedly modify the latter themselves but rather arranges them in such a way that novel properties pertain to the collectivity. In Croasmun's

[257] Croasmun, *The Emergence of Sin*, 36.
[258] Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966), 49.

language, the higher level provides "structural constraint" and a "context" within which the lower-level entities can operate according to their own laws.[259] We shall see, however, that when we consider how the emergent sociological level (the symbolic order) directs the human organism, this rule that the emergent controls the indeterminate boundary without significantly affecting the ontology of the constituent will prove insufficient. The signifier, whose provenance is always the Other, transmogrifies the subject. Fallenness can be defined as this alteration of the mechanism of emergence in such a way that human society radically transforms the ontology of the human subject. Yet paradoxically, in this very form of emergence, there is far greater potential than in any other system for the lower-level entity to significantly alter both itself and the higher level.

The sociologist who has most rigorously analyzed the downward action of society on the individual is none other than Emile Durkheim. He consistently describes this force as both powerful and external to the subject: "[C]ollective ways of acting and thinking possess a reality existing outside individuals, who, at every moment, conform to them."[260] In Durkheimian thought, social facts form through the combination of subjects as groups and as society. These facts, whether established customs or prevailing trends, can only properly be said to pertain to the emergent whole. They are opaque for the person but still greatly impact her or him. "As this synthesis occurs outside each one of us (since a plurality of consciousnesses are involved) it has necessarily the effect of crystallizing, of instituting outside ourselves, certain modes of action and certain ways of judging which are independent of the particular individual will considered separately."[261] But does not the language of independence and externality go too far?

[259] Croasmun, *The Emergence of Sin*, 39.
[260] Emile Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, Steven Lukes (ed.), W. D. Halls (trans.) (New York: Free Press, 2013), 12.
[261] Ibid., 15

R. Keith Sawyer disagrees with Durkheim, positing that discursive representations of what the latter calls social facts can be at least partially cognized by the subject.[262] Nevertheless, he insists that the downward causation of the sociological level can operate apart from this cognizance. There is something insightful about Durkheim's insistence that social causes are primarily external, for such externality both accords with emergent irreducibility and helps to explain the persistence of cultural forms. If the latter were completely available to consciousness, would they not be more readily altered? On the other hand, calling them external ignores the obvious fact that they must develop within human consciousness. Somehow, social facts must be both internal and external. And this is the picture Lacan presents: culture having its way in and through the subject, but primarily unconsciously. Thus, its influence, while internal to the person, is mostly external to consciousness. The subject can be radically influenced by the Other without the consciousness of it that would be required to easily diverge from its indwelling sway.

Lacan in Emergentist Terms

Let us now explore in some detail Lacan's conception of what I am calling the downward action of the symbolic order on the subject.

Lacan frequently speaks of the determination of the word or signifier or symbol. It is important to grasp that these roughly equivalent terms denote not free-floating entities, but linguistic units grounded in an overarching societal order. For Saussure, words do not signify through a natural connection to a referent[263] or through the conscious intentionality of a speaker but as a result of their embeddedness in a linguistic superstructure in which their relationships to other words in

[262] Sawyer, *Social Emergence*, 217.
[263] "The bond between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary" (Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye [eds.], Wade Baskin [trans.] [NY: Philosophical Library, 1959], 67).

that order produce meaning.[264] Lèvi-Strauss found that the practices of the people groups that he studied could be analyzed through the principles of structuralist linguistics. And many took his insights to mean that society itself has the same ordinal characteristics of the Saussurian linguistic universe: it is an interconnected and arranged totality. In a sense, this finding was a confirmation of the Hegelian rule that what is true is the whole. Lacan is deeply indebted to both these structuralist pioneers, and to Hegel as well. For him, then, language is both structured itself and part of an encompassing societal framework in which it plays a salient and integral role; the powerful force that language exerts on the subject is also the totality of society wielding its influence in and through the person:

> Symbols in fact envelop the life of man with a network so total that they join together those who are going to engender him 'by bone and flesh' before he comes into the world; so total that they bring to his birth, along with the gifts of the stars, if not with the gifts of the fairies, the shape of his destiny; so total that they provide the words that will make him faithful or renegade, the law of the acts that will follow him right to the very place where he is not yet and beyond his very death; and so total that through them his end finds its meaning in the last judgment, where the Word absolves his being or condemns it – unless he reaches the subjective realization of being-toward-death.[265]

This passage illustrates two core features of Lacan's conception of the symbolic order fixing the limits of the subject's existence. Note that here the symbolic order is said to circumscribe the subject's life, preveniently carving out a position before birth, providing the terms of failure or success, shaping her or his destiny, and outlasting her or him as it inscribes a verdict after she or he has died. And by joining the subject's parents before they beget her or him, conferring a destiny at birth, and surpassing death, the symbolic order is here inscribed as consistently outstripping the

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[264] "[J]ust as the game of chess is entirely in the combination of the different chess pieces, language is characterized as a system based entirely on the opposition of its concrete units" (Ibid., 107). Lacan's debt to Saussure is great. Saussure by himself did much to decenter the subject, but he to some extent left a humanistic conception of consciousness in place by placing the signified over the signifier. Lacan inverts this Saussurian pairing and locates the operations of the signifier primarily in the unconscious. See his famous essay "The Insistence of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason Since Freud," in *Ecrits*, 412-444.

[265] Lacan, *Ecrits*, 231.

natural and the biological. This symbolic over-coding of the Real is fallenness, the emergent societal order deviating from the standard, restrained form of downward causation. The cultural order does far more than provide a context for the operation of its members; it thoroughly inhabits us and orchestrates the terms of our lives. Moreover, this passage can help us see that the oppressive fictions about a final judgment of God rendering each person justified or condemned has grown out of the symbolic order itself. The father and the word underwent an apotheosis and acquired a power to judge which would make any earthly sovereign blush.

But in the allusion to Heidegger's concept of being-towards-death, Lacan does hint that there may be a way beyond this pervasive influence, at least to a certain extent. Yet he never develops this idea. And for Lacan, because the subject is necessarily subsequent to the ever-intruding signifier, there is no lasting fix. Moreover, being-towards-death prescribes an individualism that can readily exacerbate egoism even as it rips the subject from her or his embeddedness in an always interconnected Real. This project is committed to doing what Lacan never seriously attempted and Heidegger failed to do: articulating a way beyond captivity to the symbolic, but without rejecting culture altogether. Western thought, aside from certain mystical and Romantic exceptions, has consistently employed the culturally embedded forms from which it recognizes that we must be delivered as part of the grand solution. We will avoid, then, both a naïve affirmation of agency that does not grapple with the bondage of the will to cultural hegemony and the characteristically Western hamstringing of the subject that has inevitably attended the attempt to liberate her or him.

The sense that culture always envelops and directs the existence of the subject is a theme that itself virtually envelops and directs the Lacanian oeuvre. For example, he writes, "Founding speech, which envelops the subject, is everything that has constituted him, his parents, his neighbors, the whole structure of the community, and not only constituted him as symbol, but

constituted him in his being."[266] But what is founding speech? It refers to that discourse which, issuing from the preceding structures of constitutive social forms, is most determinative for the subject. And it works on her or him so as to make of its object a symbol coterminous with its discursively laden precedence and to so alter the body as to change the core of its being. As mentioned above, the wetness of water pertains to an emergent effect of the conglomeration of molecules and not to the particular molecules themselves. Moreover, this condition of the whole does not significantly alter the constitution of the units, much less the nuclei of the hydrogen and oxygen atoms. But for the human being, the emergent domain of culture, through the medium of the signifier, powerfully affects the person, so that her very nuclear elements are rearranged by the intervention of the signifier.

Hyberbolizing a bit, Lacan insists that "everything emerges from the structure of the signifier."[267] For Lacan, in the beginning was the word. That is, everything human has been touched by the letter and transfigured through that influence. The phrasing "structure of the signifier" is telling. As we have seen, the word is the bearer of cultural order and is itself part of a linguistic structure, coterminous with that of society, through which signification and significance emerge.

The subject is both enabled and restricted by this linguistic saturation that penetrates her as if to the marrow: "The signifier, producing itself in the field of the Other, makes manifest the subject of its signification. But it functions as a signifier only to reduce the subject in question to being no more than a signifier, to petrify the subject in the same movement in which it calls the subject to function, to speak, as subject."[268] To be human is to speak. And yet there is a price to pay for doing so. The power of the downward action of the emergent symbolic order, while necessary for the modicum of agency that attends subjectivity, is such that, through the medium of

[266] Lacan, *The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis*, 20.
[267] Lacan, *Ecrits*, 205.
[268] Ibid., 206.

the word, it profoundly alters the very being of the subject and converts the latter into a living, breathing signifier. It is not possible to completely undo this alteration, yet Zen insists that there is a form of consciousness that escapes the priority of the signifier. However, the unconscious must still be structured like a language, and the element of undoing fallenness that Zen achieves can be accompanied by a concomitant surrendering of some of our forwardness.

However, to persist in our present condition is becoming increasingly costly. For Lacan, we have been created in the image of the word. I am insisting that we thereby become vehicles of the glorious cancer of civilization. The new world disorder, dependent upon our interpellation and subjectification because of its supervenience, propagates and aggrandizes itself through us and further colonizes and mars its terrestrial host. And yet to submit to this process is initially a necessity.

Is it necessary, though, to remain in this fallen condition? For Lacan, there is no definitive way beyond the vice grip of culture. We shall question this in turn as we introduce the *thatāthā* that lies beyond the occlusions of the letter. Yet the word deeply inhabits all of us. Conscious transcendence of the signifier is not tantamount to a subjectivity that is utterly free.

Postliberalism, somewhat like Lacan but without knowledge of him, accepts the priority of the signifier. George Lindbeck has called for a cultural-linguistic definition of religion. Becoming a subject of a given religious denomination is like gradually acquiring the skills and competencies that make one an adroit speaker and writer of a given language. It is only against the backdrop of this sociological and linguistic presupposition that religious claims can be evaluated.[269] I, however, am arguing for a form of religiosity by which the subject strives to disabuse herself of the beliefs acquired through religious acculturation. Nevertheless, there is a place for received religiosity after awakening, through what Ricoeur would call a second naïveté.

[269] See, for example, *The Nature of Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1984).

For Lacan, the great choice is not to be or not to be, but rather, because of the priority of the signifier, to be in part or not to be at all. To explain the *vel* of alienation, he refers to a robbery in which the perpetrator says, "Your money or your life."[270] There is really no way to win in such a situation. To hold onto your money is to forfeit your life. To give up your money and hopefully retain your life is still to suffer a loss of some of that which is necessary for the maintenance of life. It is likewise for subjectivity itself. Being, in human terms, is impossible apart from accession to the transmogrifying inhabitance of the symbolic order within, yet this indwelling and the profound determination that accompanies it preclude the fullness of being which the subject deeply longs for: "In other words, it is of the nature of this meaning, as it emerges in the field of the Other, to be in a large part of its field, eclipsed by the disappearance of being, induced by the very function of the signifier."[271] Yet what Lacan fails to realize is that something like that which is sought is attainable, but only through surrendering the desire to attain and realizing the emptiness, not the fullness, of being. To be sure, though, an element of bondage must remain.

The signifier, then, comes from the symbolic order, enters the subject, and colonizes the depths of her being. One symptom of this colonization is the tendency of the subject to repeat. For Lacan, repetition is born of the insistent recurrence of the indwelling signifier, itself the result of "the intrusion of the symbolic register."[272] The signifier, of course, does not exist by itself. It is always part of a chain, just as the otherwise determining signifiers named adenine, guanine, cytosine, and thymine are parts of genetic units linked together extensively. Signifying chains inhabit and largely orchestrate the unconscious. There is also an order to these networks, for "the unconscious is structured like a language. "[273] This does not mean that it is put together in precisely the same way

[270] Ibid., 212.
[271] Ibid., 211.
[272] Lacan, *The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis*, 88.
[273] Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 20.

that English or Spanish or Latin is organized. Nevertheless, unconscious signifying chains have an overarching form in some sense similar to the Saussurian linguistic order. The unconscious is a microcosm of society. Lacan frequently uses the metaphor of the machine to describe unconscious regularity, and the type of mechanism he most likens to the subterranean order is the "thinking machine," which performs operations through binary programming and possess a kind of memory as a retention of the results of dichotomous selection. What is a machine if not an instrument that, when it is sufficiently advanced, has mastered the art of repetition? "What is in the memory of a machine, in effect, goes round in circles until one needs it – it's obliged to go round in circles, for memory cannot be built into a machine in any other way."[274] There is an insistence on the same that calls to us from deep within, driving us forward toward a history we are condemned to repeat that masquerades as the novelty of the future. The deeply embedded signifier, in its recurrence and insistence, conspires with the flesh to produce a habitus, which in turn engenders that foolish consistency which is the hobgoblin of most minds and tends to reproduce the fallen structures of the cultural order in their present form. As Pierre Bourdieu has claimed, we are inhabited by a "productive principle" which "is itself the product of the structures which it consequently tends to reproduce."[275]

The force of the former to renew itself is communal before it is personal (just as fallenness is first structural and secondarily manifests as the alienation of the individual). Binding chains of discourse envelop and permeate families and institutions, knotting them together in reiterative consistency and restrictive reduplication. For the subject, produced by the overarching regime as an incarnate word, the community's linguistic pattern is "the discourse of the circuit in which I am

[274] Lacan, *Formations of the Unconscious*, 33.
[275] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, tr. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 83.

integrated," and I am "one of its links."[276] Repetition is therefore one of the primary forms of the propagation of fallenness: "It is the discourse of my father for instance, in so far as my father made mistakes which I am absolutely condemned to reproduce – that's what we call the *super-ego*. I am condemned to reproduce them because I am obliged to pick up again the discourse he bequeathed to me, not simply because I am his son, but because one can't stop the chain of discourse, and it is precisely my duty to transmit it in its aberrant form to someone else."[277] On the other hand, repetition is not necessarily problematic, and there is far more to the reproduction of generational sin than linguistic inheritance.

As noted, the foremost Lacanian term for the emergent cultural order as it causally impacts the subject is "the Other." Yet it is important to remember that the interaction of the macro with the micro is primarily unconscious. Thus, we can preserve a component of the Durkheimian insistence that the emergent level is external but nevertheless, in that this externality is also internal, explain how it is able forcibly to prehend the subject.

The unconscious is the playground of the Other, which is the symbolic order as it confronts the subject and that from whence all signifiers come. Writes Lacan, "The unconscious is constituted by the effects of speech on the subject, it is the dimension in which the subject is determined in the development of the effects of speech, consequently the unconscious is structured like a language."[278] The Other as it resides in the unconscious is therefore a residue of speech but, as noted above, it has its own order that internally reflects the Saussurian structure of language. The Lacanian subject is both inhabited and animated by an indwelling alterity whose inertial propulsion strives for more of the same, and this repetition-inducing otherness, structured analogously to the symbolic order itself,

[276] Lacan, *Formations of the Unconscious*, 89.
[277] Ibid.
[278] Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 149

is the primary mechanism of the emergent culture's downward influence on the individual and reproduction of its form.

Cognition and speech belong more to the Other than to the subject, for the signifier's primary residence is in the symbolic order. "Every discourse is the Other's discourse, even when it is the subject who speaks it."[279] Speech must follow an *exitus-reditus* circuit from the Other to the message and back to the Other. The Other is the alpha and omega of thought and communication. To initiate cognition or speech, an impulse of the subject must intercept the code, which is the linguistic dimension of the Other, conceived as the synchronic Saussurian order. The code both confers iterative consistency on that impulse and transforms it into something capable of bearing meaning. Out of this intersection comes the message, which is the particular thought or utterance. But this message must in turn receive authentication from the very code from whence it derived much of its substance. "Here the processes are to be articulated, of course, as circular between the subject and the Other – from the subject called to the Other, to the subject of that which he has himself seen appear in the field of the Other, from the Other coming back. This process is circular, but, of its nature, without reciprocity. Because it is circular, it is dissymmetrical."[280] Circular but dissymmetrical because the agency of the emergent order consistently outstrips that of the subject, and the modicum of power in the latter itself is only realizable through a deference to the former. (Unless of course she can draw on the infinite resources of the Real.)

The subject who must ceaselessly be indebted to the downward action of the emergent level is fallen and alienated: "In coming to be in and through the order of the symbolic, that is, the field of the Other, the subject can never be in its own place; it has no place of its own."[281] How can one mark one's own place or stake one's own claim without language? Yet the very process of

[279]Lacan, *Desire and its Interpretation*, 33.
[280] Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 206.
[281] Calum Neill, *Without Ground* , (NY, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 2.

articulation entails a borrowing from the Other and a deprivation of being. The subject's existence is therefore exilic. Furthermore, the fallenness that exists in society is readily transferred to the subject through the mediation of the Other. Structural fallenness does not simply pertain to the macro but also enslaves the subject because of her or his ineluctable subsequence to the internalized force of disordered cultural regularity.

Little Big Others and Micro-Symbolics

We need to refine the Lacanian concept of the big Other. Lacan is right that the totality of a cultural order is in some sense present in the subject. But how can we possibly define such a totality? Surely there is not one symbolic order. Yet where does one culture end and another begin? And what do we do with Bhabha's notion of hybridity? As I will argue, the big Other primarily pertains to the tentacular inhabitation of a subject by an emergent, minded person that supervenes on a host of aligned institutions and their constituents. But my main point here is that this presence is always mediated by intermediate orders. Are not there little big Others within the subject as well, the internalized, deep presence of the particular institutions that form us and which collectively constitute the micro-symbolic orders? In this section I aim to show that these little big Others potently shape our subjectivity, to the point where it is necessary to claim that our thoughts, desires, and affects are not our own but largely the effect of the indwelling sway of institutional power-knowledge.

Emile Durkheim has argued that both institutions and a given society as a whole (whatever that is) are combinations with irreducibly emergent and downwardly causal mental agency: "not having the individual as their substratum, [emergent collectives] can have none other than society, either political society in its entirety or one of the partial groups that it includes – religious

denominations, political and literary schools, occupational corporations, etc."[282] Let us focus now on the latter, those institutions or "partial groups" whose presence in us as little big Others contributes forcibly to both the production and constraint of our cognition.

For Ludwik Fleck, something novel occurs in a conversational combination as small as two people:

> He is a poor observer who does not notice that a stimulating conversation between two persons soon creates a condition in which each utters thoughts he would not have been able to produce either by himself or in different company. A special mood arises, which would not otherwise affect either partner of the conversation but almost always returns whenever these persons meet again. Prolonged duration of this state produces, from common understanding and mutual misunderstanding, a thought structure [Denkgebilde] that belongs to neither of them alone but nevertheless is not at all without meaning.[283]

Wherever two or more are gathered in unity, there is a presence of something more. For Lacan, that something is the big Other, the internalization of the symbolic order. But while the emergent thought structure that Fleck points to is no doubt funded by the archive (Foucault) located in the big Other, something more specific at play here. What Fleck describes is something I would call a little big Other which both conforms to and shapes the specificity of the encounter. Furthermore, the little whole that is formed is more than simply discursive. It is a kind of micro-community with its own emergent properties and "special mood." The linguistic element of the conversation is only a piece, as the whole cannot be reduced to or even represented by the signifier. In fact, the "special mood" may point to an affective dimension of the micro-community that taps into and transmits elements of the emergent structure that cannot be relayed by language, even as there is an attunement to this mood and automatic conversational conformity with it on the part of the subjects of the encounter.

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[282] Durkhiem, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, 21.

[283] Ludwik Fleck, *Genesis and Development of a Scientific Fact*, eds. Thaddeus J. Trenn and Robert K. Merton, trans. Fred Bradley and Thaddeus J. Trenn (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), 44.

Durkheim has larger, more established communities in mind when he describes how emergent collective structures form, but nevertheless the same logic pertains. The new level of organization and mentality is the effect of a dynamic combination of subjects: "the network of social life arises from the relations between the individuals thus combined"[284]; they form a "system" "by uniting together"[285]; they synthetically produce collective representations which "do not derive from individual minds as such but from the association of minds, which is a very different thing."[286] This formational process is analogous to the emergence of mental representations from a neural base.[287] The intricately relational pathways of the brain coalesce to engender representations which, while dependent on this anatomical-physiological constituency, are something novel that cannot be located in any single component of the neural apparatus. Thus, the patterns of institutional life, while arising from the fusion of subjects, are actually part of a whole new order of being and mentality when compared to the cognition, volition, and affect of its funding members. And the intricate and specific forms of connection within this fusion are the channels by which a complex circulation elicits higher order functioning. Matthew Croasmun, for example, has called attention to the trust, qualifications, and confidence pathways that direct the communication within institutions as acting like the neurons of the brain to constitute a collective mind.[288]

But not all institutions are created equal. Let us use a Foucauldian principle to distinguish between those non-subjectifying groupings whose strictures subjects conform to contextually and ephemerally and those subjectifying institutions that create humans in their own image. In Freud's version of group psychology, for example, he examines the behaviors of crowds that coalesce and then are dispersed. Such collectives can powerfully influence the behavior of their constituents, but

[284] Emile Durkheim, *Sociology and Philosophy*, 24.
[285] Ibid.
[286] Ibid., 25-26.
[287] Ibid., 24-25.
[288] Croasmun, *The Emergence of Sin*, 86.

such groups are ephemeral and leave no real enduring mark on subjectivity. A simple pick-up basketball game might serve as an example of this sort of ephemeral group dynamic. Such an informal game is in a certain sense institutional in that there is a nomic framework, an established sport with rules, and diverse subjects coalesce to form a team which, when it functions well, has characteristics that are more than the sum of the parts. Yet the players' submission to this framework usually does not entail a marked imprint on and modification of subjectivity. On the other hand, if one is part of an organized high school, college, or professional team, one enters a whole subjectifying apparatus replete with a subculture, a concomitant social status, and a quasi-militaristic ideology of competition, self-improvement, and teamwork. What is more, the contests engendered by organized athletics are more structured. A three-on-three pick-up game is often a one-on-one game increased by a factor of three. But in a college contest, teams have been trained by expert coaching to function as well-oiled machines irreducible to the sum of the players. And the players become more identified with specific subject positions. In a pick-up game, positions are seldom fixed. But on a school team, a point guard is a point guard and has a strictly delimited role. And such a fixed role becomes significantly integrated into the player's identity. Note also how in an informal game, one's individuality is not as likely to be transcended to align with the emergent functioning of an organized unit, yet the participation is much less likely to impact the subject's identity. On a well-run team, however, the particular player must detach from her or his ego to attune to the cohesive dynamic on the court yet is much more likely to graft the athletic subject position onto her or his sense of identity.

Yet what facilitates the transition from the sort of institution which, while submitted to by the subjects participating in it, does not markedly alter their subjectivities and that which commands significant allegiance even as it occupies the internalities of its constituents with its own emergent epistemic framework? According to Mary Douglas, the latter require legitimation and present

themselves as deriving their right to exercise power from that which is considered ultimately Real: "A convention is institutionalized when, in reply to the question, 'Why do you do it like this?' although the first answer may be framed in terms of mutual convenience, in response to further questioning the final answer refers to the way the planets are fixed in the sky or the way that plants or humans or animals naturally behave."[289] Such a link is provided by concatenated binaries, analogies that not only legitimate the functional modalities of the group but also naturalize its subject positions and inhabit the minds of its members, potently conditioning their cognition as the outwardly branching epistemic focus of an indwelling little big Other. For example, societies which have operated with a hierarchically imbalanced gender dichotomy have often justified this arrangement by aligning the male's superiority to the "natural" supremacy of the right hand with respect to the left, which "reinforces the social principle with a physical analogy."[290] Such binaries are then further conjoined to others, which in turn form a kind of genetic spine for the allocation and fixture of subject positions, the rationality of the group, and the cognitive habits of its members.

That inveterate cognition which Zen consistently impugns, then, is not primarily personal and is always significantly captive to the structures in which we operate, or rather, which operate through us. Lacan said that it is not primarily the subject who speaks but the signifier (whose home is the Other) that represents the subject for another signifier.[291] And Durkheim said that the social environment "seeks to shape [the subject] in its own image."[292] For him, manners of thought and behavior "are endued with a compelling and coercive power by virtue of which, whether [the subject] wishes to or not, they impose themselves upon him."[293]

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[289] Mary Douglas, *How Institutions Think* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 46-47.
[290] Ibid., 48.
[291] Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis,* 157.
[292] Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, 23.
[293] Ibid., 21.

Ludwik Fleck wrote about "thought collectives," communities whose emergent cognition acts downwardly on particular subjects to frame epistemic limits and even provide much of the content of their thought. He said that when such an enduring cognitive unity is formed, "the aim is logical conformity within a system at any cost."[294] Such a collective accrues an inertia and thereby, in its emergent commitment to remain continuous and constant, "offers enduring resistance to anything that contradicts it."[295] Therefore, for one who has a subject position within such a group and thereby incorporates that role into an egoic identity, her or his thinking must conform to the strictures established by the amalgamated totality. Furthermore, identification with the thought style of a collective makes it nearly impossible to make sense of ideas that come from a different cognitive modality,[296] as the intellectual resources for making sense of such situated notions are not universally given but the consequence of having been formed within specific institutional and epistemic limits.

Fleck was a philosopher of science whose focus was the discipline of biology. He saw the circulation of ideas in publications as not just the dissemination of knowledge but a key constituent of the production of a whole regime of truth which "create[s] habits of thought" and precedes and frames all observation.[297] Thus, even the most rigorous empiricism does not escape the priority of the signifier: "In science, just as in art and in life, only that which is true to culture is true to nature."[298] Fleck was thus attuned to that which in Lacanian terms is the mediation of the Other. But in this case, we are not dealing primarily with the inhabitation of the subject by the symbolic totality but with the subjective indwelling of a concentrated micro-symbolic that, while drawing on vast archival resources and broadly consonant with a culturally collective episteme (Foucault),

[294] Fleck, *Genesis and Development of a Scientific Fact*, 31.
[295] Ibid., 25.
[296] Ibid.
[297] Ibid., 37.
[298] Ibid., 35.

nevertheless produces a unique species of cognition with an internal logic that is circumscribed by institutionally specific bounds.

Cognition for Fleck, as for Lacan, or Wittgenstein, for that matter, is primarily social: "Cognition is therefore not an individual process of any theoretical 'particular consciousness.' Rather it is the result of a social activity …"[299] Thought collectives comprise "harmonious holistic unites" which "exhibit those particular stylistic properties which determine and condition every single function of cognition."[300] At the same time, there is not strict determination. The emergent whole supervenes on particular cognitive instances which do not absolutely replicate their inherited structure. In Fleck's words, "What is already known influences the particular method of cognition; and cognition, in turn, enlarges, renews, and gives fresh meaning to what is already known."[301] The enlargement denotes an extension that is not mere reproduction. At the same time, there is a limit to that (modicum of) novelty which must remain coextensive with a precedence of power-knowledge. Furthermore, in Lacanian terms, the element of freshness need not be primarily attributed to a conscious personal will, as the intricate play of signifiers and phonemes within the unconscious, and the metaphoricity and metonomy that engender linguistic novelty, can produce fresh formulations apart from human intentionality.

One Symbolic Order or Lyotardian Diversity?

It could be argued that we all participate in multiple institutions and no single one has sufficient sway to significantly subjectify. The postmodern or post-postmodern world is marked by plurality and incommensurable difference, is it not? Yet I contend that the real fiction of egoic unity often seeks a conjunctive and reciprocally constitutive social amalgamation. Thus, while we inhabit

[299] Ibid., 38.
[300] Ibid.
[301] Ibid.

a universe of seeming diversity, disparate institutions align in constellated congruence to offer the seemingly unitary ego a whole world in which the various spheres of existence are connected by a common ideological thread. In this country, the two most obvious domains of potently subjectifying, pan-institutional universes are evangelicalism and progressivism.[302] Each power-knowledge apparatus both produces conforming subjects and presents them with literature, media outlets, entertainment, educational institutions, and, in a less structured way, a normalized sociality that provide the ego with a macro-mirror: a whole world of continuity and an orbit of like-mindedness in an age during which norm-defying difference is supposed to be the only norm.

Furthermore, surface plurality can belie an underlying unity. There may be significant divergences between the modern domains of psychiatry, elementary education, criminal "justice," and the industrial workplace, yet Foucault found similar power dynamics operating across these spaces. Foucault thus never spoke of different powers working with or against each other but of one field of power that nevertheless morphs and inwardly differentiates. Moreover, in *The Order of Things*, he found a common epistemic base to fields which, in Kuhnian terms, operate with seemingly incommensurable paradigms and research programs. I am trying right now to articulate a mid-level source of symbolic subjectivation that Lacan neglected. This domain is nevertheless commensurate with supervening higher orders that also inhabit and form the subject. However, the intermediary realm to which I point is focal; the symbolic totality, the big Other, tends to act obliquely through the mediation of little big Others.

All this is to say that the Lyotardian thesis of a society populated by incompatibly different milieus fails to account for the constellated congruence of various institutions and the deep, underlying cultural unities that for Foucault are inscribed in "power," "the episteme," and "the archive" and for Lacan is the symbolic order inhabiting the subject as the big Other. At the same

[302] Yet there is clearly greater personal liberty in progressivism.

time, I am not about to argue for a single symbolic order. Where does one draw the lines? At the level of the state? But there are fissures within states and overlapping dynamics between them. The truth is that I cannot reject Lyotard unequivocally. I have said that *fallenness* is the great extent to which the sociological determines the psychological. But I have also claimed that *forwardness* is the unusual freedom that humans have in contradistinction to other bodies of emergent wholes. And it is the linguistic inhabitation of the human mind which Lacan consistently points to which makes for both such forceful downward causation and such extensive possibility for divergence. Thus, because of the latter, sociological wholes are not as fixed and bounded as, say, molecules, organs, or bodies. Therefore, when we seem to get to the level of cultural totalities, it becomes hard to name such collectives in a definitive way. The symbolic order is a shorthand for talking about a society, but societies have inward divisions that don't neatly amalgamate, even as they interpenetrate with other societies.

Emergent Superorganisms

I have been affectively formed by various milieus, one of which is community of progressive Christians in New Haven, CT. A member of this group, Matthew Croasmun, is the scholar who introduced me to emergentism. He has argued persuasively that the Pauline concept of Sin (*hamartia*), which in Romans 5-8 is portrayed as a cosmic power that enslaves sinners, is reflective of a real emergent person: "The superorganism, Sin, emerges from the resultant complex interaction of sinning individuals and sinning institutions and exercises downward causation back upon institutions and individuals."[303] This sounds quite like my depiction of Lacan's big Other. But, if there is no single big Other apart from little big Others, there must be multiple incarnations of Sin. Let us say that every micro-symbolic of constellated institutions has its own particular form of Sin. It must

[303] Croasmun, *The Emergence of Sin*, 99.

also be noted that the Other is not unequivocally malevolent. Let us therefore say that Sin is the negative, alienating, and oppressive side of the symbolic collective. We can also lean into the personal dimension inscribed in "the Other." The Other is the inhabitation of the subject by the tentacles of a real superorganism that supervenes upon fallen subjects and institutions even as it acts downwardly upon, in, and through them. Descartes of course speculated that an evil genius could have been manipulating his experience, even as he saw the certainty of the thinker as a counterproof to such an influence. I am claiming that there are (partially) evil geniuses behind our cognition, affect, and desire and that these larger persons operate through us so readily because we believe that solely we ourselves are thinking, feeling, and wanting and are present to ourselves in "doing" so. Yet between thinking, feeling, and wanting, the biggest culprit of delusion is cognition. The belief that one is present to oneself in thinking and the implicit underlying contention that thinking is the ground of one's being are the foremost lies infecting the Western mind.

The Cartesian cogito which we have yet to displace is also coterminous with a deeply problematic humanism. Emergence offers a means of relativizing our claims to absolute uniqueness without eliding the important distinctions between animals who can (therefore) call themselves animals and those that cannot. The linguistically formed human mind is surely a novelty in evolutionary history. But does it reserve us grounds for boasting? That is, does it leave us, in spite of our continuity with other primates and, by extension, the whole earth, something that we can nevertheless claim as the source of an unimpeachable exaltedness? From an emergentist perspective, we must answer in the negative. Mind is not the unique province of a human person; it can also be attributed to micro-symbolics that supervene upon groups of subjects and to societies that supervene upon myriad institutions. Furthermore, these higher mental structures also significantly fund what has historically been thought to be the auto-generated cognition of a supposed individual. We need not resort only to drawing out our commonality with apes, Fido,

snakes, and termites in order to chasten our inherited humanistic hubris. We can also point above ourselves to the unanticipatedly agential operations of the structured, subjectifying, and *personal* aggregations.

Existentialism as Resistance to Downward Causality of Emergent Superorganisms

Though I affirm the reality of these emergent persons to deconstruct human claims of mental uniqueness, I am also insisting that their influence is often largely negative. Let us turn now to two brilliant Continental thinkers who sensed the oppressiveness of these "superorganisms" but were never able to name them as such. Nietzsche and Heidegger were particularly attuned to the impingements of the social upon the particular person, even as they lacked the ontology to discern and articulate the truly personal source of this force and, in championing the single individual, acted partly in concert with the powers they resisted.

Nietzsche had a keen sense of how custom and a general will (constituted by particular agents who will feebly) could preclude self-actualization. He spoke frequently of "the herd," which for him was the hegemonically majoritarian European collective of middling, passive, conformist subjects. There is thus an elitism in Nietzschean thought, but it must be highlighted that many who would have been considered cultural elites of the late nineteenth century were for Nietzsche subsumed quite easily beneath the rubric of "the herd animal." And though Nietzsche consistently denigrated the weakness of what he considered to be the Christianly inspired (even if no longer Christian) subject, it must also be acknowledged that, from an emergentist and Foucauldianly Lacanian perspective, he was also resisting an irreducible societal power structure of substantial subject-warping sway.

Nietzsche did nothing less than take a hammer to established morality. For Nietzsche, morality is a form of power that expresses and seeks the needs of the group while disregarding the

individual as someone of great worth in his or her own right. A morality consists of "valuations and an order of rank of human impulses and actions" which are "always expressions of the needs of a community and herd."[304] These values are then automatically transferred to the subject, apart from consideration of the difference between what I would call the irreducibly emergent whole and the constituting part that is the human person. Therefore, writes Nietzsche, "Morality trains the individual to be a function of the herd and to ascribe value to himself only as a function."[305] Morality, then, is the herd instinct for survival and growth operating in the individual, quite apart from concern for the subject as an end in herself. Nietzsche asserted the greatness of the unique individual who overcomes the strictures of the group to create higher forms of subjectivity. I want to second an element of this movement but make the individualistic assertion only inceptively helpful (and ultimately fictitious) and retain a morality in which all sentient creatures (not just exceptional human subjects) are treated as ends in themselves (Kant).

Nietzsche's account of morality is strikingly consistent with Durkheim's. For Durkheim, the norms of a group are the product of the emergent collectivity whose epistemic basis is distinct from the particular minds of the subjects constituting its supervenient base. A complex group is a minded subject with its own agenda, and this agenda becomes the morality of the members. An "individual's" morality is thus "social to the highest degree."[306] Durkheim consistently describes the great power with which the whole acts in and through the subject, and this force is doubtlessly a significant element of what Nietzsche was responding to. The morality imposed by the group mind is "an authority before which our will defers."[307] Social facts, a category a bit broader than simply morality, are "manners of acting or thinking, distinguishable through the special characteristic of

[304] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, tr. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974), III.116.
[305] Ibid.
[306] Durkheim, *Sociology and Philosophy*, 56.
[307] Ibid., 57.

being capable of exercising a coercive influence on the consciousness of individuals."[308] The castrated, docile, and productive subject who is "good" in the eyes of the world is for the most part a pawn.

But are there discursive facts that are not social facts? If, as Lacan asserts, all signifiers belong to the symbolic order and cognition is primary located in the Other, which is the unconscious indwelling of that order, is there a way of thinking that is not first and foremost exterior and social and therefore at least somewhat the result of a coercion? Durkheim distinguishes between collective representations and individual representations, but for Lacan, all representation is a product of that signifier, which inheres in the Other. The only way for the individual to truly break free of the force of societal constraint is to cultivate no-mind, and in no-mind, though there is a considerable detachment from the social, there is also, quite paradoxically, no separable individual. Durkheim insists that, given the way in which the social whole occupies the subject, "we can only renounce civilization by renouncing ourselves."[309] I want to partially agree with him, while maintaining that something like this double renunciation is necessary. To be sure, I am not advocating an utter rejection of civilization. That would be impossible. But I am trying to articulate a way of overcoming its domination of the subject through the indwelling occupiers of the big Other and the little other (the ego). And indeed, to renounce the rule of a fallen world within oneself is to renounce a considerable part of oneself. In fact, it entails surrendering one's rule of oneself, which has always been collaborating with the occupiers. Furthermore, if particular subjects form the supervenient base of the symbolic order, it is possible to form a new world through a movement of subjects committed to overcoming the past and present worlds occupying their being. Nevertheless, given the deep inhabitance of the subject by the signifier, unequivocal liberation is

[308] Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method,* 13
[309] Ibid., 54.

impossible. And a movement of particular persons spiritually remaking themselves will always be insufficient; the structures must also be dealt with directly.

Before we fully enter the Zen universe, though, let us consider one more existentialist thinker: Martin Heidegger. Heidegger's quest for authenticity can be taken as partially coextensive with a movement toward the Real. For the German genius, the subjective imprint of mass sociality is the greatest hindrance to becoming authentic. Most subjects, he avers, have been colonized by a hegemonic alterity: "[Dasein] itself *is* not; its Being has been taken away by the Others. Dasein's everyday possibilities of Being are for the Others to dispose as they please."[310] Or more directly, "Dasein, as everyday Being-with-one-another, stands in *subjection* [*Botmässigkeit*] to Others."[311] Yet what Heidegger fails to grasp is that this bondage is not to others, particular incarnate persons, but to the Other, which, to be sure, is also a person that is inseparable from particular incarnate others.

One of the foremost ways that Dasein becomes estranged is by comparison: "there is constant care as to the way one differs from [the Others]."[312] One is always ahead of or behind another. There is a disturbing and usually concealed distance from the other in my proximity to her. Yet what Heidegger fails to mention is that the very standard by which this distance is measured comes from the emergent Other, the moralizing societal whole which imposes an order and a ranking which belongs to no one in particular yet enfolds everyone. Our distance from others, which is also an estrangement from self through the normalized measurement of self and other, is itself parsed by the big Other.

[310] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, tr. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), I.4.27.
[311] Ibid.
[312] Ibid.

Dasein is in thrall to *Das Man*, that "one" who is a representative of the "they." *Das Man* is no one in particular but everyone at once as an imposed singularity with nothing singular about it. A lengthy citation is here warranted:

> This Being-with-one-another dissolves one's own Dasein completely into the kind of Being of 'the Others,' in such a way, indeed, that the Others, as distinguishable and explicit, vanish more and more. In this inconspicuousness and unascertainability, the real dictatorship of the 'they' is unfolded. We take pleasure and enjoy ourselves as *they* [*man*] take pleasure; we read, see, and judge about literature and art as *they* see and judge; likewise we shrink back from the 'great mass' as *they* shrink back; we find 'shocking' what *they* find shocking. The 'they,' which is nothing definite, and which all are, though not as the sum, prescribes the kind of Being of everydayness.[313]

There is a hegemony of Others which at the same time occludes particular others "as distinguishable and explicit," for what Heidegger describes here is not the dominion of Others (plural) but the reign of the Other, which, as a fallen emergent, runs roughshod over the particulars on which it depends. This reign, in Lacanian terms, forms the basis of my subjectivity. But there is something in Heidegger, with his phenomenological concentration on conscious experience, which does not simply resolve into the Lacanian framework. In Lacan, the Other resides in the unconscious, and consciousness is only viable insofar as it bypasses the ego and seconds the motion of the indwelling sway of the Other. But in Heidegger, there is a notion of the Other as a part of conscious life. What we have is an adult version of the mirror stage: *Das Man* as the introjected imago. An egoic identification with the approximated incarnation of the Other thereby parallels what happens in the unconscious. The ego is maturely formed in accordance with the imaginary anthropic instance of the symbolic standard.

Furthermore, the Lacanian conception of the Other of the unconscious cannot completely account for cultural and subjective persistence. The unconscious is a dynamic and unruly locus in which phonemes and signifiers are readily displaced from their introjected and culturally reflecting

[313] Ibid.

syntagmatic positions. The play of signs in the unconscious is heightened by the coursing of the libido. Symbolic forms and social facts are thereby transmogrified as they move through the churning depths in which they are housed in the subject. The Other of the unconscious is therefore incapable on its own of reproducing symbolic conformity. There must also be a more static basis for the continuity of cultural forms and castrated subjects. This is none other than *Das Man*, the imaginary ideal of symbolic subjectivity which the ego is always assimilating.

One other problem with Heidegger is that he assumes a monolithic cultural totality. But we primarily engage the social through the mediation of micro-symbolics. And every micro-symbolic has a constitutive exteriority, which insofar as the latter is constitutive, cannot be unequivocally exterior. It is not that we accommodate ourselves to the "they" or the "one"; we align our subjectivities to the unitary approximation of the "we/us," which can only exist in contradistinction to, and therefore in dependence upon, the "they/them." And a significant element of the captivating allure of the homogenized instance of the we/us is that it is definitively not the stereotype of they/them. The affection reserved for the others who are never wholly other because of their alignment with the we/us is concomitant with the violent rejection of the they/them. I am attracted to the imaginary model of the we/us ideal in large part because of its divergence from the abject approximation of the they/them. My attraction to the instance of the insider is coterminous with my repulsion from the insider's two-dimensional portrayal of the outsider. This dynamic has taken on a particularly pernicious form in the West, and in its Manichean sociopolitical manifestation in the contemporary United States, it is destroying a whole society.

It is important to emphasize that in micro-symoblics the affection reserved for the likeminded insider can be coterminous with the hatred of the other. But is the former really love or is it not an affectivity that must fall short of love because its primary locus is the imaginary type of *Das Man* and the fetishized belief structure attached to it and not the other as other? Is it not more

likely to confront the other as other and thereby love her as a neighbor who is as oneself when one ventures outside the supportive confines of the group? Walter Kaufmann, in the introduction to his English translation to Buber's *I and Thou*, describes the Us-Them dynamic as a salient instance of the I-It pseudo-relationship: "Righteousness, intelligence, integrity, humanity, and victory are the prerogatives of Us, while wickedness, stupidity, hypocrisy, brutality, and ultimate defeat belong to Them."[314] I have argued in my exposition of Lèvi-Strauss that there is no such thing as an I-It dynamic, for the "I" that treats another as an "It" becomes itself another "It" in the always ricocheting process of objectification. It is likewise with the Us-Them dynamic: the instance of the "Them" is an "It," but so is the particular member of "Us." Not only does a member of "Us" fail to be an "I" because of his or her truncated relationality with the external other, but also because of her very affect-laden and reciprocal connection to other members of the in-group. I do not relate to another member of the in-group primarily on the basis of her irreducible and glorious complexity but first and foremost insofar as she approximates the homogenized instance of *Das Man*.

These brilliant existentialist critics of the social are of course putting into philosophical terms some of the basic tenets of Romanticism. The latter was in many ways a reaction against a homogenizing and encroaching modernity. But is it simply the case that leveling homogeneity is on the side of modern civilization and the assertive particularity of the Romantic or existentialist is diametrically resistant and unequivocally other? For Foucault, the individual as we know it is the effect of modern forces. In *Discipline and Punish*, the same power that Romantics and existentialists saw as a menace that the single individual must escape is for Foucault the source of the subject's individuality. The disciplines through which we have been formed are not simply homogenizing; rather, they assign specificity to the body in the very process of exercising a generic and normalizing

[314] Walter Kaufmann, "I and You: A Prologue," in Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, tr. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970), 13-14.

regime. The individual is coterminous with the carefully manufactured docile body "that may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved."[315] "The individual is no doubt the fictitious atom of an 'ideological' representation of society; but he is also a reality fabricated by this specific technology of power that I have called 'discipline.'"[316] The kernel of the Romantic and existentialist revolt is partially borrowed from that which these movements resist.

On the other hand, Foucault's omission of a discussion of Romantic individualism is glaring. The question is, what is the relationship between the disciplinary production of subjective singularity and the Romantic and existentialist assertion of it? For Isaiah Berlin, the peak of Romanticism was during the last third of the eighteenth century and the first quarter of the nineteenth.[317] Interestingly, this is the same epoch as the rise and permeation of what Foucault calls disciplinary power. There must be a relationship between the two, and it is likely that part of what Romanticism was reacting against was the disciplinary formation of the subject. However, the reaction was a bit one-sided in that societal power was, for the Romantics (and the later existentialists), almost always represented as infringing on the uniqueness of the person. These profound movements thus failed to grasp the great extent to which power is anthropically specifying even in its totalization. Thus, Romantics and existentialists also failed to see that what they asserted as unequivocal subjective divergence greatly partook of what it rejected. We have a classic case of that perennial form of resistance that, in its presumed diametrical opposition, is also reinscription. Therefore, though the virtue of nature was frequently extolled by Romantics, usually, in its unencumbered rawness, it remained on an unreachable horizon. While I second the Romantic and existentialist naming of the evils of societal power, I contend that individualism is one of those evils. I also embrace the quest for the Real (named in Romanticism as "nature") and the significant degree of subjective divergence and

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[315] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 2nd ed., tr. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1991), 136.
[316] Ibid., 194.
[317] Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism*, ed. Henry Hardy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 9.

assertion required to pursue it, but I also recognize that the illusion of the separate self must be dispelled if the Real is to be realized.

Conclusion

Judith Butler helps to make the connection between individual identity and the propagation of symbolic power. Since the symbolic order is supervenient, it can only perpetuate itself in its present forms through subjects' performance of acts that accord with its imposed strictures. I contend that the wayward cultural order persists largely through the ruse of identity, in which that behavior and speech whose provenance is for the most part in the Other are taken to be revelatory of a personal core. For Judith Butler, "[A]cts, gestures, and desires produce the effect of an inner core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal the organizing principle of identity as cause."[318] Building on the Foucauldian conception of a pervasive power that precedes and produces subjectivity and inflecting it with psychoanalytically-informed nuances regarding the construction of gender, Butler recognizes gender identity primarily as the false attribution of a personal and essentialized provenance to acts that are actually rooted in a coercive corporeal inscription to which the unwitting subject conforms. Similarly, I am trying to argue that identity itself masquerades as the sole source of speech and behavior whose prime mover is the indwelling Other.

Central to Butler's understanding of performativity is repetition: it is the recurrence of the performance of gendered behavior that conveys the appearance of an issuance from an essential core, yet she brackets a domain that is necessary for comprehending how this return of the same takes place. She is so committed to the superficiality of performance that she indeed misses

[318] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, (New York: Routledge, 1990), 185.

something: in Kierkegaardian terms, she neglects inwardness. Nevertheless, contra Kierkegaard, delving deep within is not a failsafe means of rising above the crowd; the crowd already inhabits our depths as the Other. I contend that the masquerade of identity, while necessarily inscribed on the surface, is also markedly internal; we also play the part of the persistent and generative person for ourselves. Butler claims to attempt to "invert the inner/outer distinction."[319] In the process, interiority becomes a realm of illusion. To be sure, the superficial is involved in the creation of this fiction, but it is inside where the ghost of an unseen gendered essence is projected. Thus, by a kind of attunement to the actuality of corporeal conformity, we can recognize the core of misunderstanding. In the process Butler both denigrates interiority and lets it off the hook.

The misconception of identity is paradoxically a deeply personal matter and must involve much that does not reduce to socially visible performance. The recurrence of the performance issues from deep within; it is an effect of the machine-like repetitiveness of the signifying chains that inhabit the unconscious and the ego's quest for diachronic unity. Yet this internality is funded by externality. What could be more indicative of a core identity than the auto-proximity of self to self in "hearing" oneself think and the deep sense of inwardly generated motivation in feeling the movements of desire? Yet for Lacan both these seemingly unimpeachably personal experiences are greatly indebted to forces that enter the subject from the outside.

The cultural production of identity causes us to see each other as independent, self-motivated agents. Our inherited forms of discretion and judgment predispose us to project and accept discreteness and diachronic self-identicality. We thereby confer identities on each other and accept egoic self-conceptions that preclude recognition of the deeply internalized, hegemonic sway of the Other even as the ignorance and misrecognition which our egos engender foster submission to that unwittingly adopted and potently animating cultural power. Furthermore, the stasis of the

[319] Ibid., 189.

ego conspires with the insistent recurrence of indwelling signifying chains to produce more of the same on both the personal and superveniently collective levels. Thus, to will to be the self that one imagines oneself to have been for one's lifetime is to be in Kierkegaardian despair, regardless of one's affective experience.[320]

We operate as apparently self-same creatures with expansive but centripetal attachments, reiterative memories that bind, resumé highlights that instill pride, and sins and secrets that summon shame. And we have been conditioned to see all these things as consequent to and revelatory of a perduring, essential, and productive core. In actuality, however, our inwardness is replete with a discontinuity-conferring alterity: the ego is an other, and the other Other reigns in the unconscious. Hence the necessity of overcoming the grip of selfishness: the "self" that is sought, protected, and aggrandized is both an agent abetting the growth of the cancerous cultural matrix and a faux form constituted mostly by that which cannot pertain to a self at all. One must lose one's self in order to find "it," for the self with which one has come to identify is both not really what it is believed to be and the emergent symbolic order's chief vehicle for its own propagation and expansion, which, in the terms of this work, is fallenness. Thus, the principle of *anatman*, "no self," as it will be unfolded in the subsequent chapters, is central to this project. If I can die to my identity, then I will no longer automatically *identify with* the contents of consciousness. Rather, I will be able to operate from that Real space of *Sunyata* (emptiness) which is not simply subsequent to the Other or caught up in the ego. Yet I can never be completely free, for my unconscious must remain subjected.

To be sure, identity is not merely evil. The self, while a fiction, is a serviceable construct needed to get one started in life, and, false as the discursive garb of the assertion may be, it may be

[320] For Kierkegaard, the despair takes a feminine form of not willing to be the self which one is and the masculine form of willing to be a self which one is not. I would argue that even in the feminine form there is a false self. See Soren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (ed. and trans.) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 49-74.

crucial to employ the notion of identity to emphasize the haecceitic worth of the oppressed person when intervening on her behalf and helping her to strengthen that self which, to be sure, must one day be discarded. The solution is not to do away with identity altogether but rather, to attribute it pragmatically and to reach a point where one transcends the imposition of personal definitions and, as the koān says, seeks the face one had before one's parents were born.

Thus, as we will see in the work of Masao Abe and D.T. Suzuki, overcoming the fiction of self and self-realization are coterminous moments. The subject who breaks free from her captivity to an imaginarily and symbolically imposed ontical universe is paradoxically a new being. Such new beings will both know the restorative power of the radically empty Real and, in ceasing to see their thoughts and deeds as indicative of an antecedently generative essence, will be in a position to more easily detach from much of the internal productions of the Other and the ego and adopt divergent forms of being and acting that issue form a harmony with the Real. This liberated behavior, if multiplied, will produce new forms of relationality and thereby alter the constitution of the supervening symbolic order. But the results will be limited if spiritual emancipation is not conjoined with a rational, political, and practical commitment to confront structural injustice.

I therefore want to venture beyond Zen and insist that the enlightened subject must understand her transformation as liberation from the internalization of fallen cultural power and thereby recognize that the personal pursuit of spiritual restoration and the public commitment to address structural injustices are necessarily conjoined endeavors. With the ontological and practical fruits of spiritual awakening, paired with this novel understanding of spiritual formation as necessarily imbricated with the overcoming of structural evils, these subjects will be inspired to work for radical cultural change and will be able to pursue justice efficaciously and with integrity. They will have overcome much of the culturally conferred dysfunction occupying their internality and

therefore will not sabotage their discursive, institutional, and practical efforts to resist oppression with a subjectivity in which the vice grip of fallenness has not been dealt with.

Chapter 3: A Paradoxical Presencing: The Timely Timelessness of the Koān

It has been said that time is of the essence. Perhaps, but much of the temporal component of experience may in fact be conferred by that which is accidental. As Elizabeth Freeman pointed out, the forces of what Lacan would call the symbolic order strongly condition how we experience time; our temporal horizons are chrononormatively configured. Freeman defines chrononormativity as "the use of time to organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity."[321] It plays an important role in cultivating the coherence of collectives and inciting the subjects who constitute them to yield outputs that redound to corporate benefit. In other words, chrononormativity serves the diachronic purposefulness of superorganismic, emergent superjects, the minded micro-symbolic orders which supervene and act downwardly upon us all. Chrononormativity makes the operations of those organized collectivities that we inhabit (even as they inhabit us) seem natural. It thereby is an important part of what makes the symbolic order and its imaginary accomplice, which negate the Real, seem to be the principal realities. Chronormativity lends a rhythm to the choreographed movements of bodies within institutional constructs that in turn constitutes the continuity and potency of the emergent superject which is the choreographer. My suspicion is that there is a pervasive and standard form of chrononormativity based on that on which all forms of societal power rely: speech, writing, and the production and dissemination of knowledge. I contend that the Western rationalist is strongly attached to successions of signifiers and those signifieds that loom, congeal, and evanesce. This fosters a captivity to a linguistically formed temporality marked by the egoic expectation of and identification with the signified. The futurism of the anticipation of meaning coincides with shouldering of the nine-to-five onus while looking forward to the income and status to come. The Zen presence which meditation on the koān can yield provides a way to

[321] Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 3.

detach from a semiotically rooted and capitalistically coincidental diachronicity which hastens towards a future present that cannot arrive while preserving and aggrandizing the fallen structures in which we live and move and have our alienated being.

Egoic delusion is most pronounced in the field of cognition, for the ego does not simply identify with the signified; it also attributes to itself creative provenance with respect to the "truth" of the word and, oblivious of its debt to the Other, comes to define itself in terms of this misguided (sense of the production of) sense. The primordial misrecognition of the inverted mirror image as the self is multiplied ad infinitum in the ego's mistaken assumption of ownership of thought. The fiction of cogito ergo sum betrays captivity to the illusion of an auto-affectionate presence to self and meaning which is also the auto-proximity to self as the source of meaning. The Western subject mistakenly believes himself or herself to be a creator through the medium of the word but in doing so is caught up in the infinite, alienating project, begun in the mirror phase, of projection, (mis)identification, and introjection. And all of this occurs within the ambit of a symbolic apparatus which incessantly produces a syntagmatically configured temporal trajectory which not only forestalls the to-come but also hurries past the subjectively concealed glory of That which is already here.

The Zen kōan is constructed to disrupt the subject's relationship to the formal progression of thought and deliver an alter-temporal, transrational, and transpersonal mode of being. Meditation on the kōan is then a strategy to achieve a certain kind of presence that is so radically different from egoic subjectivity that it can hardly be described. Zen phenomenality is, from the perspective of us who are not enlightened, unforeseeable and incapable of grammatical or syntagmatic capture. And yet it is definitively a kind of presence. As D. T. Suzuki writes of the experience of enlightenment,

"You are the absolute present. You are the Here-Now."[322] Masao Abe concurs: "Ultimate Reality is not something far away, over there. It is right here, right now. *Everything starts from the here and now*."[323] Yet after Derrida, can a Western scholar justifiably follow them in being so affirmative of a certain kind of presence? I want to argue that such an endorsement is possible. To be sure, the Zen affirmation of presence is, like the hyperessentiality of negative theology and Husserl's pure now, something that is perhaps susceptible to deconstruction. Yet I see no reason to have to commit to Derrida's narrow strictures absolutely. Indeed, to do so would actually diverge from his always qualifying example. Moreover, I am comfortable endorsing that which is in certain respects logocentric, but I must remind the reader that insofar as Zen presence is logocentric, it also entails detaching from virtually all that we Westerners have traditionally associated with the logos. Moreover, in Zen, transcendence is itself transcended. First one detaches from form to realize Emptiness, but then one recognizes that form is Emptiness and Emptiness is form. Furthermore, realizing Zen presence is coterminous with recognizing the *pratitya-samutpada*, the dependent origination of all things, and insofar as one tastes this relationality, one's presence is inextricable from and constituted by all that is absent. Absence informs and inhabits Zen presence.

A Lacanian Interruption

One dimension of logocentrism is the idolization of speech, of the sense of gaining access to pure meaning through speech. But meaning in the form of the signified is not available through the whole continuity of listening to speech. The signifieds only seem to line up behind signifiers at certain junctures in the syntagmatic sequence, or what Lacan calls the *points de capiton*: "It was in reference to this that I fabricated the image, borrowed from the upholsterer's craft, of the quilting

[322] D. T. Suzuki, "What Is the I?" in *The Buddha Eye*, ed. Frederick Franck (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2004), 21-37, 36.
[323] Masao Abe, *Zen and Comparative Studies*, ed. Steven Heine (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997), 61.

point. There does have to be some point, effectively, at which the fabric of one becomes attached to the fabric of the other, so that we know where we stand, at least with respect to the possible limits of sliding. There are quilting points, then, but they leave some elasticity in the links between the two terms."[324] Like two pieces of upholstery fabric that are only conjoined at certain points, signifiers and signfieds, whose conjunction depends on the relationship of multiple signifiers to each other, only link up at intermittent intervals of speech (and even then, not in an absolutely definitive fashion). Therefore, that aspect of logocentrism which is predicated on the subject's access to the signified entails a neglect of all those presents which do not deliver the signifieds to the listener.

To put this differently, the experience of listening to speech or reading is diachronically and retroactively emergent. As Michael Polanyi writes,

> It includes five levels, namely the production (1) of voice[325], (2) of words, (3) of sentences, (4) of style, and (5) of literary composition. Each of these levels is subject to its own laws, as prescribed (1) by phonetics, (2) by lexicography, (3) by grammar, (4) by stylistics, and (5) by literary criticism. These levels form a hierarchy of comprehensive entities, for the principles of each level operate under the control of the next higher level.[326]

We could add the phrase and the clause between words and sentences. And we should replace the term "hierarchy" with what Ken Wilber calls a nested holarchy; we are not dealing with domination but concentrically expanding, relational wholes. But notice how Polanyi's analysis accords with Lacan's and even makes the latter's opaque and somewhat limited metaphor, with an atomistic focus on particular signifiers and signifieds, more lucid. But I do want to retain Lacan's emphasis of particular junctures in a sentence or discourse where signification is grasped more firmly. To combine the insights of Lacan and Polanyi, we can say that meaning is not given at once but is punctuatedly cumulative, so the sense of accessing the sense of speech (or writing) does not happen

[324] Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book V: Formations of the Unconscious*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, tr. Russell Grigg (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 1998), 7.
[325] This is of course logocentric, and this logic just as readily applies to reading.
[326] Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 35-36.

all at once. Conjoined sounds become words, strings of words become phrases, phrases make up clauses, clauses constitute sentences, etc. And the meaning of each unit is only given retroactively upon its completion. As Hegel wrote, "The owl of Minerva takes its flight only when the shades of night are gathering."[327] We can only wisely understand an epoch through the holistic retrospection that its closure provides, just as we do not fully grasp the sense of the sentence until we read or hear the whole of it. In the West, this diachronically expansive but still intermittent grasp of meaning, which can never be truly final, became encoded vertically as a hierarchy of writing, speech, the signified, and the transcendental signified, with the immanently elusive (because nonexistent) absolute posited as the ground of a secure referentiality of the word to the pure idea/thing in itself (which is also fallacious).

And since speech involves the anticipation of meaning before the quilting point arrives, there is also a problematic futurism built into human temporality. Lacan has identified the fundamental verbal tense of our subjectivity as the future perfect: we are perpetually oriented to what will have been the case. As Callum Neill writes, "The logic here is that in the production of any utterance, prior to the production of each signifier which would retrospectively be understood to have comprised that utterance, it is obviously uncertain what is going to be said."[328] And because the *points de capiton* never nail down meaning in a finally definitive fashion and each sentence engenders more questions, there is always an element of future orientation in speech and in we who have been constituted through the movements of speech. Furthermore, this linguistic process parallels the movement of desire, which is always aiming for what it cannot reach and must content itself with intermittent pleasures that never fully satisfy but simply engender more craving and more dukkha.

[327] G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, tr. S.W. Dyde (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2005), xxi.
[328] Lee Edelman, *No Future* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 32.

The future perfect. Heaven is in the future, and it will be perfect. A classless society is coming, and it will be perfect. The future perfect can sanction or engender a present hell. And the havoc-wreaking Western conception of progress, exacerbated in modernity by a technologistic enframing (Heidegger), the originally Protestant and now pervasive transference of the signification of righteousness to socioeconomic and professional status (Weber), insatiable and conspicuous consumption, and the forward-reaching, secular temporalization of an ultimacy that was once projected vertically toward a transcendent and static divinity suggest that presentism may not be the chief form of the Western subject's distortion of the temporal. Even in this assessment, though, I am not necessarily diverging from Derrida, who understood nostalgia and teleology as forms of presentism. Still, I am more strongly calling attention to the problematics of a futurism as that which does not sufficiently recognize the importance of presence; we are syntagmatically and libidinously constituted to reach for a future that can never fully arrive and desperately need to be interrupted.

Lee Edelman, who similarly to me uses the radical Lacan to resist the conservative Lacan, has pointed to the problematic figuration of what he calls "reproductive futurism," the employment of the heteronormatively engendered Child to galvanize the sort of progress that must, in the end, because of its motivating principle, conform to the present and the past. Edelman is particularly subversive in that he discerns oppressiveness in the use of a trope generally believed to be unimpeachably innocent, "the Child." "That Child," he writes, "remains the perpetual horizon of every acknowledged politics, the fantasmatic beneficiary of every political intervention."[329] This is a bit over an overstatement, yet Edelman's claim does help to illustrate a broad futurism that does not have to utterly reduce to the glorification of heteronormative reproduction. The Child, like the goals of Westerners in general, is eminently futural and is destined to grow into the horizon of our present projections, and there is something incontestable about a political intervention discursively

[329] Ibid., 3.

committed to it. For Edelman, though, this language also inscribes the commitment to reproduce the exclusive, heteronormative symbolic order as it is. The particular policy may result in a modicum of good, but the effort will be substantially wedded to the propagation of that familiality which in Lacanian terms is the basis of the cultural order. The Child is born of a temporal projectivity that is engendered by a commitment to extend an established syntagmatic succession.

In light of Edelman's work, the nostalgia of Burkeans, neocons, Trumpians, and evangelicals is not entirely separable from certain liberal forms of the movement toward just novelty which insidiously employ figures, like "the Child," that are ensconced in symbolic fixity. But conservatism is, in another sense, its own animal and illustrates why the West's fallen temporality includes not just distortions of the present and future, but also a disordered hankering for the past. Paradoxically, though, those who make much of yesterday do so through a commitment to tomorrow which can never replicate what has been and most likely only selectively continues certain strands of the present, which, upon their arrival, are necessarily differently iterated strands at that. Rightists situate themselves at the *point de capiton* and fixate on the recollection that is required for comprehension. But they want what they can't have, the simultaneity of the signifier and the signified, and they therefore emphasize the literality of the past in the hope of retaining the lost signifier and marrying it to present meaning. Conservatism is also an adherence to the big Other, that supervening, historically accreted moral presence, often misidentified as God, which conspires with the little other, the ego, to hold subjectivity captive and preserve the static continuity of the herd which constitutes its base. But this also means that conservatism must ceaselessly turn its gaze away from its historical authorities and transform its nostalgia for the once-present into a futilely recuperative, futuristic ideal, as it must adhere to the movements of that forward-focused desire which is funded and relied upon by the big Other.

Our Western sense of time is thus completely out of joint. We need a remedy that attacks the problem, which is the subject's relationship to syntagmatic sequences of signifiers, at the root. The Western train of thought has gone off the rails and needs to be radically disrupted. The solution must confront a rationalistic Western relationship to meaning and truth. This relationship is marked by an absorption in the expectation of the arrival of the signified and a subservience to the big Other (the symbolic order) and the little other (the ego). What is needed is that paradoxical formulation in which *points de capiton* clash and logocentric meaning and the ego constituted by identification with it are seen to be impossible. We need the kōan and Real presence.

The kōan is kin to what Kierkegaard calls a "sign of contradiction."[330] Such a sign is a syntagm with no obvious meaning that is nevertheless profoundly meaningful. It also contains that which stops syntagmatic time and draws attention to itself. As Chesterton wrote, a paradox is "truth standing on her head to get attention." Yet I question whether Kierkegaard's paradox, Jesus Christ the God-man, is sufficiently fresh and divergent to generate the subjective novelty towards which he strove. And if the point, as he rightly saw it, is to move beyond the understanding, can a Christian really do so through an adherence to that soteriological discursivity that is embedded in his or her understanding? Does it not make sense for someone in my position to retain the radical existence qualification inscribed in the command to lose one's life in order to find it but to recognize that much of the subjectifying religiosity surrounding the exhortation has constituted the life that must be lost? And, therefore, does it not also make sense to seek a paradox with different content, but one whose content is not absolutized (for absolutization is objectification, and objectification hardens the ego and precludes newness of life) but is only a vehicle for realizing a realm beyond all form? Such is the kōan.

[330] Soren Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, tr. and ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 125.

Kierkegaard said that the sign of contradiction is "a something else that stands in contrast to what one immediately is."[331] For the Zen student, then, in order to grasp what this something else behind the kōan is, his or her chrononormatively configured self as it immediately has been must go through a travail whereby it is transcended. But what has been taken to be the immediacy of what one and the world have been has, since the culturally accommodating adjustment of castration, always been mediated by symbolic delay, figuration, and occlusion. Therefore, an immediate access to the Real is only possible through a crucifixion of the faux immediacy induced by the ego and the signifier, which have always been concealing their conspiratorial, insidiously projective influence even as they have veiled that which they have transmogrified into a plurality of present-at-hand beings standing out against a neglected interstitiality. The meditation on the kōan, then, is a strategy for uprooting self and world and uncovering the pluralistically unified field behind and within them. This utterly deracinating process brings about success through the experience of thoroughgoing failure of the cognitive and voluntary resources on which the subject has relied and which have formed both her false self and her simulacric world.

Two hands clap and there is a sound. What is the sound of one hand? What is your original face before you were born? When the many are reduced to one, to what is the one reduced? The kōan accords with the rules of grammar and syntax but takes an unexpected turn. The *points de capiton* do not build on each other to accumulate and deliver a readily cognizable signified sense. Furthermore, the signifieds of the kōan cannot be anchored referentially. One of the most seductive fictions of language is the apparent connection of the signified to the Real. The kōan, then, disrupts both the mistaken alignment of language with the Real and the mistaken identity of the "I" that assumes a place in language. In the process, symbolic temporality is interrupted, opening up a space for accessing That which is beyond time and space but not opposed to them. To the typical mind,

[331] Ibid.

subservient to the code, symbolic temporality, and a neatly dichotomizing egoic rationality, these Zen riddles are nonsense. But to the adept they are gateways to a different world. Not a heaven above or an ever-after elsewhere but something much more like a hidden kingdom of peace and new life that is within and at hand. Meditation on the kōan is for those who have chosen a narrow path and are intent on finding the pearl of *Prajñā* (transcendent wisdom), thereby ending the linguistico-libidinous quest for substitute objects that never suffice. The kōan is for those who are willing to crucify all conception, including conception of self, on an altar of Emptiness and marry a decentered presence to the actuality of the im/possible.

The kōan is the product of that no-mind which is the Buddha mind, and the aim of meditation upon the kōan is to realize in oneself the consciousness that engendered the riddle: "The idea is to unfold the Zen psychology in the mind of the uninitiated, and to reproduce the state of consciousness, of which these statements are the expression. That is to say, when the kōans are understood the master's state of mind is understood, which is satori and without which Zen is a sealed book."[332] The kōan comes from the deep inner resources of a mind that has transcended the alienating ego and the seemingly ineluctable precedence of the Other and its signifiers. It therefore defies the logic of the code and egoic rationalism and can only be comprehended if the student also delves into that same profound, trans-thetic noesis.

Meditation on the kōan induces a limit situation in which the resources of egoic rationality are shown to be inadequate and the practitioner must die to the false, dichotomizing self and embrace another way of knowing and being. As Masao Abe writes, it is "designed to drive a Zen student into a mental corner, to break through the wall of the human psyche, and to open up an entirely new spiritual dimension beyond analytic or dualistic thinking."[333] The kōan's purpose is thus

[332] D.T. Suzuki, *Zen Buddhism*, ed. William Barrett (NY: Doubleday, 1956), 160.
[333] Ibid., 159

to induce a time-bending failure so severe that only the most gloriously unanticipated form of success can follow. Only a brand-new self and a radically novel world can emerge in its wake. As Nietzsche recognized, every creator is also a destroyer, and so the enlightenment-engendering kōan becomes a guillotine that decapitates the false self and a conflagration that incinerates all the latter's trappings: it aims "to destroy the root of life" in order to usher in new life, "to make the calculating mind die" and uncover an intelligence that transcends calculation, "to root out the entire mind that has been at work since eternity" and deliver a new mind that is the gateway to what is truly eternal, and "to go beyond the limits of intellection" to a form of consciousness which funds all intellectual brilliance but is repressed by the castrated accession to discursive formality and its attendant societal powers.[334] The kōan pushes the practitioner, who "[uses] up all the psychic powers at [his or her] command,"[335] to utter exhaustion. It goads him or her beyond the limits of consciousness itself and into the repressed Real which, when realized, becomes consciousness's eccentric center. It brings about that "psychological *impasse*" which is the "necessary antecedent of satori."[336] Meditation on the kōan leads to a crucifixion that engenders a resurrected life.

"If you want to get at the unadulterated truth of egolessness, you must once for all let go your hold and fall over the precipice, when you will rise again newly awakened and in full possession of the four virtues of eternity, bliss, freedom, and purity, which belong to the real ego."[337] An inducement to give up control completely. There is the letting go of another which can be followed by a despair that clings more tightly to an internalized semblance of the departed. There is the letting go of a vice through which I can deludingly convince myself that I have become righteous. There is the letting go of possessions which can easily engender an image of self as magnanimous or pious

[334] Ibid., 164
[335] Ibid., 164-165
[336] Ibid., 162
[337] Ibid., 175

which itself becomes a more insidiously intractable form of attachment than the material things were. There is the letting go of the world through which my ego is aggrandized and stands out over against the world. There is even the knight of infinite resignation who seemingly lets go of everything but clings to letting go itself and fails to realize both the transcendent other side and the goodness of temporality relativized. Then there is the letting go of myself, of that fundamental prehension born of the flimsily foundational introjection of an image and the misrecognizing cathexis and identification of "my" convictions as definitive of a self and a world as they truly are. There is the letting go and then the plunge … into the watery depths from which I am reborn.

The kōan, then, provokes a failure so extreme and thoroughgoing that the only possible other side is radically other and alter-temporal. But Zen is not the only tradition to recognize the benefits of the subject's confrontation with its own incapacity. It is important to remember that the end-of-the-rope impasse towards which the spiritual practice of meditation upon the kōan tends can also be presented by life itself. Failure does not have to be manufactured. The queer theorist Jack Halberstam, author of *The Queer Art of Failure*, which, along with Freeman's *Time Binds* and Edelman's *No Future*, is one of the leading monographs in queer counter-normativity, speaks of the unpremeditated encounter of failure in glowing terms: "[F]ailure allows us to escape the punishing norms that discipline behavior and manage human development with the goal of delivering us from unruly childhoods to orderly and predictable adulthoods." The powers that be use the carrot of success to form docile bodies that deprive us of a presubjectified openness to vitality and the sort of unpredictable future that Derrida would call messianic. Halberstam also writes that "[f]ailure preserves some of the wondrous anarchy of childhood and disturbs the supposedly clean boundaries between adults and children, winners and losers." There is a nostalgia in Halberstam for the Eden of childhood. Adulthood oppresses through the imposition of a hegemonic order and clear-cut, dichotomous divisions, two of the foremost of which are winners/losers and adults/children. The

successful tend to be those who lose themselves by finding themselves in the gratification of a status carved out by an alienating regime, but for Halberstam, while losers fail to accord with symbolic standards of acceptability, they nonetheless might realize something that cultural accommodation precludes, namely the possibility to be more like a spontaneous child, to whom the kingdom of Sunyata belongs.

Two of the most insightful spiritual teachers of our time, Eckhart Tolle, who does not identify with a specific tradition but has been most deeply shaped by Zen, and Richard Rohr, a Franciscan monk, have also spoken of failure, loss, and surrender as segues to a radical form of "success" that cannot logically follow from the prefab sequence of signifiers and event-less events unfolding in accordance with symbolic predestining. As Tolle writes,

> There are many accounts of people who experienced that emerging new dimension of consciousness as a result of tragic loss at some point in their lives. Some lost all of their possessions, others their children or spouse, their social position, reputation, or physical abilities. In some cases, through disaster or war, they lost all of these simultaneously and found themselves with 'nothing.' We may call this a limit-situation. Whatever they had identified with, whatever gave them their sense of self, had been taken away. Then suddenly and inexplicably, the anguish or intense fear they initially felt gave way to a sacred sense of Presence, a deep peace and serenity and complete freedom from fear … It is indeed a peace that doesn't seem to make sense, and the people who experienced it asked themselves: In this face of *this*, how can it be that I feel such peace?[338]

The answer for Tolle is obvious if you understand the mechanics of the peace-precluding ego, which operates through the fiction of identification. These extreme situations forcibly detach the subject not simply from the external things, persons, and circumstances to which it has clung but also from the very ego which is constituted by identification with these forms. We have seen in Lacan how the ego is formed by the (mis)identification of an image with the self. The imaginariness of this introjection renders it insufficient and in need of ceaseless *supplementation* by subsequent (mis)identifications. But a great impasse presented either by life itself or a spiritual practice can cut

[338] Eckhart Tolle, *A New Earth* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 46-47.

off the subject from a future-focused temporality that is fixated on seeking a self through the psychic incorporation of attachments. And when the cleavage is complete, all that is left is the irenic nakedness of an essence-less essentiality that needs no adornment.

Richard Rohr eschews traditional theologies of the atonement but points to the centrality of the sign of Jonah: "[W]e must go inside *the* belly of the whale for a while,"[339] for "true life comes *only* through journeys of death and rebirth."[340] The belly of the whale is a fitting metaphor for Zen transformation. The practitioner, like Jonah, must come to realize the futility of egoic willing and thinking figured in the avoidance of Ninevah and the symbolically conferred caricature of the cultural other. The kōan, though, in contrast to Jonah's plunge, is a voluntary leap into the sea. And the Zen student comes to taste the insufficiency of his or her superficially and terrestrially adjusted resources. Being swallowed by the big fish is the encounter with the repressed Real of the unconscious, and the ego-digesting, Empty Presence of the fish's belly strips the practitioner of attachment to form even as it becomes the source of a radically new form of existence in which the Presencing of Kairos supplants the fleeing haste of Chronos. The failure and the descent, then, are necessary conditions for the ascent and transformed temporality of the emptied and renewed being, figured in the story of Jonah by his alignment with a divinely inspired vocation and a previously unforeseeable present and future.

The linguistic dynamics of the kōan accord with this jarring movement from loss and failure to peace and clarity. The kōan is an instance of heteroglossia, that speech with alien elements which reflects an alternative modality of encountering reality. As Bakhtin writes, language carries with it "specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words, specific world

[339] Richard Rohr, *Everything Belongs* (NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2019) , 44
[340] Ibid., 178.

views, each characterized by its own objects, meanings and values."[341] The kōan, then, is a message from and provocation to a certain subjective mode of encountering the world. Yet the horizon that it indirectly translates and engenders is denuded of attachment to "objects, meanings, and values." The standard mind, beholden to a certain *Weltenschaung*, obscures Sunyata and the ubiquitous Buddha nature even as it projects cathected "objects, meanings, and values" into its fallen phenomenality. But because the kōan emerges from a mind unfettered by a clinging to these typical trappings of subjectivity, it cannot simply coincide with the "logic" of a mind incapable of grasping the coincidence of opposites. The kōan is nonsensical to the fallen, dualistic subject because it emanates from a noesis whose forms of sensibility are formless and non-discriminating. It is the ultimate form of heteroglossia, testifying not simply to cultural heterogeneity but to a radically divergent, transcultural form of existence that is somehow also primary.

As I have noted, the kōan exercise disrupts the linguistically and chrononormatively instilled psychotemporality of the subject by having her meditate on a statement in which there is a disruption of the expected continuity in successive *points de capiton.* It thereby impugns the fundamental form of subjectification and delivers the subject from the temporalization ingrained by inhabiting the symbolic order. The syntagmatic, paradigmatic, and grammatical structure of language is conferred by what Lacan calls the code. Describing how the demand is articulated, he writes, "At this level we find the fact that all satisfaction of demand, to the extent that it depends on the Other, will hinge on what happens here, in this to-and-fro between message and code, code and message, which enables the Other to authenticate my message in the code."[342] The code is that dimension of the Other which confers discursive form on what is otherwise an inarticulable need. The code is what transforms biological impulse into the linguistically structured demand, even as it provides the

[341] Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, tr. Caryl Emerson (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 291.
[342] Lacan, *Formations of the Unconscious*, 138.

interlocutor with the cognitive basis for reception and affirmation of the message. And though the code is primarily that dimension of the Other which provides linguistic order, it is also imbricated with all forms of societal normality. Therefore, to prioritize a locution that conflicts with the code is in fact an act of radical subversion. In statements that accord with the code, *points de capiton* align and work conjunctively to build meaning in accordance with the normalization and temporality of the symbolic order. In the kōan, however, there is grammatical and syntactical coherence but the signifieds can never simply line up behind the signifiers in a fashion that engenders obvious meaning. The code is partially followed yet fundamentally disavowed, and the symbolic order's charade of aligning with the Real is unveiled. Therefore, the discursive modality which is the primary mechanism for the subject's introjection of cultural forms is shown to be deeply fallible, the ego which weds itself to signifieds is left without ground, and the chrononormativity instilled by the accumulation of meaning through syntagmatic succession is paused. One becomes a luddite with respect to the internalized symbolic machine and its mechanical timing. And the result is indescribable.

From the Zen perspective the typical subject's temporality is marred by an objectifying and occluding mental screen. As Masao Abe writes, "In Buddhism our ordinary conception of time is regarded as a conceptual attachment."[343] I have argued that our experience of meeting up with signifieds through the syntagmatic sequence strongly conditions our sense of time and that the kōan disrupts this linguistico-temporal subjectification and delivers a radically different form of presence. We might add that the ontification of the signifier also contributes to our relationship to time. As Lacan writes, "It is the world of words that creates the world of things – things which at first run together in the *hic et nunc* of the all in the process of becoming – by giving its concrete being to their

[343] Suzuki, *Zen Buddhism*, 165.

essence, and its ubiquity to what has always been."[344] The sense of a world populated with separable things, then, is largely an effect of symbolic production. Words create things, which are otherwise part of an interconnected flux of becoming. And time is inextricable from the interdependence of all things. As Abe writes, "Time is thus understood in Buddhism always to be inseparable from things as ever-changing."[345] Time, then, as a result of linguistic conditioning, becomes another casualty of the signifier, objectified and lost simultaneously, for real time is inextricable from the relational dynamism which signifiers obscure. The Zen practice of meditation on the kōan breaks through the conceptual shield which blocks the experience of real time to engender an immersion in an immanent processual network, even as it delivers a depth that transcends the space-time continuum while not being strictly external to it.

Concomitant with objectification is attachment. The mind clings to that which it objectifies, even as the ontic ego is ceaselessly replenished through this process of projective reification and grasping. As Lacan writes, "[Analysis] has taught us that the ego is never just the subject, that it is essentially a relation to the other, that it finds its point of departure and its fulcrum in the other. All the objects are considered from the standpoint of the ego."[346] The ego and the object are reciprocally constitutive, and because both are used to give the subject a sense of identity, they are sources of deluding attachment. Foremost among the subjectively formed and clung to objects are hardened versions of their past, present, and future. For Masao Abe, this is the source of samsaric time: "Regarding time, people discriminate past, present, and future, and substantiate them in their fixed form through attachment. In attaching name and form discriminated of the phenomenal world they are involved in transmigration without realizing ultimate reality."[347] Objectification and

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[344] Lacan, *Ecrits*, tr. Bruce Fink (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1999), 228-229.
[345] Suzuki, *Zen Buddhism*, 164.
[346] Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book 2: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis*, tr. Sylvana Tomaselli (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1988), 177
[347] Suzuki, *Zen Buddhism*, 165

attachment coalesce to plunge the subject into a fictional temporality that precludes access to what is ultimately Real. And doubtlessly the syntagmatic sequence, with the retention of past signifiers, the expectation of the *point de capiton*, and the arrival of the signifieds, plays an important part in the obscuring of the Real through an imposed and cathected temporal substantiality. The kōan, by disrupting the continuity of a statement's consecutive quilting points, disrupts the egoic attachment to the objectified pasts, presents, and futures that are mediated by the signified.

Zen's remedy for our temporal fallenness is both to affirm Real becoming and to connect with That which transcends the space-time continuum altogether. Though Abe and Suzuki don't always succeed in affirming the particularities of the former dimension, such a dual affirmation is, in my estimation, possible because the transcendent realm of Sunyata is not held to be utterly external but is, like the Cusanic infinite, a nondualistic boundlessness that is both transcendent and immanent.

Describing the necessity of merging with the flow of time and life, Abe uses the analogy of swimming in a river. The temptation is "to reify or substantialize both the swimming self and the flow of the river as if they were two different entities" and thereby forfeit "the quality of living reality." Rather, the swimmer must "[seize] all – self, swimming, and the river – together at the same time" so all merge into a unity and one comes to see that the river is bottomless and therefore cannot be made into a thing.[348] Doubtlessly the reifying sequences of discourse, which fix things in their places and divide subject from object, can readily masquerade as real temporality. The kōan, then, disrupts this faux flow, leaving space for the subject to merge with the bottomless river.

The notion of a bottomless river points even beyond the flux itself to the realm of nirvana which transcends becoming, though not exclusively so. As Abe writes, "one goes down or

[348] Ibid., 177

transdescends into the bottomless depth of the transtemporal, eternal dimension."[349] The profound portal to nirvana opens with the transcendence of the ego and the internalized dualistic and temporalizing fictions of the symbolic order.

At the heart of the ego's preoccupation with self-maintenance and the binary illogic that inhabits minds and thereby propagates our fallen cultural orders and their limiting syntagmatic chonologic is the inescapable dichotomy of life and death. The overcoming of the false self and the shedding of dualistic and chrononormative shackles hinges in large part on the recognition of the mutual imbrication and constant occurrence of life and death. "According to Buddhism, we are not moving from life to death, but in the process of living-dying. This must be clearly realized."[350] One comes to see life and death not as opposed, as if death is merely the end a span of living. Rather, in every instant, life and death are conjoined. One is living and dying constantly, and seeing this fosters a radically open temporality and a recognition of one's deep connection to the Real network of Sunyata that links all impermanent things. With the recognition of this truth, one is able to transcend both life and death and taste the groundless ground of the All, even as one realizes true presence.

The mode of presence Derrida critiques, on the other hand, is usually one conceived as exclusively vital, and writing, which can operate apart from my conscious supervision and which maintains a fixity that precludes humanistically organismic modulation, has been, throughout the history of Western metaphysics, consistently aligned with death. Yet Derrida troubled this foundational dichotomy through a rigorously immanent problematization. In Zen there is a concurrence with Derrida in the recognition of the need to bring death into the domain of presence, but there is also a dimension of profundity and eternity in Zen that Derrida, committed as he was to surface play and a certain form of rationalism, never allowed for. I would also argue that this

[349] Ibid., 167
[350] Ibid., 166

immanently transcendent Zen realization, in addition to including life-death, also embraces presence-absence. To realize the depths of Sunyata is to connect with all "things," including God. As Suzuki wrote, Sunyata is "deep enough to include even God."[351] In the experience of nirvana, does one connect to something like a universal sinthome through which God and all things are linked? Regardless, this connection does not deliver full presence, both because everything is spectrally emptied of being and because the overwhelming majority of the "others" which one joins obliquely through a sense of vast interdependency are not immediately discernable; they are only present hauntologically, not ontologically. Beneath life-death and presence-absence is a bottomless depth that opens into eternity and embraces all things through a transcendence that includes and joins.

Christianity also involves the subject connecting to eternity but has tended to see this linkage as guaranteeing a blissful postmortem personhood. Unfortunately, this promise, which appeals to the ego, has ironically tended to preclude the existential connection to the eternal, which can only be realized through ego death.[352] We should recognize the historical forces that produced this misidentification. Basically, the Hellenic conception of immortality intersected with Jewish theodicy to produce the conception of a general resurrection of the dead with a final judgment separating the righteous from the unrighteous. The notion of immortality provided certain ancient Jewish thinkers with a way of reconciling a strong notion of divine sovereignty and justice with the fact that many of the presumably elect were not faring so well temporally: things were going to be put to rights after death, which would reward the righteous, punish the unrighteous, and show God to be ultimately

[351] Ibid., 64

[352] John Cobb has contrasted the substantialist and intensified subjectivity of Christians with the emptied self of Buddhism (See, for example, "Chapter 13: The Perfection of Love," in *Christ in a Pluralistic Age* [Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1999], 203-220). Yet in doing so he universalizes a contemporary, mainline, and accomodationistic form of religiosity and neglects the salient kenotic strands in ancient, monastic, mystical, pietistic, Quaker, and even certain Reformed forms of Christian subjectivity. Still, I am arguing, that Christian self-emptying has often been tainted by the promise of infinite personal blessing.

sovereign and just. And doubtlessly the way this was worked out was inflected with that vengeful *ressentiment* which Nietzsche has pointed to. Christianity inherited this form of theodicy and its attendant dysfunctional psychology, sharply emphasizing the resurrection of the dead and the final judgment. In Zen, though, we have an affirmation of the eternal without the trap of infinite personhood and the violent, infinite bifurcation. There is therefore a spiritual option for us beyond the false dichotomy of heaven or materialism.

On the other hand, there is also a way in which Zen thought is muddled by its experience of the eternal, and this is especially the case in its understanding of time. Zen thinkers have allowed the experience of transcending time and realizing nirvana to obscure their understanding of how the temporality of the immanent space-time continuum operates. According to Abe, "From this depth of eternity one can grasp or embrace the entire process of living-dying without beginning and without end and thus can reverse the process. … The unidirectionality of time is thus overcome and the reversibility of time is realized from this bottomless depth of eternity."[353] The reversibility of time? What could this possibly mean? While the conception of transcendence as not unequivocally removed from immanence is rich and helpful, there still needs to be a distinction between the eternal and the temporal. If Christianity has made the mistake of applying infinity to personal postmortem persistence, Buddhism has erred in allowing the realization of nirvana to corrupt its understanding of time. If time is seen to be reversible, how can one invest in the realm of becoming apart from that form of commitment that yields enlightenment? The Bodhisattva ideal provides an extraverted missiology that helpfully balances Buddhist introversion, but it tends to be strictly focused on helping others awaken spiritually and thus still neglects the vast majority of the domain of historically informed change. In a sense, we have in Buddhism something like conservative evangelicals' neglect of social justice. In both cases, there is such a strong soteriological focus and a

[353] Masao Abe, *Zen and Comparative Studies*, ed. Steven Heine (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997), 167.

concomitant unremitting denigration of unregenerate or unenlightened subjectivities. Consequently, in these traditions, working for forms of justice that do not directly engender salvation or enlightenment come to be seen as a rearranging of deck chairs on the Titanic. In the Zen case, this neglect is rooted in a dichotomy between the enlightened and unenlightened that belies claims to be utterly nondualistic.

But there are resources within Zen that can help to correct this problem. Foremost among them is Masao Abe's verbal conception of Sunyata: Emptiness not primarily as a state or condition but as the dynamic process of emptying which even applies to nirvana itself. As Abe writes, "In nirvana one may be liberated from the dualities of birth and death, right and wrong, good and evil, etc. But even then one is not liberated from a higher-level duality, i.e., the duality of samsara and nirvana, or the duality of the secular and the sacred."[354] This is a nondualistic emptying that is so rigorous that even the transcendent realm is transcended. Like Kierkegaard's knight of faith, the Zen practitioner does not simply give up the finite for the infinite but is able to have the infinite and finite simultaneously. Hence the saying "samsara-as-it-is is nirvana." The problem was not with the world or samsara or finitude after all but with a symbolically and imaginarily conferred distortion of the perceptual apparatus.

Yet the vast majority of Zen Buddhists, like Kierkegaard himself, for that matter, have failed to invest in projects to rectify and enhance the finite and the temporal in ways that are commensurate with this ostensive embrace of samsara. Perhaps part of the problem is an acceptance of samsara-as-it-is, which may evince a spiritual complacency that lacks the zeal to seek corporate justice. There may also be a failure to recognize that the world contains a whole range of problems whose solutions must entail an array of approaches that cannot be limited to overtly spiritual intervention. Furthermore, in this project I have been consistently striving to demonstrate that the

[354] Ibid., 57

ills that Zen addresses, while residing in the subject, are primarily the result of introjection. As I have said, fallenness is structural before it is personal. Zen scholars have for the most part failed to engage the post-Hegelian Continental philosophy, sociology, and anthropology that would make this evident to them. Perhaps if they can come to see that they are dealing with issues that are not simply personal, they will be more motivated and committed to remedying the manifestations of dysfunction that reside in culture at large. There is still time for change, but there is also great urgency in the present.

Chapter 4: Adieu to Two: The Pervasive Problem of Dualism and the Zen Solution

We have seen how the ego is an alterity and an introjection, as well as how the influence of this foreign occupier has been exacerbated by modern and capitalistic forces. We then examined the great extent to which culture inhabits subjectivity. The ego identifies with much of this downward causality as its own, thereby causing the subject to have a mistaken sense of self and attempt to preserve as its own the fallenness of societal influence. Our immersion and deep inhabitation by language also causes us to operate according to syntagmatically configured chrononormative strictures. The koān interrupts this temporality and with it the whole inertia of cultural reproduction, even as it allows the subject to access That which is beyond time altogether. In this chapter, we will explore how Zen spirituality can be a means of transcending the dualistic fictions according to which our cultures and subjectivities are structured.

Day and night. Self and other. Male and female. Right and left. Good and evil. The thinker and her thoughts. The doer and his deeds. It can seem as if basic dichotomies are woven into the structure of reality, constituting the rudiments of the orders of the world. Yet Zen Buddhism insists that the ostensible binary givenness of things is not rooted in what is ultimately Real.

Dualism and Lacan

Yet where do we situate Lacan in terms of the critique of dualism? The answer is, as one might expect, a bit complicated. On the one hand, his thought is in many respects in accordance with heteropatriarchal normality: the ideal subject positions for him are the heterosexual, cis-gendered male who seems to have the phallus and the heterosexual cis-gendered female who seems to be the phallus, and he consistently pathologizes those who deviate from this fixity. On the other hand, this fixity isn't exactly fixed. The two ideal endpoints are only realized through an arduous

process and are far from inevitable. In this regard, he follows Freud. But in the latter, the centrality of the penis tethers the somewhat open-ended Oedipal complex to biology. In Lacan, however, the penis is largely supplanted by the phallus, which is a non-biological signifier. Thus, there is a stronger sense in which the ordeal by which we become gendered and sexuated is dependent on forces that are the effect of human construction. Therefore, while Lacan's thought largely accords with inherited dualisms regarding gender and sexual orientation, his work also opened doors for those intent on deconstructing dichotomous absoluteness in these domains.

It should be noted that Freud's discovery of the unconscious, to which Lacan is of course deeply indebted, is a milestone in the disruption of some of the foremost of our inherited dualisms. The binarism of the Western mind has been predicated on a conception of the subject as autonomous and self-present, someone who through the immediate proximity to a personal will and an idiomatic cognition stands erect and agential over against the world and alterity and bears the power to direct his own existence. Since Freud, however, this picture, while not being unequivocally displaced, has been much more difficult to maintain. However, in Freud there is still a dichotomy between the irrationality of the unconscious id, a "a chaos, a cauldron full of seething excitations"[355] and a more sober and reasonable, if significantly enfeebled, ego. In Lacan, however, the basic structures of rationality come from the internalization of the symbolic order and are housed in the subject's unconscious. And the ego, imaginary and distorting through and through, becomes the chief impediment to the movement of rational intersubjectivity, which begins with what I would call the emergent rationality of the symbolic order and is mediated by subject's the unconscious.

Lacan's anthropology thus extends and complicates Freud's project by further problematizing consciousness and injecting order into the unconscious. The former's conception of

[355] Sigmund Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis,* tr. and ed. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1965), 91.

the formation of the ego particularly disrupts the inherited notion that the individual is a point of origination and self-direction. For Lacan, the ego which is at the root of our sense of self is itself the result of the introjection of an image. The ego is not a self; it is an other. And its whole modus operandi is predicated on a mistaken assumption of self-identity and agency. The binary of self and other, which we take to be unimpeachably fundamental and which Zen insists is false, is predicated on a universal and fundamental error that makes of alterity a self. Humanity is dogged by an idiocy that is the result of the identification with what is mistakenly taken to be idiomatic but is actually the root of alienation and evil.

Lacan disrupts the self-other binary in another fashion as well. In what appears to be a conversation between two, there is always for him a third term, the big Other, which both inhabits and envelops the speakers. Lacan writes of a "structure that says that once there is a speaking subject there is no longer any question of simply reducing the question of the subject's relations, insofar as he speaks, to an other, but that there is always a third party, the big Other, who is constitutive of the subject's position, insofar as he speaks, which is also to say, insofar as you analyze him."[356] The symbolic environment and the internalization of its structures in an unconscious ordered like a language, both of which, I have argued, are part of the organization of an emergent and downwardly causal mind, constitute the third party on which all speakers rely. We ought to recall here the work of Ludwik Fleck, who said that "[c]ognition is the most socially-conditioned activity of man, and knowledge is the paramount social creation."[357] For Fleck, as for Lacan, there is always a third party in every conversation, which is the unseen and unacknowledged source of cognitive structuration which Fleck calls the thought collective.

If we define 'thought collective' as *a community of persons mutually exchanging ideas or maintaining*

[356] Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book V: Formations of the Unconscious*, tr. Russell Grigg, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2017), 163-164.
[357] Ludwik Fleck, *Genesis and Development of a Scientific Fact*, tr. Fred Bradley and Thaddeus J. Trenn, ed. Thaddeus J. Trenn and Robert K. Merton (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1935, 1979), 42

> *intellectual interaction, we will find by implication that it also provides the special 'carrier' for the historical development of any field of though, as well as for the given stock of knowledge and level of culture. This we have designated thought style.*[358]

The Other is a carrier for the stock of knowledge and patterns and styles of cognition of a collective. "Wherever two or more are gathered in my name (which is the Name-of-the-Father, the culturally founding, generically patriarchal appellation) I am there in your midst," says the Other. "And you see only two? Sacrilege."

Moreover, the Lacanian division of the subject into Real, symbolic, and imaginary dimensions militates against the simple anthropic unity which is often assumed when dualistic cognition is employed. Yet, until his later work, Lacan frequently neglected the Real altogether, even as he asserted the symbolic priority with respect to the imaginary. Broadly speaking, then, the tripartite subject is nondualistic, but the sidelining of the Real and the symbolic trumping of the imaginary make for a de facto dualism. Nevertheless, there is still insight in these tendencies, for they mirror the distortion of the alienated subject. The key to overcoming dualism personally must be a reconciliation with the Real, or in Buddhist terms, a peaceful cohabitation in and with *tathātā*, the suchness of things.

Yet in certain respects, Lacan is thoroughly dualistic, and the dichotomy of the signifier over the signified, in collusion with an unconscious (where the signifier rules) outmuscling consciousness (where the signified makes its evanescent, derivative, and tenuous appearance) and a cultural order colonizing and transmogrifying natural processes, lies at the center of the uneven bifurcation that runs through his thought. Obviously, the move to place the signifier – with a big "S" – over the signified – with a little "s" – is an inversion of the Saussurian sign. Saussure, by accenting the arbitrariness of the signifier and the differential relationships of a given signifier to other signifiers as the prime source of that word's meaning, certainly contributed to the decentering of the knowing

[358] Ibid., 39.

Western subject as master of things through the representational power of the word. However, he curiously allowed the signified or mental concept to have pride of place over the signifier or sound-image[359] and thereby retained a significant element of the pretentious Western conception of the subject's immediate access to truth. And he thereby privileged consciousness in a way that Lacan could not tolerate. The latter followed Freud in accenting the profound prevenience of the unconscious and dethroning the deludingly arrogant, egoically conscious tip of the iceberg but, unlike Freud, insisted that the unconscious is structured like a language. Wrote Lacan, "The unconscious is neither the primordial nor the instinctual, and what it knows of the elemental is no more than the elements of the signifier,"[360] thereby injecting proto-meaning and order into a domain that for Freud tended to be lawlessly libidinous. And of course, since a sine qua non of the signified is its "appearance" in consciousness, the language of the unconscious is constituted by just signifiers and phonemes - with their Byzantine interconnections - and no signifieds at all. Therefore, for Lacan, the priority of the signifier with respect to the signified is in many respects coterminous with a structuralism-infused iteration of the Freudian insistence on the potent precedence of the unconscious, which, due to the infusion, is proximally coextensive with forceful (but not unequivocally deterministic) cultural priority.

In fact, in the essay "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious," Lacan actually misrepresents Saussure as placing the signifier above the signified, even as he still contests this misrepresentation. In Saussure's illustration of the sign, a picture of a tree sits atop the signifier *arbor*, the conceptual mental image, the signified, being located above the sound-image.[361] Lacan, on the other hand, presents the reader instead with two identical doors, one marked "men," the other

[359] See, for example, Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, tr. Wade Baskin, ed. Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye (New York: Forgotten Books, 2012), 66-67.
[360] Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits*, tr. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), 434.
[361] Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, 67.

"women." The signifieds, the doors, are exactly the same. Meaning here is created solely by the signifiers and the relationship between them. The signified is not a pure image of which the signifier is only a support but a kind of mirage created by the effects of determining, syntagmatically arranged signifiers. For Lacan, then, signifiers and signifieds form "two networks of non-overlapping relations"[362] or "distinct orders initially separated by a barrier resisting signification."[363] Where signification emerges, it does so holistically through the effect of signifiers generating but remaining quite distinct from signifieds. "The signifier alone guarantees the theoretical coherence of the whole as a whole."[364] And the whole evinces its sense through "an incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier,"[365] which generatively dominates.

But is this model all there is to the production of linguistic meaning? Above I noted how for Durkheim the emergence of mind from the brain and its downward action upon its neurological components is analogous to the emergence of a social whole from groups of subjects and the former's downwardly causal influence upon persons. But I also noted that the cognition that Durkhiem takes to be chiefly the product of the emergent mind is from a Lacanian perspective largely the effect of the social whole or the symbolic order wielding its influence through the linguistic reservoir of the unconscious and the determining signifier. Nevertheless, I insisted that there must be an emergent intelligence to the mind apart from the influence of language that is still a key element funding cognition.

Noam Chomsky has pointed to a natural power in the human mind which, from his perspective, is largely responsible for language acquisition and use: "A person who knows a language has acquired that knowledge because he approached the learning experience with a very explicit and

[362] Lacan, *Ecrits*, 345.
[363] Ibid., 415.
[364] Ibid., 345.
[365] Ibid., 419.

detailed schematism that tells him what kind of language it is that he is being exposed to."[366] Chomsky views the young child's exposure to language as quite piecemeal and therefore insufficient to explain the extraordinary linguistic capacities which the child develops at an astonishingly rapid pace. There must be a natural endowment, he reasons, which contributes a great deal to language acquisition and use. This giftedness is the focus of what he terms "general grammar," the targeting of neurological linguistic capacities and forms by seeking a natural and universal root behind a common structural core of what misleadingly manifests as languages' diversity and incommensurability.

But Chomsky tends to make his case by minimizing the signifier and ignoring the symbolic order. He exaggerates the disorganized and fragmentary nature of the young child's exposure to language, calling attention to a Lessing-esque ditch which he leaps across with humanistic religiosity: "between the really quite small quantity of data, small and rather degenerate in quality, that's presented to the child and the very highly articulated, highly systematic, profoundly organized resulting knowledge that he somehow derives from these data."[367] He thereby places organization almost entirely on this side of the individual's natural capacities and neglects what in Lacanian terms is the highly complex and organized condition of the symbolic order and the meaning-making metonymy and metaphoricity of signifiers. Surely the highly evolved human brain must contribute far more to speech than Lacan acknowledges, but such speech only happens through an acculturating immersion in a highly evolved symbolic system. Moreover, the basic commonalities between diverse languages that Chomsky has unearthed may be attributable more to the tendencies of the signifier and the universally phallocratic character of symbolic orders than to neurological universality. Still, while he exaggerates the contributions of neural givenness, Chomsky's insights, if

[366] Noam Chomsky and Michel Foucault, *The Chomsky-Foucault Debate* (New York: The New Press, 2006), 3-4.
[367] Ibid., 4.

qualified, help to correct Lacanian neglect of natural human endowments and gesture in the direction of that inherent and transcendent intelligence that Zen calls *Prajña*.

Moreover, in Chomsky there is too much assumed complementarity between the natural condition of the human mind and that symbolically inhabited mind that uses language (even as it is used by language). He frequently uses linguistically connected terminology to describe the former: it contains an "innate language" and "instinctive knowledge;"[368] it is the source of "innate organizing principles"[369] which readily cohere with a given grammar, syntax, and lexicon; the language-acquiring toddler "knows vastly more than experience has provided"[370] Consequently, for Chomsky, our use of language becomes utterly natural: "humans are like enough in language capacity so that human language can be regarded as a natural object, and so on."[371] It is as if our minds have been teleologically outfitted for language; this gives us common cause to celebrate our unique position as speaking beings united by a common cognitive nature.

But, as I have argued, following Levi-Strauss but reading him through an Irigarayan and emergentist lens, the violence of the heteropatriarchal institution of exogamy was necessary for that proliferation of symbolic exchange and the consequent emergent societal congealment which must have been a precursor of the officialization and permeation of grammatical and lexical norms.

Do not language and cognition, in our symbolically saturated, simulacric cultures, wield far too much power? Is it not possible that our natural neural endowments are not specially designed for language use (One could veritably write a "political theology" of Chomsky's thought.) but that the precedence and hegemony of the signifier in the subject is indicative of fallenness and that this

[368] Ibid.
[369] Ibid.
[370] Noam Chomsky, *New Horizons in the Study of Language and Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 6. Here the debt to Kant is obvious.
[371] Ibid., 76.

disproportionate symbolic force, while drawing on the natural endowments of the mind, also represses much of its brilliant priority?

I posit that there is a Real intelligence that is relied upon for thought but also neglected and repressed by the disproportionate sway that dualistic, discriminating cognition exercises in human consciousness. In other words, the place that this Real intelligence occupies in the human subject is analogous to the place historically consigned to women by patriarchal societies, slaves by slaveholders, labor by capitalists, colonies by colonial empires, and the natural environment by modern civilization. In each case, the oppressed sector is not simply negated; rather, its energies are siphoned off to fund the center, but a significant remainder is excluded and maimed. Moreover, even in those instances of exclusion in which there seems to be a definitive separation between insider and outsider, the latter's presumed inferiority is used to support by way of contrast the former's taken-for-granted subjective plenitude, which, because it relies on this contradistinction with the other, renders the seemingly external and deplorable ones internally intrinsic and its own ostensive fullness full of holes. As Judith Butler writes,

> [The] exclusionary matrix by which subjects are formed thus requires the simultaneous production of a domain of abject beings, those who are not yet 'subjects,' but who form the constitutive outside to the domain of the subject. The abject designates here precisely those 'unlivable' and 'uninhabitable' zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject, but whose living under the sign of the 'unlivable' is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject. This zone of uninhabitability will constitute the defining limit of the subject's domain; it will constitute that site of dreaded identification against which – and by virtue of which – the domain of the subject will circumscribe its own claim to autonomy and to life. In this sense, then, the subject is constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection, one which produces a constitutive outside to the subject, an abjected outside, which is, after all, 'inside' the subject as its own founding repudiation.[372]

The words "constitute" and "founding" highlight that the status of the privileged subject is not simply given but fundamentally dependent on those whom he or she abjects. Yet the "autonomy"

[372] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 3.

and "life" that the insider claims as a result of this foundational exclusion betray a blissful ignorance about the base provenance of his or her identity. I am arguing that a similar and imbricated repudiation, also grounding what is taken to be a fixed identity, occurs within each subject, with the Real intelligence that is relied upon but excluded becoming, like the abject, simultaneously constitutively internal and marginally external.

Marginality, then, which can be the effect of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural dynamics, is integral to the dominating center yet this constitutive importance is constantly ignored or disavowed even as the benefiting elements operate at the expense of the oppressed. I am insisting that this very structure of domination is ubiquitously personal. It is an inner subjection of the subject in which excessive cognition and dualistically egoic hegemony utilize but repress and oppress the Real. Moreover, this dynamic must be a prime contributor to structural forms of oppression, all of which supervene on the behaviors of persons.

The place of the signifier in the thought of Lacan (which, though tendentious, in part accurately represents the excessive sway of symbolic prevenience) is analogous to the place of the male in traditionally heteropatriarchal societies. The Lacanian signifiers produce meaning through their collective force the way that heteropatriarchal societies were founded and propagated by hommosocial[373] arrangements between men who agreed to exchange their women and construct a symbolic order from which the latter were largely barred. Women would be analogous to Real intelligence, at once relied upon and excluded by discriminating cognition. And Lacan's model of signification as relying almost exclusively on the signifier would be like ancient conceptions of conception, in which everything "genetic" was provided by the male seed and the woman's reproductive apparatus was simply a field in which the seed germinated.

[373] This neologism is Irigaray's.

Zen has a name for this emergent, Real intelligence: *prajñā. Prajñā* is an omniscience that does not know in the ordinary sense. Suzuki writes that it is "not at all discriminating" and yet "functions in every possible mode and is able to discriminate everything; there is nothing it does not know."[374] We might understand this omniscience, however, not so much as knowing everything but as knowing in concert with the All. Given that I am equating *prajñā* with Real intelligence, it is imperative to remember that in the Real, while there is differentiation (Here I diverge from Lacan.), there is no division. So *prajñā*, contra Chomsky's humanistic construction of pre-discursive knowledge, does not belong to the subject (insofar as the latter is understood to be atomic and skin-bound). Rather, it is a cosmic intelligence that the subject taps into, for the mind and nature of the Buddha are ubiquitous. *Prajñā,* though, is not utterly divorced from the limitedly discursive and the truncatingly personal; it is "an omniscience that underlies all our knowledge of particulars"[375] and without which the knowledge of particulars would not be. But its full flowering is precluded by the hegemonic dominion of egoic rationality's limitingly dualistic tendencies, which, to be sure, tend paradoxically to make us unwitting pawns of the downwardly causal and vampirically supervenient cultural order whose discursive power-knowledge is rooted in fundamental dichotomies.

Cognition is quite useful, but it has overstepped its bounds. Let us not forget the lessons of the great pragmatists like Charles Sander Peirce, William James, John Dewey, and Richard Rorty, or the insights of Wittgenstein and those who carried the ordinary language philosophy torch like J.L. Austin. Have not both these camps consistently taught that language is a social phenomenon and that truth is not correspondence to actuality but a compliment we pay to what works *socially* and/or

[374] Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis*,tr. Sylvana Tomaselli (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1988), 34.
[375] Ibid.

practically (Rorty)[376] or an indication of the utility of a move in a *socially constituted* and *publicly inhering* language game (Wittgenstein)? Could this be why Lacan rarely wrote of cognition qua cognition but spilled considerable ink on the topic of speech?

James insisted that truth is primarily functional; a new idea "makes itself true, gets itself classed as true, by the way it works."[377] James consistently tried to show that truth is not something static and merely propositionally corresponding but is inextricably tied to the results that believing it engenders. Truth for him is not simply a property of a statement but what that statement becomes when it is internalized and acted upon. It is in the results that belief produces that truth or falsehood is revealed. I am trying to trouble that egoistic form of cognition that serves no purpose whatsoever other than to propagate the fiction of a perduring essential self. I am trying to problematize a relationship to ideas that is devoid of the practical benefit that makes them true.

Wittgenstein's private language argument impugns such forms of cognition by insisting on the primacy of sociality for even the most seemingly personal language games.[378] How do we learn the word "pain"? Pain is internal, but the signifier "pain" pertains primarily to the expressions of pain which are received and recognized by others. One can claim that "no one else knows this pain" but "this pain" is a conventionally constituted formulation referring to an experience that is shared. One might resolve to try to signify a certain sensation by naming it with an "S" and then inscribing an "S" on the calendar on every day that the sensation occurs. But how would I know that I am always having the same sensation? Such knowledge requires public, symbolic consensus. In Lacanian terms, there is no meaning without a symbolic order. Therefore, there cannot be a private language,

[376] Rorty's redefinition of truth was part of a turn from systematic to edifying philosophy (a turn which he found in the mid-career reorientations of Heidegger, Wittgenstein, and Dewey) and away from a conception of the mind as a mirror and truth as accurate representation.

[377] William James, *Pragmatism* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 1991), 31.

[378] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, tr. G.E.M. Anscombe, P.M.S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 256ff.

and the cognition which constitutes my fragile identity can never simply be about me in my haecceity.

Recall that the ego, while it might roar and intimidate, is a flimsy, insubstantial energy formation which is the result of the introjection of a distorting and derivative image. Because of its tenuousness, alterity, and beholdenness to the imaginary, it must constantly replenish itself. I submit that the ego needs the imaginary signifieds engendered by constant cognition in order to maintain its delusive and alienating sense of self. Descartes' statement that without thinking there would be no proof of being, while depraved, is a penetrating insight into egoic reality. The ego feeds on thought in order to maintain its very Being-less being. Without constant cognition, it just might perish.

Unproductive thought is operating primarily as a performative and a supplement. For Judith Butler, performativity is the discursively reiterative and structurally configured process through which gender identity seems to be an antecedent essence. But the very veiled processual nature of this production, when recognized, shows the appearance of essential givenness to be a sham.[379] I am arguing, as Butler does in certain instances, that this insight can be extended to identity as a whole: the sense of a fixed self behind all thought and action is itself the product of reiterative performativity. And I am insisting that the central component of this performativity is self-referential cognition. This sort of performance, though, is not for another; it occurs within the subject as the self performing for itself. And yet the inner bifurcation that this dynamic evinces, with one aspect of subjectivity performing and another watching, is disavowed in the assumption of egoic unity that is gleaned from the very process, even as this undivided agency is taken to be antecedent to the performance.

[379] They write in *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990) that "acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as cause" (185). I want to follow Butler without the insistence on the superficial, and I want to assert that cognition, though unseen by others, is central to performativity.

The self, which seems to be an ego preceding the cogito, is itself the phantasmatic product of recurrent cogitation. As Bertrand Russell, commenting on the Cartesian epiphany, has written,

> Descartes's indubitable facts are his own thoughts – using 'thought' in the widest possible sense. 'I think' is his ultimate premise. Here the word 'I' is really illegitimate; he ought to state his ultimate premise in the form 'there are thoughts.' The word 'I' is grammatically convenient, but does not describe a datum. When he goes on to say 'I am a *thing* which thinks,' he is already using uncritically the apparatus of categories handed down by scholasticism. He nowhere proves that thoughts need a thinker, nor is there reason to believe this except in a grammatical sense.[380]

There was therefore an element of insight in Descartes' recognition that the occurrence of thought cannot be doubted, but positing a thinker as being ineluctably behind thought was unwarranted. Therefore, it is not a thinking subject that should be the foundation; rather, consciousness itself, necessary for the recognition of cognition, can be a kind of ground, but a groundless ground (*Ungrund*) at that.[381]

Nietzsche, decades before Russell, "was thinking" along the same lines:

> When I analyze the process that is expressed in the sentence, 'I think,' I find a whole series of daring assertions, the argumentative proof of which would be difficult, perhaps

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[380] Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Touchstone, 1945, 1972), 567.

[381] This *Ungrund* is the Godhead, which Meister Eckhart ambiguously speaks of as the sum of the tripersonality of God and as a depth beyond God. He is of course reaching back to Plotinus, for whom the One precedes the Intelligible. Intelligibility is a sine qua non of the Christian God, so … Plotinus' naming of the groundless ground as "the One," is, from our vantage point, a poor decision, but he also declared that this unity was not the same as the number one. He meant to emphasize that in ultimate reality there is no division. And this insistence comes through even in the Lacanian description of a Real without rending. Plotinus writes about the *ungrund*, which in his terms is the One, thus: "The awesome Prior, The Unity, is not a being, for so its unity would be vested in something else: strictly no name is apt to it, but since name it we must there is a certain rough fitness in designating it as unity with the understanding that it is not the unity of some other things" (*The Enneads*, tr. Stephen MacKenna [New York: Penguin Books, 1991], IV.9.5). If the Plotinian One as distinct from the Intellect is at times amalgamated with God and at other times separate from God in Eckhart, Schelling is more clear about the distinction between the Godhead and God. He writes, "We have expressed the Highest elsewhere as pure equivalence (indifference) that is nothing yet everything. It is nothing, just like the pure happiness that does not know itself, like the composed bliss that is entirely self-fulfilled and thinks nothing, like the calm interiority that does not look after itself and does not become aware of its not Being. It is the highest simplicity, not so much God itself, but the Godhead, which is hence, above God, in the way that some of the ancients already spoke of a Super-Godhead [*Übergottheit*]. It is not divine nature or substance, but the devouring ferocity of purity that a person is able to approach only with an equal purity. Since all Being goes up in it as if in flames, it is necessarily unapproachable to anyone still embroiled in Being" (F.W.J. Schelling, *The Ages of the World*, tr. Jason M. Wirth [Albany: SUNY Press, 2000], I.A.2). So Schelling recognized that there is that which is ultimate which is beyond God, which is more simple and therefore utterly unified, and which can be a source of passionless equanimity. This is precisely the Emptiness which the enlightened Zen Buddhist realizes

> impossible: for instance, that it is *I* who think, that there must necessarily be something that thinks, that thinking is an activity and operation on the part of a being who is thought of as a cause, that there is an 'ego,' and finally, that it is already determined what is to be designated by thinking – that I *know* what thinking is.[382]

The thought, for Nietzsche, comes not when "I" will it to but when it wishes. To assume that there is an "I" behind thought, producing thought, is to treat dualistic grammatical construction, in which a subject must precede a predicate, as ultimately real.[383] Subject and then verb. Thought appears. Ergo I, the subject, think this thought. Thus, both Russell and Nietzsche see the surreptitious influence of grammar behind the attribution of a subject behind cognition. We might align this usually unacknowledged grammatical background in which a substantial subject must precede a predicate with Butler's insight that identity, while constructed and subsequent to discursive practices, is generally taken as an a priori given. We have been deeply formed by our linguistic conventions, in which substantives reign supreme and being precedes and produces becoming. In actuality, though, the supposed substantial being of the self is a mirage produced through the aridly reiterative performance of thought.

Much cognition might also be described as the supplementation of a center which is not. Derrida, in *Writing and Difference,* described an intellectual shift that occurred in the latter part of the twentieth century from dualistically positing a fixed origin and center outside of a given structure to recognizing that there is no centrality apart from the differential relationships within the structure itself, and as such, no centrality at all. The center has been believed to authorize the substitution of signs within the structure; it has been understood to provide the framework for play, enabling meaningful activity even as it restricts it. The anthropological version of the center is the self; we might therefore align play with performativity, recognizing that the self is a kind of illusion created

[382] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, tr. Helen Zimmern, ed. Oscar Levy (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1907, 2007), I.16.
[383] Ibid., I.17.

by recurrent performances, or reiterative play, but an illusion that, insofar as it is treated as a fixed and generative essence, still serves to rein in the range of the subject's activity. The self is believed to be, like the Derridean center, a "fundamental immobility and a reassuring certitude, which itself is beyond the reach of play"[384] or performance but which determines the forms that play or performance can take. Nevertheless, it is nothing more than an unwarranted assumption universally held to be fact because of a general cultural imperative, an imperative that impels me to play and perform conformingly and attribute such activity to a precursory identity.

The history of Western thought, for Derrida, is tantamount to a long process of supplementation, using conceptual substitutions to extend and attempt to reach the fundamental ground: "If this is so, the entire history of the concept of structure, before the rupture of which we are speaking, must be thought of as a series of substitutions of center for center, as a linked chain of determinations of the center. Successively, and in a regulated fashion, the center receives different forms or names."[385] Yet the center never was; the substitutions have never been substituting for a center but for other substitutions. "The substitute does not substitute itself for anything which has somehow existed before it," because the center "has never been itself, has always already been exiled form itself into its own substitute."[386] Analogously, I posit that much of the cognition that is self-referential and impractical is being used to supplement a supposed preexistent self when in actuality there is no prior entity; the centered self never has been itself but has always already been exiled in cognitive substitutions which accumulate to engender a phantom that seems substantial and productive.

Zen has consistently troubled the iteratively cognitive grasping that extends the dualistic illusion of a separate, a priori self and the marginalization of *prajñā*. Masao Abe, for example,

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[384] Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, tr. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 279.
[385] Ibid.
[386] Ibid., 280.

furthers Nagarjuna's relentless attack on the subject's overreliance on cognition. For both Zen "thinkers," cognition cannot directly taste what is ultimately real, and the tendency to treat thought as true mires the subject in dualistic fictionality and suffering. *Prapañca*, whose semantic range blends the ideas of cognition and also phenomenality, points to the way, as Lacan saw quite clearly, that language constructs our reality. *Prapañca*'s rich denotative texture highlights the complexity, plurality, and fictionality of language and therefore its estrangement from the Real simplicity of Sunyata.[387] For structuralistically informed thinkers like Lacan, Foucault, and Derrida, linguistic construction tends to be treated as unavoidable. Zen is more confident about the subject's ability to transcend discursive limits. But, as I will argue, enlightenment achieves a conscious emancipation that does not necessarily extend to the totality of the subject.

In a sense, we do have something like a preference for unity with respect to multiplicity in Zen, but we should not be deceived and liken this to the Western dichotomy of the One and the Many. The latter construct has been used perennially as part of a dualistic and hierarchical arrangement to assert the dominion of a unitary being or class of beings over against a presumedly lesser class of beings. This is not at all what is going on in Zen. The latter tradition problematizes the diversity intrinsic to cognition because a multiplicity of signifiers draws the subject into a realm of unreality, entails conflict and division, and is fundamentally rooted in problematic hierarchical dichotomies which both inhere in the discursively generative relationships between key signifiers and in the dualistic sense of separation between the egoically and cognitively ensnared subject and the rest of the cosmos. Zen thus insists that there is an interconnectedness that precedes particularity and that difference can only be affirmed through an extistentiality that perceives an underlying and indwelling unity. Not a One over the rest but something utterly insubstantial in which all "things"

[387] For a discussion of *Prapañca,* see Abe, *Zen and Comparative Studies* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997), 45.

inhere and apart from which there is no knowledge of anything as it actually is. *Prapañca*, which combines notions of unreality, plurality, and cognition, names a prime source of that pervasive modus vivendi in which the subject perpetually experiences a fantastically divided phenomenality that precludes such a primally connected and Real seeing, knowing, and being.

Prapañca is intrinsically related to *vikalpa*, which more strongly emphasizes the dualism and discrimination of cognition.[388] *Vikalpa* connects the dichotomization and judgment inhabiting thought to the subject's attachment to language and perilous belief that its claims are ultimately true and real. Language, dualism, and attachment conspire to mire the subject in a fallen perceptuality in which partisanly embraced hierarchical binaries and libidinally invested judgments form the basic structure of a distorted and seemingly external world. In Abe these claims are simply asserted without substantial support. Nevertheless, there is more insight in these notions than in much ostensibly amply supported scholarship, even as there is much within Western theory that supports these assertions.

The subject is seduced by the emergent signified sense of successions of signifiers into believing that it is the prime producer of that meaning and that what is produced is reflective of a transparent, autonomous agency. This dynamic thereby engenders a cathexis of thought and its constitutive dichotomies as distinctly one's own and therefore the bearers of a truth that, while discursive, is embraced with the viscerality of filial attachment. (Yet, as Lacan insists, our fundamental motivations have always already been cuckolded by the signifier and the cultural order of which the word is a phallically penetrating, reproductive extension.[389]) As in the mirror phase, but in this case with the subject seeing itself more as the progenitor of that which is engendered than as

[388] For a discussion of *vikalpa*, see Abe, *Zen and Comparative Studies*, 45.

[389] As he writes, "even at the most radical level, as soon as you speak to someone, there is an Other, another Other in him, as subject of the code, and that we already find ourselves subject to the dialectic of the cuckoldification of desire" (Jacques Lacan, *Formations of the Unconscious*, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book V,* ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, tr. Russell Grigg [Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2017], 134-135).

identical with the reflecting form, the subject assumes an alienating relationship with an emanation that masquerades as an obvious testimony to selfhood.

As a result, awakening is forestalled as the subject becomes trapped in a dualistically agonistic specular economy and the slave of a futilely recuperative cul-de-sac of repetition. Of course, it is possible for what seems to replicate to engender considerable newness: there are Kierkegaard's repetition forward and Deleuze's repetition as difference. However, in this case, each cognitive form is captive to the inertia of a potento-priority that is both cultural and personal; the libidinal investment of the signified and the concomitant commitment to imaginary egoic continuity, operating in reciprocally constitutive concert with the endurance of cultural formality, preclude anything like a fresh, existential correlate of the Kierkegaardian or Deleuzian movement into unanticipated futurity through the medium of a modicum of sameness. And since linguistic meaning is impossible without disparities and divergences and there is no coherent system and especially no united set of cathected propositions spanning the life or even an hour of the given subject, the latter becomes internally divided, unwarrantedly identified with and invested in a host of relationally incompatible and inwardly deconstructible notions whose weightiness is more personal than logical. Moreover, these thoughts are always in part being used to extend a centered self which cannot *hold* because it is itself only the phantasmatic residue of reiterative cognitive *grasping*. But these things must fall apart for the transrational and transpersonal unity of Emptiness to be found.

The intellect, then, grasps for but can never hold what it is truly seeking. Writes Suzuki, "The intellect wants to see everything physical or psychological analyzed, determined, and defined so that it can place its fingers right on these defined objects and pick them up for demonstration. But it utterly fails when it tries to dispose in this manner of experience that takes place in our inmost being."[390] This predilection for cognitive prehension entails both an objectification of reality and a

[390] Lacan, *The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis*, 24.

duality between the subject and that which is held, both of which remove the subject from what is ultimately Real. For what is really being sought with the reaching mind does not lie in the realm of dichotomizing, ontic distinction and cannot be reached by standard, worldly means. What is being sought is that Emptiness which lies before, beyond, and within all desiring and is at the root of the beingless Being of the subject and the cosmos. To quote Lacan, "Desire is a relation of being to lack. This lack is the lack of being properly speaking. It isn't the lack of this or that, but lack of being whereby the being exists."[391] A void at the root, and yet desire, while in a deep sense longing for this rootedness, seeks objects.

At the intersection of Emptiness and the quest for substitutes is the *objet petit a*, the primordial lost object which is no particular object at all and the instigator of desire, luring it toward replacements that can never fully satisfy. Yet is the *objet petit a* truly primordial? It may be indicative of an original rupture with the Real and therefore in some sense primary. But is it not actually a postlapsarian effect of being barred from the Garden and so not completely indicative of the objectless Emptiness that is Really first? Whereas for Lacan, the *objet* is "the real … that remains, insists, and ex-sists after or despite symbolization,"[392] I am insisting that it is a hybrid that only points to the Real obliquely as That which has been left behind and can only be misrepresented by objects. The *objet*'s no-thing-ness is continuous with the Emptiness from which the subject has existentially (but not ontologically) departed but its generative imbrication with the libidino-linguistic quest for substitute entities makes it imaginarily deceptive.

We live and move and have our substantially alienated being in, with, and as objects: objects as the present beings of the logocentric tradition (Heidegger, Derrida), objects as the phenomenal appearance of ontic separateness which masks an actual interrelatedness (Leibniz, Spinoza, Hegel,

[391] Ibid., 223
[392] Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 83.

Whitehead, de Chardin, Deleuze, Cobb, Keller, Barad, Buddhism, quantum physics), objects as nouns and pronouns, objects as fetishized commodities (Marx), objects of the masterfully detached positivistic gaze, objects as egos (Lacan), objects as capitalistically configured goals, objects as ideal ends used to justify oppressive means, objectives of one-dimensional subjects (Marcuse), objects of sexual desire, the unconscious objective to obtain through the seizure of objects that fullness of jouissance which is always elusive, objectives situated within a technologistic enframing that treats beings as "standing reserve" (Heidegger), and objects that are the human subjects who are pawns of a pervasive, pre-subjective power (Foucault). And all the while we are objectifying part of ourselves by creating an inward subject-object division in that relationship of self to self, in which one is both seer and seen. We are always grasping for objects, not so much with our hands as with our minds. We try to prehend the world objectively in piecemeal ratiocinations through the dualistic, dividing, and distorting projectivity of a grammatically and egoically delimited horizon.

Yet the prime mover according to which we negotiate these objectifying propositions and relationships is the *objet* which is no object at all but is in fact a phantasmatic, misleading subsequence to the primordial Emptiness for which we really yearn in the expansive void of our deep heart's core. And realizing That towards which true yearning points necessarily entails a radical disabusing of "oneself" of the subject-object delusion and concomitantly a crucifixion of the thoroughly attached modality of subjectivity constituted by the cathecting and cogitating creation of objects.

Yet so few possess the wisdom and courage to object to and attempt to rectify the psychic depravity that delivers fallen cultural forms and broken subjectivities. According to Suzuki, "'Those who find Zen foolish are still under the spell of linguistic magic."[393] And irrationally spellbound

[393] D.T. Suzuki, "Self the Unattainable," in *The Buddha Eye*, ed. Frederick Franck (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2004), 3-10, 7.

people consistently assume a clear division between reason and madness and an unequivocal identification with the former, not realizing that the very assumption evinces that denial and dualistic entrapment that are cardinal symptoms of psychological dysfunction. Lacan recognized the enchanting character of the realm of signifiers: he wrote that *les non dupes errent*. Those who are not duped stray and err. To fail to integrate the Name of the Father, to be psychotic, is to avoid being tricked by the symbolic order and therefore to wander aimlessly and miss the mark *markedly*. For Lacan, being hoodwinked by the word is much preferable to being subjected to psychotic error/errancy and lacking the ability to effectively negotiate the enabling strictures of the cultural realm.

But not all who wander are lost. There have been psychically hybrid subjects throughout history, partially castrated and somewhat psychotic. These subversive mimics of the normal have had the ability to be culturally relevant but also drawn on the *Prajña*-provided insight that comes from not being completely duped by the signifier. These loony luminaries have led semi-charmed lives, and not being utterly spellbound by discourse, have had more access to the depths of transrational wisdom and insight. Madness has often conferred that requisite blindness which enables the transcendent vision of the seer. In the arts and literature there are too many examples of this form subjectivity to name, but Van Gogh, Beethoven, Schumann, Blake, Coleridge, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Byron, Woolf, Plath, Hemingway, Artaud, Brian Wilson, and Kurt Cobain come immediately to mind. The psychologist Kay Redfield Jameson, bipolar herself, has done extensive work in documenting and analyzing some of these and a host of other examples. In politics, Abraham Lincoln and Winston Churchill, both of whom have been retroactively diagnosed with bipolar disorder by experts, are salient instances. In the ancient world, the combination of divergent perspicacity and queer eccentricity in Heraclitus, Diogenes, and Jesus points to that form of brilliance conferred in part by an element of psychosis. *Les non dupes errent*. And the errant and erring

Son of Man internalized a radically different form of the Name of the Father, had no place to lay his head, periodically evinced that grandiosity which is a hallmark of psychosis, was an enemy of the guardians of correctness, and was crucified as a threat to the symbolic order.

But Zen offers a way to wake up from the unreality of a hexed habitus and partake of trans-symbolic insight without enduring and inflicting the pain that comes from partial psychosis and while maintaining the practical savvy that castration confers. The spell that initiates the enchantment is the Name of the Father, and the incantation that awakens the dreamer is the koān. To move with symbolic adeptness but fail to know the sound of one hand clapping is to operate with an unsound mind. To quote a line from Pascal, cited by Foucault at the opening of the *History of Madness*, "Men are so necessarily mad, that not being mad would be being mad through another trick that madness played."[394] Perhaps the irrational koān is that other trick madness plays, by which the folly masquerading as rational normalcy is overcome and one can possess the most lucid kind of madness and thereby see with the clarity of Jesus and Lincoln - but without having to suffer so much.

Cognition is not just misleading; it is also so constrained to operate at a shallow level that it inevitably fails to sound those profound inner spaces where satori can be reached. As Abe writes, "[W]e must accept the fact that the intellect has its limitations, and that things or facts belonging to our innermost experience are altogether beyond its domain."[395] To touch what is innermost, "one must shed all the superficialities that have been piled up in one's mind."[396] "Abandon, therefore, this reasoning habit,"[397] wrote Tai-hui, for discursive explanation takes one in the wrong direction. The goal is to realize the Unattainable, and one can only do so by leaving behind the inveterately automatic, cognitive means used to attain mundane ends.

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[394] Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, 414. In Michel Foucault, *History of Madness*, tr. Jonathan Murphy and Jean Khalfa, ed. Jean Khalfa (New York: Routledge, 1972, 2006), xxvii.
[395] Lacan, *The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis*, 24.
[396] Ibid.
[397] D.T. Suzuki, *Zen Buddhism*, ed. William Barrett (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 171.

> The Unattainable, so termed, subsists in its absolute right and must now be taken hold of in a way hitherto unsuspected in our intellectual pursuit of reality. The intellect is to be left aside for a while, in spite of a certain sense of intellectual discomfort, so that we may plunge into that nothingness beyond the intellect, as if into a threatening abyss opening at our feet. The Unattainable is attained as such in its just-so-ness, and the strange thing is that when this takes place the intellectual doubts that made us so uncomfortable are dissolved.[398]

Intellection is what makes that towards which the signifier "Unattainable" obliquely points true to the literality of its label. Thinking constitutes and clings to the specious surface of things and is intrinsically divisive and dualistic. It must be transcended if the subject is to realize the deep realm where zero and infinity coincide[399] and to know what is ultimate in the way that Adam knew Eve. The goal is to depart from the drama of duality and become one with the Buddha nature which subtends, inheres in, and joins all flesh wordlessly and inwardly. Writes Abe, "It is necessary for us to retrogress from attachment to thinking and judgment to the realm of non-discursive intuition. In so doing we face reality prior to language. This is the realm of 'emptiness.'"[400]

Zen is therefore the most consistently apophatic of all spiritual traditions. And this existential *via negativa* is rooted in an uncompromising, essence-less essentialism. What exactly was the satori experience of the Buddha in its naked purity and how is it replicated? According to Suzuki, "The claim of Zen followers that they are transmitting the essence of Buddhism is based on their belief that Zen takes hold of the enlivening spirit of the Buddha, stripped of all its historical and doctrinal garments."[401] And making the radicalism of this essentialism even more explicit, he writes, "To make this point clear and to justify the claim for Zen that it transmits the essence of Buddhism and not its formulated articles of faith as are recorded in letters, it is necessary to strip the spirit of

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[398] Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XI. The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, tr. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1977), 5.

[399] Writes Suzuki, "Experiences at the level of intellection are restrictive and conditioning, but the 'inner' self feels the way God felt when he uttered, 'Let there be light.' This is where zero identifies itself with infinity and infinity with zero – if we recall that both zero and infinity are not negative concepts, but utterly positive" ("Self, the Unattainable," 5-6).

[400] Abe, *Zen and Comparative Studies*, *45*-46

[401] D.T. Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism* (New York: Grove Press, 1949), 54.

Buddhism of all its outer casings and appendages, which, hindering the working of its original life-force, are apt to make us take the unessential for the essential."[402] Zen recognizes the Reality at the heart of satori and, like Lacan, knows that historically constructed symbolic forms preclude access to the empty fullness of the Real. Zen therefore consistently and assiduously aims for That before which words must come up short. In the process, though, it employs verbiage in such a way as to highlight language's limitations and incite the student to overcome an inveterate overreliance on the ego and cognition.

Historically, insofar as Zen embraces discursively transmitted history at all, it takes its cue from the Buddha. Siddhartha Gautama lived in a Hindu context in which there was much rational speculation and elaboration, yet upon his awakening, he consistently eschewed giving direct answers to grandly metaphysical questions. According to Suzuki, "[W]hat the Buddha wished was this self-realization, a personal experience, an actual insight into truth, and not mere discoursing about methods, or playing with concepts. He detested all philosophical reasonings which he called *drishti* or *darsana*, for they would lead him nowhere, bring him no practical result in his spiritual life."[403] Moreover, shortly after his death, rationalizing tendencies developed among many of his followers. "The metaphysician began to assert himself against the simple-hearted devotion of the disciple."[404] Zen sees itself as maintaining a spiritual purity that set the Buddha apart from his contemporaries and was quickly forgotten by many who claimed to follow him.

When Zen first took root in China, it did so by diverging from intellectually based ostensive followers of the Buddha. Suzuki describes the Buddhism that Bodhidharma, the founder of Zen, encountered as a "maze of doctrinal intricacies."[405] Meditation was practiced but was conceptually

[402] Ibid., 41.
[403] Ibid., 61
[404] Ibid., 52.
[405] Ibid., 107.

centered. Chih-I (Chigi, 531-597), one of the founders of the T'ien Tai school and one of the foremost of Buddhist philosophers in China, encouraged his followers to focus on and hone the intellect as a primary form of spiritual practice. But Bodhidharma insisted that his students abandon the conceptual and analytical interpretation of the doctrine of Enlightenment. Zen, then, sees itself as continuing an apophasis that is consistent with both the Buddha's trans-discursive encounter with ultimate reality and his own pedagogical modalities. Furthermore, it recognizes the temptation of rationalism and its tendency to derail the spiritual quest.

Zen apophasis does not reserve a single and singular supreme being as being too gloriously transcendent to be reined in by a name; it insists that all Being, in its kenotically intraconnected condition, is intrinsically trans-discursive. One cannot existentially align with the empty essence of all things through the distorting medium of the signifier. One must instead recognize with Socrates and Nicholas of Cusa that one's learning amounts to ignorance and partake of that prime source of insight which cognition relies on but occludes.

Zen's position is summarized in four statements:

> A special transmission outside the Scriptures;
> No dependence upon words and letters;
> Direct pointing to the core of the person;
> Seeing into one's nature and the attainment of Buddhahood.

A rejection of textuality. But not a prioritization of the self-presence of the speaking subject, for speech is thrown out (in terms of reaching what is ultimate and not unequivocally, to be sure) along with writing and with it the ego that is constituted by its sense of filially productive attachment to the signified. Presence is of course of prime importance, but only insofar as it is self-absent, empty, denuded of a masterful proximity to present-at-hand, ontically isolable beings, and connected to that which yokes the All, the Buddha nature, thereby affirming all which is absent as well. Still, this formulation, and indeed, the heart of Zen, is in certain respects quite logocentric in that there is a

quest for a kind of pure existentiality beyond language. Once again, I must point out that in order to do justice to Zen experience, I must, to a certain extent, affirm this logocentric presence and the capacity of the subject to transcend the priority of the signifier. However, I must add, that this capacity only pertains to consciousness. The subject is too deeply inhabited by the signifier to be consummately free of it.

And with such a (qualified) rejection of discourse, it is also possible to tap into a space which is beyond the power which Foucault has shown to be inextricably bound up with the production and transmission of knowledge. In a certain sense, the genealogical Foucault conceives of power as so extensive that it is impossible to get outside of it, and his voluntaristically post-Nietzshcean potent-ontology precludes liberation. But is it not possible that he discounts the possibility of a more profound ontological space, a more pacific power, and a keener, non-discursive form of insight that are of the Real and not necessarily tied to symbolic forms? This is not to say that a spiritually enlightened person would be unequivocally delivered from the grip of power-knowledge. For insofar as the subject employs language and negotiates the symbolic order, her or his words and deeds become in a certain respect coterminous with the pervasive power that Foucault describes. However, is it not possible that an inner space of detached peace and Real insight could both heal the subject of the damage inflicted by inhabiting a power-laden domain and be a source of subversive but meliorative power, provided it is wedded to a commitment to a justice to come? Lacan and Foucault, indebted as they are to structuralism, assume an ineluctable subsequence of the subject to the signifier. For Foucault, this means that power configurations can be reconfigured but never overcome. Therefore, for Both Lacan and Foucault, to act as a subject is, at least in part, to reproduce the symbolic order.

But Zen insists on the possibility, indeed, the reality, of subjective liberation from the problematic strictures of power-knowledge and therefore, as I am arguing, an interruption of the

chain of inevitable symbolic propagation. At the same time, though, I am insisting that this is not an unequivocal deliverance, as the unconscious is still inhabited by the Other. Therefore, a degree of symbolic propagation cannot be avoided. In emergentist terms, though, it is possible to realize a dimension within that is beyond the reach of the forceful downward causality of the cultural order and therefore to act in a fashion that does not have to accord as extensively with its productive strictures. To channel Judith Butler, this Real inner space can be an ontological and epistemic springboard from which one performs subjectivity in a disruptively divergent fashion.

Despite this radical possibility, though, it is imperative to remember that the experience of enlightenment - as expansive, personally remedying, and potentially subversive as it is - does not entail that the awakened subject can operate within cultural confines as though he or she were completely free of the taint of a ubiquitous, linguistically adhering and inhering oppressiveness. And, frankly, some of this sullying must be embraced. We must distinguish between personal liberation and that civic engagement which entails compromise and the embrace of an element of messiness. Enlightenment overcomes much subjective evil but, while culture supervenes upon subjects, personal transformation is insufficient to alter it thoroughly. As John Cobb has noted, Zen has generally failed to pair transcendence of the ego with a commitment to social justice.[406] I would argue that it is incumbent on the awakened person to kenotically compromise her or his placid subjectivity in working for ends that are muddied, complex, collective and always already tainted by an element of discursively conferred unconsciousness.

We should not, though, because of Zen's shortcomings, shirk from its call for radical spiritual renewal. To return to the four foundational statements, let us further investigate what it is that Zen affirms. Something beyond the endless play of signs and other than power-knowledge

[406] Cobb argues in *Christ in a Pluralistic Age* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1999) for a synthesis that combines a Buddhist overcoming of the ego with a Christian commitment to social transformation. I will argue for a version of this in the conclusion.

formations. A shedding of superficialities and an attending to the core of the person. Yet what is this core? It is not an eternal substance ontologically distinct form the body, but it is still a nothing-something that is both more than merely material and continuous with eternity. It is something so deeply and transcendently personal that it impugns the misleading dichotomy of self vs. other. It is something so profoundly and expansively internal that it overcomes the fictive duality of internal vs. external. It is something containing so much Self, in all its resplendent nothingness, that, when it is realized, the self is no more. Buddhahood as a Selfhood that is vastly more than selfhood as it is ordinarily conceived. "The Self" as catachresis. The Self as no self at all.

The Self as the Buddha nature. Now, the Buddha was in a sense a subject who lived long ago. But insofar as Siddhartha Gautama was the Buddha, he was vastly more. He aligned himself with that "nature" which is in me and in all nature, something which I have relied upon but neglected. But insofar as I realize That, I become existentially aligned with my empty essence, the Buddha I have always been, and a queer being who is coterminous with That which is behind and within all that is. A soteriology of abandoning the superficial, consuming self by returning to nature and not abandoning it. And all by transcending the Word, which in the West, whether as Logos, reason, mind, thought, cogito, belief, scripture, creed, doctrine, ideology, philosophy, theology, theory, form, Christ, Geist, culture, structure, signifier, Name of the Father, castration, proposition, symbolic order, language game, paradigm, community, institution, discourse, or sign, has usually been held to be necessarily primary.

Zen insists that there was when the Word was not and that discursive "knowledge" must come up short of the spiritual telos. Paul said that we know in part. Indeed. But if that is the case, how can a proposition given to "knowledge," that Christ died for my sins, be salvific? For if to know is to know only in part, how can partial knowledge be sufficiently accurate to save me? How can any knowledge at all be salvific? Not only because it is partial but also because it is imbricated

with a host of signifiers and discourses and flows of power, indeed with a whole fallen cultural order. But to die in order to live? Amen. Perhaps, though, with different means. And with a discursivity that is self-abnegating and therefore not wholeheartedly embraced.

But what does it mean to know in part and is it possible to see the world more wholly? It means to embrace the whole field of perception without prior to egoistically and symbolically conferred dissection and compartmentalization. To view the whole before the schisms effected by signifiers and imaginary truncation: what a noble aspiration.

Of course, in the typical appropriations of Nietzsche, this is ruled out. We only see things from a perspective that pre-selects and colors what is viewed, thereby occluding or diverging from what a differently conditioned subject would perceive. I want to agree with poststructuralists: as far as discursively configured subjective positions are concerned, there is only bequeathed perspective. But I want to add, following Zen, that there can be a trans-discursive and holistic embrace of the consciously prehended field that is more than perspectival as far as symbolically configured location has been understood. At the same time, this view will still to a certain extent be hemmed in by positionality. While overcoming many of the confines of a culturally conferred horizon, this type of perspective does not transcend spatiotemporal partiality and is therefore still not utterly whole.

Nevertheless, it is possible to see holistically and to speak in and write in a way informed by this phenomenal fusion even if this horizon is not all-inclusive and the signifiers employed to relate this qualifiedly trans-perspectival situatedness are borrowed from a delimiting symbolic context. Poststructuralists fail to realize that a given subject can transcend an acquired perspective as it has been symbolically conferred. To see the whole from one's place is not the same as to know in part in accordance with one's dualistically dissecting discursive conditioning, but this expansive kind of vision is still a kind of knowing in part.

Zen masters, dispossessed possessors of the expansive vision of which I write, assiduously attempt to disrupt the logical commitments of their students, for the predilection for embracing formal arrangements of signifiers engenders a dualistic projectivity that rends the unified phenomenal field, tethers the subject to convention, and precludes full access to that deep source of peace and perspicacity which cognition draws from but represses. Masao Abe writes that verbal answers to the question of what Zen is "tend to be quite abrupt, eccentric, or illogical."[407] And the nonverbal answers can be even more disruptive and perplexing. What is Zen? "One may answer the question by lifting one's finger or pounding on a desk with one's fist or just by maintaining perfect silence. These are non-verbal answers to the question, 'What is Zen?' – the true expression of that which ultimately resides beyond words and intellectual analysis."[408]

The distinguished Zen teacher Ummon (Yun-men) was once asked to give an address. He stepped up to the pulpit and declared, "In the school of Zen no words are needed; what, then is the ultimate essence of Zen teaching?" He thereupon extended both his arms and, without saying anything else, stepped down from the pulpit.[409]

Suzuki recounts the following mondos.

A monk said to a master: "I am told that even when the sky is devoid of clouds it is not the original sky. What is the original sky, O master?"

"It is a fine day today for airing the wheat, young man."

Another time a different disciple asked him, "When you pass away, O master, how should I answer if people come and ask me about the deepest secrets of reality?"

[407] Abe, *Zen and Comparative Studies*, 25
[408] Ibid.
[409] Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism*, 105.

The master summoned his boy attendant and told him to fill a pitcher with water. He then remained silent. Finally, he asked the disciple, "What did you ask me about just now?" The master proceeded to ignore the disciple and leave the room.

There is a movement to transcend the particular, the corporeal, the material, and the temporal, in short, to evade the Real, that is already underway when the signifier appears. A substantival word takes the place of multiple diverging things whose multiplicity is abrogated by the fixed and unitary label. Kierkegaard famously said that when you label me you negate me. We could say the same about labeling anything or anyone. And the relationship of the signifier to a sea of reduced referents is like the relationship of the monarch to his people and the patriarch to his household: the ruler and the father stand both over their underlings kyriarchally and for them metonymically.

It is but one step further from the privileging of the referent-negating signifier to the exaltation of the concept, that broad linguistic genus which rules over other words and propositions that seem to be more tethered to the transient pre-discursive realm and less expansively encompassing. One incremental development further and we have uber-concepts like forms, the One, the Logos, truth, justice, the Good, and God. Thus, two imbricated Platonic hierarchies, the descending scale from philosopher-king to the guardians to the military elite to *hoi polloi* on the one hand, and the chain of being that moves from the Form of the Good to nous to pneuma to the belly on the other hand, are both fundamentally indebted to a linked line of linguistically derived descent whose primacy was unacknowledged: that of uber-concept, standard concept, standard signifier, and material referent. And this is a chain whose implicit embrace must disavow that each higher category is subsequent to and unwarrantedly extrapolated from the one beneath it.

With these constructions came a whole power-knowledge formation constituted by a minority of male elites who had the luxury to spend a lot of time thinking big thoughts and

superciliously distancing themselves from all the slaves, workers, and women who labored to live and therefore were more obviously involved with the flesh and the flux and more noticeably separate from the privilege of conceptual ascendancy and the status of stasis.

Zen takes this inclination to generalize and etherealize through the signifier, so pronounced in the Western academy, and turns it on its head. How does the Zen teacher respond to someone who wants to climb to the summit with words? With a non sequitur that redirects the student to what is more palpable and theoretically negligible. If we Western academics were to adopt this move, we could re*orient* ourselves and begin to recover from the fallenness of our conceptually climbing, hyper-theoretical Occidental proclivities but without abandoning these tendencies altogether.

Moreover, it is impossible for us to conceive of language apart from a symbolic order, which for Lacan always has the character of universality. And beneath this totalizing cultural umbrella, the haecceity of the instance is both subsumed and negated. The human being is such an instance. The Western thinker seeks forms of expression that explain more and more in language that is increasingly Byzantine and theoretical. Thereby he or she might overcome the subjection of which he or she is deeply but inchoately aware: having to second the primary motion of that seemingly universal cultural order. If only he or she can master reality with theoretical conceptuality, an intellectual form of totality and dominance can be achieved to allay the sense of inferiority felt with respect to the overarching and indwelling force of the Other.

The Zen modus operandi of negating the use of concepts to make spiritual progress can be seen as an antidote to the fallenness of Western academia, which, while some extent rooted in the inception of the signifier and the symbolic order, was greatly exacerbated by a fallacious and accelerated Hellenically conceptual extrapolation. We are still, in our unswerving embrace of the hallowed domain of Theory, committed to writing footnotes to Plato, and Zen can help us continue

the radical, counter-traditional work within and against Theory that the likes of Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Lacan, Weber, Heidegger, Saussure, Levi-Strauss, Barthes, Wittgenstein, Kuhn, Peirce, James, Dewey, Rorty, DuBois, West, Whitehead, Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse, Althusser, Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, Irigaray, Kristeva, Butler, Zizek, Agamben, Fanon, Said, Spivak, and Bhabha have begun, but with the potential to be, in a certain sense, more thoroughgoingly radical by adding a Schopenhauerian and personalistic twist and prioritizing non-Western insights. What is the Good? There was much dew on the grass this morning. What is justice? The desk at which I work is wooden and shabby. And yet, if we press further, that is not at all what it is.

Signifiers and especially concepts abstract. The word "abstract" comes from the Latin verb *abstrahere*, a root that highlights the primacy of separation and appropriation in the genealogy of the signifier. *Abstrahere* could mean "to drag away," "to appropriate," "to take away," "to deduct," or "to exclude." In the verb "abstract," whose primary meaning is "to take away, to extract, or remove," there is more overt denotative retention of this Latinate semanticity than there is in the adjective, which means "of a word: denoting an idea, quality, or state rather than a concrete object." How has this idea, quality, or state, been arrived at, though, apart from an appropriation of an ostensive core and a separation from both the variances of particularity and the unity of the Real?

And is not this essentializing violence exactly the opposite process of Zen "instruction," which is always redirecting the disciple away from abstraction and towards concretion? Abstraction is inherently dualistic, effecting a distancing dichotomy between the universal and the particular and between the knower and the known. Zen, however, seeks to know and be so deeply that the separation and twoness of representation is dissolved: "To understand reality one must grasp it in one's own hands, or, better, one must *be* it. Otherwise, as the Buddhist saying goes, we shall be taking the finger for the moon; the finger is the pointer and not the moon itself. Similarly, money is a convenient medium exchanged for real substance, but in a time of crisis we let money go and hold

on to bread. Let us not get confused: language is only the finger, only the money." The finger is as far away from the moon as the signified is from the Real. And money is an abstract signifier whose worth is secondary to the real stuff it can purchase. Zen is about the real stuff, yet it goes so deeply into this stuff that its ostensible stuff-ness is shown to be a phenomenal mirage.

In Zen terms, the concept is a dangerous thing. The word "concept" comes from the Latin term *conceptum*, which meant "that which is conceived; a fetus" and "that which is conceived in the mind; an idea." I posited that the subject becomes ensnared in his or her thinking because he or she mistakenly assumes that he or she has created the emergent sense of the proposition and thereby cultivates a filial attachment to the signified. Does not this Latin term, referring both to what is conceived sexually and what is thought to be conceived noetically, strongly support this contention? Monotheistic theologies have also consistently wedded creation to the mind and speech of God. The generativity of the word, with the word as the effect of mental creativity. The cosmos engendered by a mind. Cosmos as concept. And the concepts we employ as the offspring of autoerotic, self-present mental conception.

For Lacan, however, the concept belongs fundamentally to the Other and the ego that tries to hijack thought is always deluded. Zen has also always intuited that the concept does not belong to the Self; rather, it tends to become an insidiously dangerous source of attachment. Foremost among those potentially ensnaring ideas are the dichotomies which Mary Douglas has shown to be located at the epistemic center of institutions, Levi-Strauss has demonstrated to be the productive basis of mythological and sociological structures, and Nietzsche and Derrida have identified as forming the spinal column of the inflexible skeleton of Western metaphysics. Writes Abe, "To begin with, the very distinction of good and evil is, to Nagarjuna, nothing but a reification or substantialization of a human concept that is devoid of reality. In short, all value judgments are, after all, unreal human

conceptual constructions."[410] But if Nietzsche wanted to shed inherited values to create new ones, Zen wants to transcend dichotomizing discursive morality altogether. And yet, quite paradoxically, the very movement that rejects moral dualism allows the subject to realize a deep and abiding virtue.

Linguistic reification is part of what engenders attachment, for clinging requires a fixed, focal entity, and if the entity is believed to be the offspring of the self, all the more enmeshment. As Abe definitively declares, attachment is "inseparably connected with conceptualization"[411] The signified in fact creates the seemingly separate referent, lifting it out of its Real, relational embeddedness and creating an idol of the mind. "We objectify and attach to ourselves, other persons, and other things as if they were something substantial and eternal. This process gives rise to suffering."[412] These constructed idols can dominate us as if they were actually agential and malevolent deities. "The most difficult thing we as finite beings have to experience is that whenever a name is given to something, we take it to be something that has a form, and hence we make puppets of ourselves with the tools of our own making."[413]

Moreover, the imbrication of linguistic dualism with social structures that employ it to demarcate boundaries, fix belief, and allocate subject positions lends a potently relational and affective charge to the already seductive power of dichotomous discursive constructs. One comes to believe in them in order to belong and have a perduring sense of self. But one loses oneself in the process. Richard Rohr has said that belief systems are belonging systems. We identify with a group for this or that reason and come to embrace its master signifiers, nonnegotiable propositions, and inevitable exclusions because social acceptance, as far as membership in a micro-symbolic order is concerned, is predicated on like-mindedness. Yet such conformity is poisonous to the soul.

[410] Abe, *Zen and Comparative Studies*, 45.
[411] Ibid., 102.
[412] Ibid.
[413] Suzuki, "What is the 'I'?," 29

Belief is a very dangerous thing. It often forms as a result of sociality, proximity, affectivity, desire, habit, or force, yet it can be clung to and defended as if it were the fruit of an objective surveying of all the relevant sources and intense logical scrutiny. As Freud knew well, "rational" contentions are often ex post facto rationalizations of unconscious, libidinal investments. Belief is also implicitly and unjustifiably taken to be a window revealing the Real and is often treated as if it were as indispensable as oxygen. In fact, commitment to belief has consistently been one of the most lethal threats to human existence.

To employ a turn of phrase used titularly by Elaine Pagels, spirituality must be beyond belief. And that is where Zen takes us. Zen certainly does not entail belief in the Buddha. As Abe points out, believing in the Buddha would objectify the Buddha and thereby preclude the realization of the Buddha nature that is ultimate but not other.[414] Wu-men Hui-k'ai (1183-1260) said, "Don't you know that one has to rinse out his mouth for three days if he has uttered the word 'Buddha?' If he is a real Zen man, he will stop his ears and rush away when he hears 'Mind is Buddha.'"[415] Zen recognizes that the most treasured concepts and signifiers can readily become idols which, when clung to, inevitably constitute a dualistic division within the subject and thereby forestall satori.

But Zen nonduality is not restricted to its problematization of the subject's relationship to language. Zen's relationship to language as a whole in fact testifies to this. For the world of words, though it is dichotomizing through and through, is not rejected unequivocally and dualistically. Zen teachers employ discourse in order to facilitate a transformation in their students' relationship to discourse. The koān, for example, employs syntagmatic, grammatical, and lexical instrumentality to enable the student to overcome the spell that the symbolic order has cast. And propositions that are earthy and mundane are used to disrupt the students' mistaken attempts to seek spiritual awakening

[414] Abe, *Zen and Comparative Studies*, 56.
[415] Ibid., 72.

through grand, metaphysical answers. Moreover, the two truths theory acknowledges that language has practical efficacy and importance even if it is ultimately fallacious philosophically. Writes Abe, "The Buddhists … speak of two levels of truth: the conventional and the ultimate. Conventionally, the sun rises; really, it does not. Conventionally, objects exist; really, they are empty."[416]

We might say that the truth lodged in conventional knowledge is derived from the cash value of the statement (James) or its effectiveness as an implement in a given language game (Wittgenstein). Ultimate truth, however, is beyond language altogether. As Heidegger said, the essence of truth is the truth of essence. We might add, though, that this essence, when uncovered, reveals itself to be empty, transdiscursive, transpersonal, and relational. No room for a solitary Dasein-towards-death.

In addition to eschewing an unqualified rejection of language, Zen nonduality also avoids creating a dichotomy between Nirvana, the realm of enlightenment, and samsara, the everyday domain of alienation, even as it resists describing the goal as good, and the pre-enlightened condition as evil. Writes Abe, in Buddhism, "the ultimate reality, Nirvana, is not the supreme good or the judge of all, but that which is *neither* good *nor* evil. This is because in Buddhism the ultimate reality is to be realized as non-dual by *completely* overcoming all duality."[417] Nirvana is in some sense a good and a goal, but conceiving it as such tethers the subject to the samsaric blindness of substantiality, division, and twoness, and thereby makes it unreachable. Nirvana is good in a way that is not good, and it is a goal that is never elsewhere and always unavailable to standard modalities of acquisition. The enlightened subject "overcomes all duality completely"[418] and lands in a place "which is entirely free from even the notion of absolute good."[419] But does this not then create a

[416] Ibid., 51.
[417] Ibid., 47
[418] Ibid.
[419] Ibid., 47-48.

new duality between a realm of purity and that which is transcended? I am insisting that enlightenment is the realization of a genuinely liberated consciousness but that this freedom does not extend to the entirety of the subject. Duality is not overcome completely, and even if it were, a new dichotomy would be enacted.

For Abe, the Emptiness that is realized is by no means something static that is utterly divorced from samsara. He insists that Sunyata is dynamic and that even Emptiness must be emptied: "True Emptiness is not a static state of everything's non-substantiality, but rather a dynamic function of emptying everything, including itself."[420] Consequently, simply abiding in Nirvana is not the goal. Nirvana too must be overcome by the Bodhisattva, who recognizes thereby that samsara-as-it-is is Nirvana. The problem with samsara was not its immanent content but the symbolically and imaginarily projective subjective lens that occluded the Real. Once satori is realized, everything is taken up into the Real. Transcendence is transcended, and the All it its glorious givenness is affirmed.

Yet what is enlightenment? How does one overcome the divide between duality and nonduality and thereby realize that the fission was only a culturally and subjectively induced fiction? I must note up front that I really have no idea what satori is. It is not that which can be known in any ordinary sense; it must be experienced. And as I have not yet experienced it, I have no idea what it truly is. Yet I will rely on the extremely consistent, perennially documented testimony of those who have experienced it and deeply know what it is, even though we must remember that discursive witnessing does not communicate the transcendent perception itself.

Satori, or enlightenment, is consistently described by Zen scholars as a kind of perception analogous to sight. The term which most directly conveys this aspect of awakening is *kenshō. Kenshō*

[420] Ibid, 49.

means "to see into the nature" of "ultimate Reality."[421] *Ken* is a verb that means "to see, to sight, to open one's eye to, or to have a direct view of," and *shō* denotes "nature, essence, that which makes a thing what it is, the suchness of a thing."[422] "*Kenshō* thus is seeing into what makes man a man, his essence, what is behind the mind, supporting it, moving it, making it respond to the outside world. And this seeing is not a knowledge of the mind, analytically arrived at, but a direct, immediate view of it, as when the eye perceives an object before it."[423] But we ought not to press this analogy with sight too far. While *kenshō* is like typical seeing in that there is direct perception, in the ordinary vision of an object, the ego and the signifier conspire to dislodge the perceived thing, which is really no thing at all, from its Real, relational milieu, the subject neglects both the background of the field of vision and the intervening space between her or him and the object, and a false duality is created between the seer and the seen. In *kenshō*, however, seer and seen are one, and what is seen is no object at all. Instead, the subject inwardly and intensely consciously resolves into "something" much more like the spaciousness that is neglected in the focal seeing of an object; she becomes the interdependent, non-ontic Emptiness that is not just her own true nature but the essence of all "things."

But this is not sheer nothingness. Rather, the knowing behind the mind at the root of its operation, namely *Prajña*, is liberated from its truncating captivity to the introjected, imaginary, and domineering ego and the internalized, fictitious constructs of the symbolic order. As I have said, *Prajña* is a neurologically emergent form of intelligence that is coterminous with the Real. And as there is no division in the Real, the unspeakable insight that the liberation of *Prajña* unleashes does not belong to the subject, but to the cosmos. Enlightenment then, is the awakening of the cosmos through the subject and not the salvation of a particular subject. It is the recognition that there is in

[421] Suzuki, "What is the 'I'?," 31.
[422] Ibid.
[423] Ibid., 31-32.

fact no one to save or liberate.[424] Hence the transpersonal character of the experience: the division between the subject and external world, once taken to be fundamental, is abolished, everything is shown to be enlightened, and the Buddha nature is seen to be ubiquitous.

The Source of all things, even God, lies within, and our task is to dive inwardly so deeply that we taste it and all dichotomies, including God vs. the cosmos, dissolve. To quote Suzuki, "So we see that Enlightenment is not the outcome of an intellectual process in which one idea follows another in sequence finally to terminate in conclusion or judgment."[425] So enlightenment does not simply follow from a syntagmatic arrangement of signifiers and the reiterative cultural order that the sentence reproduces and upon which the structure relies. "There is neither process nor judgment in Enlightenment, it is something more fundamental, something which makes a judgment possible, and without which no form of judgment can take place. In judgment there are a subject and a predicate; in Enlightenment subject is predicate, and predicate is subject; they are here merged as one, but not as one of which something can be stated, but as one from which arises judgment."[426] Judgment ordinarily entails duality, subject and object. But there is that which makes judgment possible which is beyond duality and prior to duality, and enlightenment taps into this nothing-something.

> We cannot go beyond this absolute oneness; all the intellectual operations stop here; when they endeavor to go further, they draw a circle in which they forever repeat themselves. This is the wall against which all philosophies have beaten in vain. This is an intellectual terra incognita, in which prevails the principle, 'Credo quia absurdum est.' This region of darkness, however, gives up its secrets when attacked by the will, by the force of one's entire personality. Enlightenment is the illuminating of this dark region, when the whole thing is seen at one glance, and all intellectual inquiries find here their rationale.[427]

Is not this "absolute oneness" which is beyond dichotomizing ratiocination to a great extent that which we are seeking in all our thinking? For is not the impetus of the intellectual quest that *objet petit*

[424] But this is also a weakness of Zen which I will work to address in the conclusion.
[425] Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism*, 68.
[426] Ibid.
[427] Ibid.

a, which is in some sense empty and continuous with the Real but is in another sense a grand deceiver, the cause of that desire which is ever seeking and never truly sated? Do we not seek in intellection a rest from all the wordiness and that primal, transpersonal intelligence which discursive thought relies on but suppresses? What is needed, as Suzuki rightly sees, is more volition and less cognition, and concomitantly more spiritual discipline and less intellectualization. What is needed is that will to Be which eschews popular opinion, theoretical trendiness, and the established modus operandi and seeks instead to transcend the conditioning of binary codes and make the dark region luminous.

Conclusion: Freedom, Justice, and the Triune Real

I hope in what remains to tie this dissertation together by focusing on its two central themes, freedom and justice, and by coming home, as it were, to the disciplines of Christian constructive theology and the theology of religious diversity. More broadly, I also hope to show how my thesis is relevant to the dire circumstances of our Manichean sociopolitical order.

Though I have not yet stated this explicitly, the two main themes of this work have been freedom and justice. I have used Lacan to highlight both how we are far more conditioned, alienated, and unfree than we realize and how in that conditioning the oppressive forces of society at large are, largely though the mediation of language and images, deeply internalized by us. I have turned to Zen as a possible avenue for realizing a *freedom from* a significant degree of cultural precedent and its problematic content, on the one hand, and a *freedom to* realize the Real, which ineluctably elicits a subjectivity that is peaceful, wise, and compassionate, and, thereby, just. However, the subject is so deeply inhabited by cultural forms that it must be admitted that while the enlightened sage experiences a conscious emancipation, his or her unconscious must remain largely beholden to the Other. We must adhere to the rule of Luther as far as the totality of the subject is concerned: *simul iustus et peccator*. Or, in Zen terms, one is simultaneously enlightened and conditioned. Furthermore, while enlightenment produces people who are exceedingly virtuous, there is little in Zen thought or practice that seeks to confront structural injustices. I have defined fallenness as the concealed but disproportionate influence that the top-down force of cultural structures wields within the subject. Rectifying the Fall, then, must entail addressing those structures directly; exclusive attention to personal spiritual transformation is insufficient. And, as Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." Therefore, cooperation with the oppressed in their pursuit of justice is a necessary component of the freedom of us all.

The pursuit of justice, I argue, requires a discernment of and responsiveness to what process thinkers, following Whitehead, have called the lure of God. But such attunement can readily be realized by an atheist and consistently neglected by a theist. Alignment with Sunyata is tantamount to the realization of the freedom to be, but it does not always coincide with the freedom to become, which seeks novelty, flourishing, and justice for all. The latter mission, in my estimation, requires more of an embrace of the symbolic order than Zen typically allows for and comes through an alignment with the divine lure, the primordial aim of God that entices me towards alternative futures. Moreover, fruitful becoming is inextricably bound up with a recognition of the haecceitic value of particulars. In Zen, one aligns with the insouciantly generative Source of the All and experiences a pervasively expansive compassion (*karuna*). But this compassion is not a love that deeply values the particular for its own sake. Drawing on Scotus' concept of haecceity and a process view of divine creativity, I believe that God, who persuasively entices the cosmos into form, operates with an attunement to specificity. And God has favorites: namely, the specific creatures who are least favored. To responsively and creatively align with God is to hone one's symbolically funded subjectivity and have a heart for specific others, particularly those which are oppressed.

The question is, can a single subject know both Zen virtue and the freedom to be, on the one hand, and a commitment to the particular and the freedom to become, on the other? I argue that one can, but not at the same time. Part of the task of this work has been to deconstruct the fiction of the perduring essential self. If I am not egoically constant, then I can be a different self at different times. To every self, there is a season and a time for every purpose under heaven. I can move from an investment in becoming and justice in one moment to an emptied self, rooted in Being, the next. Yet I would be remiss if I did not mention the glaring convergence in the teachings of the Buddha and Jesus: the insistence on dying to self. Here the pursuit of Emptiness and the adherence to the will of God converge, but not absolutely. I will conclude with a metaphysical

component that forms the basis of these distinct but complementary iterations of selfhood. I will primarily work with the deep pluralistic model of John Cobb and David Ray Griffin, which posits three interconnected ultimates: Sunyata/the Godhead/Being Itself, the Supreme Being/God, and the Cosmos. I will focus on Emptiness and God as the two sources of the Cosmos, with the spacious, materializing universe being illuminated in different ways by alignment with the respective sources.

Freedom From

In "Two Concepts of Liberty,"[428] Isaiah Berlin organizes his discussion on freedom into two parts, the first on negative freedom, the second on positive. The former he defines as "involved in the answer to the question 'What is the area within which the subject – a person or group of persons – is or should be left to do or be what he is able to do or be, without interference by other persons?'"[429] "The latter "is involved in the answer to the question, 'What, or who, is the source of control or interference that can determine someone to do, or be, this rather than that?'"[430] We shall apply each of these in turn to Lacan and Zen, even as we use the latter to extend and qualify the frame.

"Freedom from" is a facet of the discussion that readily finds a home in the progressive academy. Indeed, it has been a primary concern of leftist thought since Marx, and this tendency has only increased since poststructuralism took a confident and unequivocal articulation of positive freedom off the table for many. But there is a dimension of accession to encroachment that, since structuralism displaced existentialism, has been widely but unwarrantedly neglected as a

[428] Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," in *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 118-172.
[429] Ibid., 121-122.
[430] Ibid., 122.

phenomenon to critique intellectually while almost universally embraced as a dynamic to accord with existentially: conformity. In this superficial, Manichean, majoritarian country, the pressure to conform may be the prime modality by which the downward force of symbolic power acts upon the subject. I largely agree with the rejection of existentialist individualism, but there are existentialist insights about inauthenticity and assimilation that we desperately need to return to in order to mobilize resistance to coercive social pressure. Zen provides a path to the liberty of authenticity without egoic separatism.

John Stuart Mill already recognized that the majoritarian forms of power that democracy produces can be more insidiously invasive than the more overt power modalities of a bygone era. In this contention, he was roughly aligned with Foucault. For both these thinkers, tyranny had moved from the apex of the state to the social body itself and was more coincident with diurnal affairs: "when society is itself the tyrant – society collectively over the separate individuals who compose it – its means of tyrannizing are not restricted to the acts which it may do by the hands of its political functionaries."[431] The majority can be quite oppressive: "it practices a social tyranny more formidable than many kinds of political oppression, since, though not usually upheld by such extreme penalties, it leaves fewer means of escape, penetrating much more deeply into the details of life and enslaving the soul."[432] Mill, a solitary genius, sought to free the individual as much as possible from this power. Yet if this social force is subjectifying, one's individuality is not necessarily a recourse for reprieve. In fact, as I have demonstrated, the ego is an introjection, and the present condition of the "individual" is an effect of that societal power which the likes of Mill, Emerson, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Sartre sought to escape by emphasizing subjectivity. In my estimation, these thinkers were right in seeing the danger of amalgamating social pressure, but they

[431] John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, ed. David Spitz (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1975), 6.
[432] Ibid.

articulated this with a subject/collective dichotomy that cannot hold. Furthermore, they neglected the fact that the cultivation of a deep sense of connection to the cosmos and to other humans is a necessary ingredient of liberation. Zen, as I have been arguing, by problematizing the subject's relationship to the signifier, provides a way to free oneself from the problematic knowledge-power of the collective while still valuing a felt union with others and without futilely trying to escape into the fiction of a separate self.

But why do we conform? And why is conformity such a stultifying and spinally attenuating blight in American culture? For Erich Fromm, the freedom of egoic individuation comes with a significant amount of *Angst*:

> To the extent to which the child emerges from [a pre-individuated existence] it becomes aware of being alone, of being an entity separate from all others. This separation from a world, which in comparison with one's own individual existence is overwhelmingly strong and powerful, and often threatening and dangerous, creates a feeling of powerlessness and anxiety. As long as one was an integral part of the world, unaware of the possibilities and responsibilities of individual action, one did not need to be afraid of it. When one has become an individual, one stands alone and faces the world in all its perilous and overpowering aspects.[433]

Moreover, the ego, formed through the introjection of an imago, comes to sense a disparity between an internality divided by not yet fully organized drives and the gestalt of the unified image which forms the ideal ego. The young child not only feels a sense of inferiority with respect to the awesome totality of the world, from which it is now existentially separated, but also with respect to that which forms the basis of its own subjectivity.

The ego's sense of isolation and angst has been greatly exacerbated by the forces of modernity. Before modernity, its existential aloneness was attenuated by the diachronically continuous, locally tethered, and intellectually uncontested symbolic and communal fixity which enveloped the subject's environs and provided a kind of cradle-to-grave security. But modernity and

[433] Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1941, 1969), pp. 28-29.

its attendant imaginary saturation have been deracinating. And though the symbolic order is still strongly determinative, it is now divided[434], and the subject no longer accepts the conditions of her thrownness as inevitably inscribing the form of her life's arc. Consequently, she is in many respects cut loose and thrown back upon that fragile ego which is deeply cowed by the overwhelming totality of the cosmos from which it is existentially separated and over against which it tenuously stands. As Fromm writes, "[T]his growing individuation means growing isolation, insecurity, and thereby growing doubt concerning one's own role in the universe, the meaning of one's life, and with all that a growing feeling of one's own powerlessness and insignificance as an individual."[435]

This sense of aloneness can be unbearable, and one often seeks to escape the isolation, meaninglessness, and fear that attend it by throwing off the onus of freedom and escaping into a submissive form of existence that provides protection, security, confidence, and community. Fromm found in modern subjects "the tendency to give up the independence of one's own individual self and to fuse one's self with somebody or something outside of oneself in order to acquire the strength which the individual self is lacking."[436] The subject seeks secondary bonds to compensate for lost primary bonds. He or she identifies with an identity-conferring, discursively framing, angst-alleviating micro-symbolic. Fleeing freedom, he or she finds refuge in conformity.

In Kant, the experience of the sublime, that natural grandeur which renders the observer miniscule, overwhelms the senses and then causes the subject to posit a faculty, reason, that is greater than physical perception: "But precisely because there is a striving in our imagination towards progress *ad infinitum*, while reason demands absolute totality, as a real idea that same inability on the part of our faculty for the estimation of the magnitude of things of the world of senses to

[434] One is reminded of the polytheism described by Weber and the incommensurable social spheres, governed by incompatible language games, as described by Lyotard.
[435] From, *Escape from Freedom*, 35.
[436] Ibid., 140.

attain to the idea, is the awakening of a feeling of a supersensible faculty within us."[437] The senses' incapacity in the face of the sublime engenders a recourse to reason, which is capable of registering that which perception cannot. Likewise, the modern ego, upon being cowed by the potent expanse that stands opposed to it, posits that there must be strength in numbers. Conformity does for the overmatched modern ego something oddly analogous to what reason supplies for the Kantian subject upon exposure to the sublime.

The modality of power that circulates in micro-symbolics readily facilitates the illusion of independence, so the subject can have his or her comforting conformist cake and believe he or she can also eat it on one's own. Moreover, micro-symbolic conformity allows for a degree of transcendence of the ego. The harmony of the likeminded checks that aggressivity, imaginary captivity, and narcissism which egoism engenders. One partially overcomes the "systematic misrecognition and objectification that characterize ego formation."[438] The ego, writes Lacan, is "frustration in its very essence,"[439] and its unrest and futile movement somewhat subside when the subject aligns with a collective. To be identified with the ego is to be ceaselessly moving yet going nowhere. And yet a micro-symbolic allows one to engage in the dialectic of discourse through which one does not have to be so restively fixed. To be identified with the ego is to be frantically frozen in a world of alienating objectification, even as one ceaselessly tries to string together a virtual, diachronic unity through the introjection of ineluctably divergent and fracturing images. Yet to inhabit a micro-symbolic universe is to be part of a larger harmony and a subject with more depth and complexity than identification with the truncating ego and the alienating imaginary allows.

[437] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, tr. James Creed Meredith, ed. Nicholas Walker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), II.25.
[438] Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, tr. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton & Co., 1999), 94.
[439] Ibid., 208.

The acculturating influence of a micro-symbolic effects a secondary castration. Writes Lacan, "Oedipal identification is thus the identification by which the subject transcends the aggressiveness constitutive of the first subjective individuation. I have stressed elsewhere that it constitutes a step in the establishment of the distance by which, with feelings akin to respect, a whole affective assumption of one's fellow man is brought about."[440] Identification with the paternity of a micro-symbolic has a similar effect, fostering the "affective assumption" of the other members of the group and, collectively, a functional harmony which arbitrary aggregations of egos cannot attain. The group operates on the basis of a covenant, usually more implicit than explicit, which grounds discourse in faith and trust. One is in a sense sanctified by engaging in the discursive circulation on which the micro-symbolic relies. And one operates in a community whose commonalities help to foster that mutual recognition which is desire's chief aim. Writes Lacan, "What I seek in speech is a response from the other. What constitutes me as a subject is my question. In order to be recognized by the other, I proffer what was only in view of what will be. In order to find him, I call him by a name that he must assume or refuse in order to answer me."[441] The micro-symbolic affords an environment in which the subject who seeks fulfillment in the identity-affirming reply of the other readily finds a congenial response.

Yet there is a considerable price to pay for these benefits. In a micro-symbolic, one drastically underestimates the great extent to which one's subjectivity is funded by the downward causality of the emergent power of the group. One perhaps knows recurrently the benefits of full speech, but in that the latter is deeply indebted to the Other and, as Lacan insists, "includes its own reply,"[442] it tends to preclude significant agency. One has somewhat overcome the systematic misrecognition of the ego, but one increasingly attributes to oneself what is really the effect of the

[440] Ibid., 95.
[441] Ibid., 247.
[442] Ibid., 246.

indwelling productivity of the micro-symbolic totality. And one increasingly relies on the discursivity of the collective, which belongs fundamentally to the little big Other, to define one's alienated identity. In micro-symbolic allegiance, the habitual emulation of *das Man* and the indwelling tendencies of a group-propagating habitus are mistaken for the consistency of a self.

"A social fact," wrote Durkheim, "is identifiable through the power of external coercion which it exerts or is capable of exerting upon individuals."[443] Social facts are ideas and practices that belong to the micro-symbolic but realize themselves through particular subjects. Just as cognition belongs to the totality of the mind and cannot be located in particular neural elements but nevertheless requires the activity of the latter, so social facts are not the products of particular individuals but the social whole yet require fruitful manifestations yielded by particular subjects. As Durkhiem argues, "If there is nothing extraordinary in the fact that individual representations, produced by the action and reaction between neural elements, are not inherent in those elements, there is nothing surprising in the fact that collective representations, produced by the action and reaction between individual minds that form the society, do not derive directly from the latter and consequently surpass them."[444] To identify with a micro-symbolic is to be a vessel for the transmission of collective representations and in turn a vehicle of the reproduction of a given order, even as one incessantly misidentifies group-conferred proclivities for manifestations of a self and the nonnegotiable propositions that bind the herd as self-chosen, personal beliefs.

Perhaps the analogy of the human mind to the group can be pressed towards more literality. Posits D. S. Wilson, "If the individual is no longer a privileged unit of selection, it is no longer a privileged unit of cognition. We are free to imagine individuals in a social group connected in a

[443] Emile Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, tr. W. D. Halls, ed. Steven Lukes (New York: Free Press, 2013), 24.
[444] Emile Durkhiem, *Sociology and Philosophy*, tr. D.F. Pocock (London: Cohen & West, 1951), 24-25.

circuitry that gives the group the status of the brain and the individual the status of the neuron."[445] Micro-symbolics, then, have minds of their own. Well, not entirely their own, for the minds are constituted by the "neurons" that are human subjects. But this emergent mentality realizes a degree of order not reducible to the sum of its constituents. These minds operate in and through us as the indwelling Other, which for Lacan is the prime mover of discourse. New Testament scholar Matthew Croasmun has highlighted the personal nature of groups and used the emergent power of these superorganisms to describe Sin in the cosmic, personal Pauline sense. Drawing on the now familiar parallel, he writes, "In the paradigm case, mind emerges from a complex neurological system in contact with various objects in its environment (including other minds). In the case of group-level minds, mind emerges from a complex, overlapping network of these systems. And where there is body and mind, I am inclined to say there is a person … In other words, what we have found is that the social is both a biological and a psychological entity of a new species."[446] The micro-symbolic is a person, and to align with it is to be a member of its body, a neuron in its mind. This superject is an evil genius that belies the illusion of the cogito even as it uses the false sense of freedom that attends the illusion of the thinker to serve its supervening ends. Micro-symbolic identification is indeed a ubiquitous but usually unrecognized form of captivity, and it is a key ingredient of our increasingly hostile, alienating, and Manichean sociopolitical order.

In the locus classicus of Foucault's theorization of power, he describes power as "a general line of force that traverses … local oppositions and links them together."[447] Here we have the rudiments of an emergent order in which a Nietzschean agonism is being paired with Saussurian structure: a "general line of force" emerges from "local oppositions" even as it acts downwardly

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[445] David Sloan Wilson, *Darwin's Cathedral: Evolution, Religion, and the Nature of Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 33.
[446] Matthew Croasmun, *The Emergence of Sin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 98.
[447] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction: Volume 1*, tr. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990), 94.

upon the latter to "[link] them together." And power belongs primarily to the downwardly causal totality, not to individuals; it "is not something that is acquired, seized, or shared, something that one holds on to or allows to slip away."[448] In describing how power operates in this passage, Foucault makes consistent recourse to personal language, all the while insisting that what he is describing is not the operation of a person: "Power relations are both intentional and nonsubjective"[449]; they are "imbued through and through with calculation"[450]; "there is no power that is exercised without a series of aims and objectives"[451]; "the rationality of power is characterized by tactics."[452] In the end, "the logic is perfectly clear, the aims decipherable, and yet it is often the case that no one is there to have invented them, and few who can be said to have formulated them."[453] Are we to believe, though, that all this mentality is utterly impersonal? Does it not make sense that while the rationality of power does not pertain primarily to human subjects, it nevertheless does issue from superjects, the superorganisms who emerge from human collectives? Indeed, power is everywhere and comes from everywhere. It for the most part precedes the subject, yet it is still somehow personal. It is the downward causality of collective superjects, and every social fact and signifier, rooted as it is in the Other, is a vehicle of its dominion. Knowledge is coterminous with power. And yet there remains the pacifically potent, transpersonal path of unknowing.

As noted, the micro-symbolic achieves a necessary internal harmony that somewhat suppresses egoism. However, the micro-symbolic itself is a person with an ego of its own and, therefore, an inherently problematic relationship with alterity. Reinhold Niebuhr has famously called attention to the fact that social groups tend to be more immoral than the individuals who constitute

[448] Ibid.
[449] Ibid.
[450] Ibid., 95.
[451] Ibid.
[452] Ibid.
[453] Ibid.

them. Particular subjects, he avers, can achieve a degree of morality, refining themselves, respecting others, and purging themselves of egoic elements. "But all these achievements are more difficult, if not impossible, for human societies and social groups. In every human group there is less reason to guide and to check impulse, less capacity for self-transcendence, less ability to comprehend the needs of others and therefore more unrestrained egoism than the individuals, who compose the group, reveal in their personal relationships."[454] To be sure, the collective does indeed possess a rationality, but it lacks the equivalent of castration to check its egoic dysfunction. Moreover, in emergentist terms, the collective superject accrues novel properties that do not necessarily reflect complete continuity with the characteristics of the elements of its base. Therefore, interpersonal virtue among its members does not directly engender a virtuous whole. Moreover, much of the ego-transcending sacrifice on the part of members of a group serves the collective identity, the ego of the superject, which is alienated and aggressive. This micro-symbolic ego in turn acts downwardly to affirm the very egos which were transcended, as the collective identity constitutes the constituent selves as superior insiders. Indeed, serving a larger whole confers a false sense of spirituality, as one limits oneself to realize something larger. Sublimation and cooperation often characterize members' participation, while Thanatos can increasingly come to define the totality's disposition towards rival others. To identify with a micro-symbolic is not simply the surrendering of freedom; to do so also often means contributing to macro evils even as one congenially cooperates with the likeminded.

In our conformist culture, micro-symbolic identification dovetails with a ubiquitous but usually undetected crisis of identity. This pervasive issue is often unnoticed because most subjects are too superficial to be in touch with their authentic inwardness and thereby, by way of contrast, detect their falsehood. One simply feels powerless: the flight to the group has not solved the original predicament of the fraught and fragile ego. The ego is somewhat attenuated by community, but it is

[454] Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960), xii.

reinforced by a belief in one's alignment with master signifiers and the collective's sense of superiority. Indeed, the imaginary in general remains potent. The collegiality and discursivity of the micro-symbolic do not completely escape imaginary objectification, for the optics of self-presentation remain primary, and discourse, dependent as it is on the imaginary signified, is always in danger of sliding into objectification. Furthermore, the spectacle of mass culture, social media, self-image cultivation, and conspicuous consumption make the imaginary a reciprocally constitutive supplement to and titillating reprieve from the subtle internal manipulations of the emergently personal symbolic community.

In the end, both transpersonal action and egoic assertion can exacerbate the evils of the collective superject. Writes Fromm, "[The subject] has become free from the external bonds that would prevent him from doing and thinking as he sees fit. He would be free to act according to his own will, if he knew what he wanted, thought, and felt. But he does not know. He conforms to anonymous authorities and adopts a self which is not his. The more he does this, the more powerless he feels, the more he is forced to conform."[455] And the anonymous authority which comes to run one's life is that of the emergent superorganism, whose collective behavior is often destructive.

The spiritual remedy of Zen can liberate us from the shackles of micro-symbolic subservience. We must recognize with Fromm that conformity is a misguided attempt to solve the problem of the ego. And the existentialist beak from the herd is too isolating and ego-affirmative. In Zen practice, one achieves a liberation from the ego that precludes the need to flee one's aloneness and surrender one's freedom for the comfort of homogenized communion. Yet in the process one achieves a Real Presence marked by a felt sense of connection to the cosmos and other beings, which makes the subject more deeply connected to others than those who rely on a sociality based

[455] Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, 254.

on consensus. Freedom cannot be achieved with immersion in a micro-symbolic, in which one surrenders one's integrity for the sake of an unsatisfactory security and becomes the unwitting pawn of a superject. Zen freedom overcomes the imaginary captivity, angst, egoic dissatisfaction, and blindness that those who escape from freedom into conformity unsuccessfully try to dissolve even as it delivers a relationality that is more profound and expansive.

Yet Zen Buddhists do not necessarily have a history of being radically nonconformist. It is possible that enlightenment can engender a false sense of security wherein one gains a conscious separation from the fictions of discourse but accords with oppressive cultural power nonetheless. Žižek has countered the claim that we live in a post-ideological world by asserting that a conscious cynicism towards political power is often coincident with practices that accord with the strictures of a given regime. Ideology for him functions through the fantasy that one's intellectual distance from power is sufficient to resist it. But "[t]he ruling ideology is not meant to be taken seriously or literally"[456] and is efficacious precisely through the false sense of freedom of those who dismiss it. Thus, "they know very well what they are doing, but still, they are doing it."[457] Conscious cynicism is ironically paired with practical activity that is identical to that of someone duped by ideology in the classically Marxist fashion. Zen could be seen as a path to overcome subservience to the fictions of all discourse and ideology. However, while enlightened Buddhists have achieved a conscious freedom from the rationales of all regimes, they have often nonetheless conformed to the strictures of those regimes as though they have embraced the state's discursive justifications. Conscious distance from discourse is insufficient in resisting the power apparatuses to which discourse is wedded, for the symbolically imbued materiality of one's environs, in collaboration with the unconscious inhabitance of the subject by the Other, can outweigh a conscious transcendence of the

[456] Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (NY: Verso, 1989), 24
[457] Ibid., 25.

signifier. It is therefore necessary to pair transrational spiritual liberty with a rational, liberationist critique of all forms of power (including those of progressivism, which can be quite insidious) that engenders practices of resistance. Furthermore, one must recognize that the internalized discourse which one partially transcends spiritually is coterminous with various forms of injustice. The quest for personal freedom must be paired with a commitment to join the oppressed in their quest for both spiritual and political liberation.

Freedom To

Berlin defines "freedom to" as the ability to master oneself, which in the West has generally taken the form of reason mastering the passions. This freedom is thus, in a certain sense, also a "freedom from," only with the forces one liberates oneself from being internal. However, we have already shown amply how external forces and forms are readily internalized, so it becomes very hard to draw a definitive wedge between the two types of liberty which Berlin keeps separate. But let us take rational self-mastery as exemplary of a certain type of freedom anyway, for provides an amenable contrast with Zen.

Berlin unfurls a genealogy that is both compelling and sharply critical of the way this sort of freedom has developed in the West. In modernity, the ancient valuation of reason's mastery of the passions coalesced with scientism and universalism to form a general contention that the self-mastered white man was the ideal subject, that this could be demonstrated rationally, and that as the rules of reason are the same for all, any reasonable subject would see this and modify himself or herself accordingly. There was also an associated anthropology that held that there was a true rational self and that the other parts of the subject did not properly belong to his or her essential inner reality. And it became incumbent on European leadership to forcibly resist those who were deemed to act contrary to their true selves. One thinks of the coercive discipline that Foucault

detailed. This thinking culminated in racist, sexist, imperial, and eventually totalitarian governments deeming it their prerogative to enforce a certain form of rationalized subjectivity on their population, reasoning that those who resisted were not acting in accordance with their own true natures and needed to be broken. "The common assumption of these thinkers (and of many a schoolman before them and Jacobin and Communist after them) is that the rational ends of our 'true' natures must coincide, or be made to coincide, however violently our poor, ignorant, desire-ridden, passionate, empirical selves may cry out against this process. Freedom is not freedom to do what is irrational, or stupid, or wrong. To force empirical selves into the right pattern is no tyranny, but liberation … Liberty, so far from being incompatible with authority, becomes virtually identical with it."[458]

The question for us is: is the embrace of Zen liable to such a development? Using both Lacan and Zen, I have consistently argued that the subject is not simply unitary. In Lacanian terms, we have Real, symbolic, and imaginary dimensions. And for Zen the True Self is something ineffable, usually hidden, and not at all identifiable with what we Westerners have generally attributed to subjectivity. In this sense, there is some overlap between this project and the graded subject which Berlin has linked with oppressive authority. There is therefore a possibility that, through a bastardizing appropriation, both Lacanian and Zen anthropologies could be used oppressively. However, Lacan was sharply critical and deconstructive of egoic pretense. And Zen insists that the typically rational subject is not yet free; Zen lacks that important noetic nexus between anthropology and oppressive political power. Furthermore, the very self that for the West has been made the ruler of unreason and, when it has gained power, has often been oppressive, is in Lacanian terms misguided about its sense of agency and, in Zen terms, a fictional construct to be transcended.

[458] Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," 148.

Moreover, "freedom to" should hardly be restricted to Berlin's Western terms. At the same time, I will keep my comments on Zen's form of positive freedom spare and metaphysically oriented, for the experiential access to it utterly transcends discursive formulation, even as it is seemingly tangibly immanent. Zen positive liberty is not primarily the freedom of a subject; it is rather the freedom of a cosmic consciousness that wakes up from the dream of human fallenness and returns to its ineffable Source. It is misleading to believe that a person can become enlightened; such a contention is ego-affirmative. Rather, enlightenment becomes enlightened and displaces the separate false self which has formerly defined and delimited the complexly conscious body. It is something like Geist realizing the end of a small piece of its history, but this is a Geist that has been alienated in subjectivity, rationality, culture, and the state. Somehow the imaginarily and symbolically conferred unconsciousness of the human subject is both the foremost impediment and the necessarily penultimate stage in Geist's self-realization. Fallenness is forwardness. But the in-and-for-itself of Geist is also its partial annihilation, as it dissolves in the Nothingness of the Godhead from which it sprang. Hence the end of craving.

This is nothing less than the culmination of the vaunted *exitus-reditus* process. In classically Christian terms, one returns to the God from which one came but never realizes oneself as God. To be sure, in theosis one becomes divine; still, one is not on par with "the Father." But I am insisting that God is not the chief Source but the Shaper. God organizes the chaos that emerges from That which is ultimately creative but impersonal, indiscriminate, and beyond good and evil. As Plato wrote, "God desired that all things should be good and nothing bad, so far as this was attainable. Wherefore also finding the whole visible sphere not at rest, but moving in an irregular and disorderly

fashion, out of disorder he brought order, considering that this was in every way better than the other."[459]

The Christian conception of the *exitus-reditus* fails for two reasons. First, it entails returning to what is secondary to the prime Source itself. Second, it never overcomes the alienation of dualism, for the subject does not achieve unequivocal identity with the Source. To be sure, I do not believe that merging with God is possible, for though God's lure is always accessible, God's being is transcendent. Yet it is possible to merge with That which engenders God, to become one with the immaterial matrix that supports the gestation of cosmic forms. And this is precisely what enlightenment entails. Zen freedom is nothing less than the freedom of the cosmos to return to its nondual Source through the medium of the subject. The depths of the ultimately Real call to the depths of the cosmic Real, the ego is displaced, and there is a consummating union. To be enlightened is to know the freedom to be, but this is not the freedom of one's own being; it is the liberty of Being Itself in which the subject participates.

A Christian should welcome and pursue this freedom, for Emptiness has been an integral but unrecognized part of our tradition. In the Hebrew Bible the barren womb often proves to be the matrix that is most importantly fecund. Christian theology has glossed this as evidence of the divine *creatio ex nihilo*. I am arguing for a version of creation from nothing that both allows God to withstand the test of theodicy and impugns all forms of domineering sovereignty: nondual Nothingness itself is the source of creativity which provides the chaotic raw material which God works upon and with to produce emergent forms of order and novelty.

Orthodoxy has long held that there is interpersonality within divine intrapersonality. Yet without Emptiness within God, I would argue, there would be dysfunctional enmeshment between

[459] Plato, *Timaeus*, 30a, in Plato, *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*, tr. Lane Cooper et. al., eds. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 1162.

the divine persons. Perichoresis requires spacing. Furthermore, any divine-creaturely relationality requires an infinitely spacious, groundless ground where the encounter takes place. This abyssal ground (or *Ungrund*) is That which Meister Eckhart sought to reach by surpassing God and That which Zen describes as eternal yet insubstantial.

Emptiness has been central to much Christian mysticism, but, because of the Great Conflation, when Christian thinkers, led by Augustine and Pseudo-Dionysius, identified Plotinus' ineffable One with God, its pursuit has been too commingled with the seeking of God. Pseudo-Dionysius spoke of "the unknowing of the beyond beingness itself – beyond logos, intellect, and being – a knowledge beyond being"[460] but identified this extra-ontic realm with God. I am arguing that Emptiness and God are the two sources of the cosmos and need to be kept relatively separate, for alignment with each engenders two different forms of subjectivity.

Karl Barth saw mysticism as a kind of atheism and the root source of that ubiquitous and idolatrous religiosity which starts with the human person and proceeds upward.[461] Very well, then. Let us allow mysticism to be atheistic, but without denigrating what springs from it. For we must acknowledge that it has the capacity to unveil the ultimates of Sunyata and the Cosmos. And let us assert the importance of both Mary and Martha. Do you know why Mary was "rapt"? She saw in the one who would empty himself the Nothingness that was her Ground. Meanwhile, Martha was doing the work of God.

Agamben found Nothingness to be a recurrent theme in patristic descriptions of the glory of God. For early Christian thinkers, the heavenly realm was most resplendent when all work ceased

[460] Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names* I.1. In William Franke (ed.), *On What Cannot Be Said*, Volume 1 (Notre Dame, IN, University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 162.
[461] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: Volume 1, The Doctrine of the Word of God, Part 2*, tr. G. T. Thomson and Harold Knight, eds. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), I.2.17.2.

and the heights resolved into the Emptiness of inoperativity. This Emptiness, moreover, lay at the heart of that divine economy which for Agamben would segue into modern political economy:

> And yet, precisely this *unsayable vacuity* is what nourishes and feeds power (or, rather, what the machine of power transforms into nourishment). That means that the center of the governmental apparatus, the threshold at which Kingdom and Government ceaselessly communicate and ceaselessly distinguish themselves form one another is, in reality, *empty*; it is only the Sabbath and *katapausis* – and, nevertheless, this inoperativity is so essential for the machine that it must at all costs be adopted and maintained at its center in the form of glory.[462]

Emptiness in the patristic texts Agamben examined was covered over by the splendor of glory and yet somehow there was a recognition that the ultimate source of power is a gaping void.

Nevertheless, because union with this seminal Emptiness is so liberating and seemingly terminal, it can preclude a commitment to seek goals that do not reduce to its remarkable end, which, though momentous, does not in itself encompass the telos of every ultimate. Enlightenment engenders the freedom to be, but it does not necessarily beget the freedom to become. It could be argued that as a theistic supplement could help to facilitate the latter, just as the liberal fecundity of Emptiness eternally begets and requires the God who forms.

Justice

There is a salient ethical impetus in all Buddhist practice, for the Buddha recognized that the ego is at the root of human evil and that, therefore, overcoming the ego is tantamount to realizing a condition that is free from the rudiments of depravity. The enlightened subject has transcended that which is at the root of human blindness, dysfunction, greed, and injustice. We therefore should not underestimate the extent to which the overcoming of the ego can engender justice.

[462] Giorgio Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory: For a Theological Genealogy of Economy and Government*, tr. Lorenzo Chiesa (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 242, italics mine.

Fallenness entails not just the disproportionate downward causality of the emergent sociological level, but also the egoic identification with the habitus inculcated by this influence. Overcoming egoism and detaching from cognition could serve as an element of breaking free from the fullness of this forceful societal grip by no longer investing the libidinous, cognitive, and affective elements of one's internality with selfhood and therefore being less likely to accord so extensively with the powers that instill them. Moreover, emergence shows us that the personal is not simply personal; cultural orders supervene on the deeds of subjects. Personal change, sufficiently multiplied, can therefore radically alter societal totalities. But such alteration should be complemented by a direct addressing of structural mechanisms.

Zen spirituality can address personal iterations of our corporate fallenness directly. Clearly overconsumption is one of the foremost of our problems. Sally McFague has called the culture of consumerism "the air we breathe."[463] But to overcome the ego is to breathe purer air and be detached from that desire which craves more and more but, from both Lacanian and Buddhist perspectives, cannot be finally sated. McFague has called self-emptying "a pathway for personal and planetary well-being."[464] Indeed, the creation is groaning, imploring us to alter our ways of life. The form of care of the self that Zen offers can powerfully and compassionately respond by delivering a subjectivity that is too peacefully detached to be readily seduced by the contrasting societal urge to consume and grow infinitely.

Furthermore, a compassionate recognition of the interconnectedness of all beings and a disabusing oneself of the fiction of rigid identity must help prevent that form of oppression that treats members of certain marginal groups as abject. Iris Marion Young has drawn on the work of Julia Kristeva to posit that abjection is "a body aesthetic that defines some groups as ugly or

[463] Sallie McFague, *Blessed Are the Consumers: Climate Change and the Practice of Restraint* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), x.
[464] Ibid., xii.

fearsome and produces aversive reactions in relation to members of those groups. Racism, sexism, homophobia, ageism, and ableism, are partly structured by abjection, an involuntary, unconscious judgment of ugliness and loathing."[465] Abjection is primarily about boundaries. One senses the proximity of a disturbing alterity that seemingly threatens the ego's sense of clear distinction between self and other, and one reacts with fear and disgust to shore up that boundary. Because this dynamic is visceral and therefore often resistant to justice stances that rely on cognitive commitments, its alleviation may require the deep, spiritual modification of subjectivity. Moreover, a form of spirituality in which relationality is central and in which the substantiality of identity is undone would serve to forestall both the association of another with abjection and the egoic urge to separate from her or him.

Catherine Keller has impugned the anthropology of a separate self from a Whiteheadian perspective, even as she has posited that this fallacy is inextricable from sexism: "[S]eparation and sexism have functioned together as the most fundamental self-shaping assumptions of our culture. That any subject, human or non-human, is what it is only in clear division form everything else; and that men, by nature and by right, exercise the primary prerogatives of civilization: these two presuppositions collaborate like two eyes to sustain a single worldview."[466] The existential sense of one's separateness is deeply ingrained by a societal order whose inertia produces and requires the real illusion of subjective isolability and diachronic continuity. Overcoming the existential sense of separateness requires rigorous spiritual work. And such practice, in light of Keller's assertion, can be seen as a form of resistance to patriarchy. But the record of Zen also teaches us that spirituality, while necessary, is also insufficient, for enlightenment has not been ineluctably conjoined to a

[465] Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 145.
[466] Catherine Keller, *From a Broken Web: Separation, Sexism, and Self* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 2.

troubling of male mastery. A robust, rational ethic must be conjoined to transrational practices of self-overcoming.

Sarah Coakley has found centering prayer, a Christian version of meditation, to be an antidote to the will to power of the seemingly separate self. She has gained through this spiritual vehicle the ability to negotiate her spheres of influence with nondualistic wisdom: "[I]t is about a very subtle, and one might say *sui generis*, response to the divine allure that allows one to meet the ambiguous forms of 'worldly' power in a new dimension, neither decrying them *in se* nor being enslaved to them, but rather facing, embracing, resisting, or deflecting them with discernment."[467] Coakley illustrates how ego-attenuating spiritual formation can help someone inhabit the realms of fallenness judiciously without either diametrical resistance or idolatrous accommodation. Such nondualistic canniness, inspired by a spiritual retooling of one's subjectivity, is increasingly necessary in the Manichean sociopolitical culture of the United States, in which it has become tempting to unequivocally take a side, be insufficiently critical of the discursivity that bolsters one's group-conferred position, and unfairly dismiss the other.

In Coakley, spiritual practice ineluctably segues to a certain nuanced form of political commitment. The coincidence of mysticism and engagement is the theme of Dorothy Sölle's *The Silent Cry*. Sölle distances herself from the sort of spiritual practice that brackets a commitment to confront unjust structures, even as she sees in many forms of spirituality a praxis that readily conjoins with a resistance to oppressive principalities and powers. She finds in mysticism a definitive negation of the world as it exists in its present oppressive form and the invitation to remake the world so that it coincides with the divine will of justice for all: "But whether it be withdrawal, renunciation, disagreement, divergence, dissent, reform, resistance, rebellion, or revolution, in all of

[467] Sarah Coakley, *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy, and Gender* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), xviii.

these forms there is a No! to the world as it exists now."[468] She sees globalism and individualism as the twin evils of the new world order and focuses on Christian mysticism as an antidote. Zen, though, could be seen as addressing individualism and globalism quite pointedly: through Zen practice, one can disabuse oneself of the fiction of individuality even as one realizes a cosmic interconnectedness that impugns the constructed globalization that modernity has imposed upon the Earth. Moreover, in Zen, we have a thorough remaking of subjectivity so that it no longer operates in accordance with the devious trajectories of worldly power. However, Zen understands its liberation in terms that are too personalistic; it fails to see the great extent to which that which is impugned by Zen practice is not simply the province of the subject but the effect of the top-down causality of the emergent societal whole. Zen thinkers have thus not recognized how potentially subversive their tradition is and how, if it is conjoined with a theistically-infused commitment to justice, it might help to renovate not just particular subjects, but also cultural totalities.

Despite these various ways by which Buddhist spirituality can contribute to a more just social order, Zen consistently eschews explicit ethical instruction. It dispenses with the ethical in order to realize the incarnate reality towards which the ethical points. This is similar to what Kierkegaard calls the teleological suspension of the ethical, although it should be noted that for the great Dane, the ethical is suspended, not abrogated. In the Pauline tradition to which Kierkegaard adhered, one recognizes that explicit injunctions are coterminous with the sinful condition that one aspires to overcome, so by faith one accepts the divine grace that allows one to overcome the domain in which disobedience and law are conjoined and realizes a new, resurrected reality. In the terms of this project, inscribed ethics, while necessary, are an element of the disproportionate downward causality of the symbolic order and contribute considerably to the production of the

[468] Dorothee Soelle, *The Silent Cry: Mysticism and Resistance*, tr. Barbara and Martin Rumscheidt (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 3

illusion of a separate, substantial self. The ethical is constitutive of the egoism that is the foremost impediment to ethical living; overcoming fallenness must entail a transcendence of the ambivalent influence of inscribed morality. Christianity of course stresses faith and individuality, whereas Zen does not. But the commonality of relativizing the ethical to become ethical is in certain respects quite congruent.

Yet Christianity's soteriological accenting of the individual may entail too much retention of the ethical for a full liberation to be realized. "To breed an animal *with the right to make promises,*" wrote Nietzsche, "is not this the paradoxical task that nature has set itself in the case of man? Is it not the real problem regarding man?"[469] Recall that the symbolic order through which we are deeply formed is constructed on the primordial basis of exogamy. Is not the interfamilial arrangement of exogamy, with the concomitant incest prohibition, inconceivable apart from promises? Creatures who can promise are conceived as diachronically continuous, and their deeds are attributable to a perduring, ethically circumscribed subjectivity. The creature that can promise is *responsible.* The real illusion of substantial subjectivity, then, is inextricable from the ethical, so venturing beyond the latter's confines might entail a more definitive break with one's individuality than even Paul and Kierkegaard allow for.

However, there are indispensable advantages to the Jewish and Christian emphasis of the ethical and the personal. Indeed, modern social justice and liberation movements are deeply indebted to the identification of God with the Good and the Good with justice for the widow, orphan, and stranger. And Zen's unequivocal insistence on the rejection of the dichotomy of good and evil is, in certain respects, a serious shortcoming. Masao Abe, contrasting Zen with Christianity, writes, "[I]n Buddhism, the non-substantiality and emptiness of the notion of good and evil are

[469] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, tr. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale. In Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* and *Esse Homo*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), II.1.

clearly realized, and reification and substantialization of any sort are carefully rejected, whereas, in Christianity, the non-substantiality and emptiness of the notion of good are not categorically recognized due to Christianity's emphasis of divine justice. And, when the notion of good is absolutized, some reification and substantialization are inevitable."[470] But is not the unequivocal rejection of the substantial dualistic? If Sunyata is a process of dynamic emptying that even empties itself, as Abe consistently affirms, then does it make sense to insist absolutely upon Emptiness? And does not positing a realm that is completely nondualistic create a dichotomy between it and the ostensibly inferior and separate domain of twoness? Moreover, is it not possible to affirm God and the Good but qualify them in such a way that they are not unwarrantedly reified? Whitehead provides a model of a God who is constituted by alterity and lacking in aseity or independent self-being. And pursuit of the Good can recognize that the absolute is always *to come* and can only be realized in kenotic approximation.

In his contribution to *The Emptying God*, a compilation of Buddhist and Christian reflections on the relationship between Buddhist Emptiness, Christian kenosis, and Jewish conceptions of the divine, Masao Abe comments on the Holocaust from a Zen perspective.[471] He claims that it was rooted in a fundamental ignorance, in which he himself participates. Therefore, the Holocaust calls upon him, and us all, to deal with the *avidya* that, if it goes unchecked, can lead to all kinds of evils. He even rejects the recourse to justice, which he says leads to counter-judgment and conflict. Instead, he prefers to accent compassion and wisdom. One should realize the relationality and nonsubstantiality of the event and not reify it as an isolated entity. To substantialize any evil, he writes, is to lose one's view of it, induce attachment, and become ensnared in duality. This tendentious analysis makes Zen inattention to historical specificity, social justice, and particularity

[470] Masao Abe, *Zen and Comparative Studies*, ed. Steven Heine (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997), 48.
[471] See Masao Abe, "Kenotic God and Dynamic Sunyata," in John B. Cobb, Jr. and Christopher Ives (eds.), *The Emptying God: A Buddhist-Jewish-Christian Conversation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1990), 3-68.

glaringly obvious. It is woefully inadequate, particularly for someone whose country was allied with Nazi Germany, and, in a certain sense, it is quite unenlightened.

In his own essay in the same volume, John Cobb takes Abe to task. To quote Cobb, "A specific event requires specific explanation. Awareness of interconnectedness aids in this explanation, but it does not take its place."[472] He likens Abe's view to that of a certain kind of pietism that fantastically holds that all problems will be solved through the saving of souls. And he rightly sees that a Zen spirituality that is all-encompassing "leads its followers to be detached from concrete historical involvement in responding to such events as the Holocaust."[473] In contrast to Abe's overly spiritualized and generic assessment, Cobb cites specific New Testament passages and elements of U.S. policy that could have contributed to the Holocaust, even as he calls attention to the fact that Japanese Buddhists were for the most part complicit in their country's imperialism. In Cobb's deep pluralistic terms, Abe has become too enamored of Emptiness to adequately deal with those cosmic particulars that are dissolved by *pratittya-samupada* and the vastness of Nothingness. "[T]he movement to the Christian level from the ethical one deepens the sense of concrete particularity and historical responsibility. The movement to the Buddhist level in Abe seems to leave all this behind."[474]

Part of this attunement to particularity and a historically conscious ethic means recognizing the obvious fact that there are many forms of suffering that are not simply the result of spiritual blindness. There is an anthropological reductionism behind Zen myopia. Our spiritual selves are the emergent apex of our subjectivities. However, they include and do not negate our physicality, psychology, and sociality. In other words, spirit supervenes upon and therefore is deeply dependent on all these other aspects. To reduce soteriology to spirituality, therefore, neglects the emergent

[472] John B. Cobb, Jr., "On the Deepening of Buddhism," in Cobb and Ives (eds.), *The Emptying God*, 91-101, 93.
[473] Ibid.
[474] Ibid., 94.

structure of the person, elides that upon which spirituality depends, and fails to deal with all the sociopolitical ways in which fallenness is propagated and creaturely flourishing is impeded. As Gustavo Gutiérrez has written, "Our conversion process is affected by the socio-economic, political, cultural, and human environment in which it occurs. Without a change in these structures, there is no authentic conversion. We have to break with our mental categories, with the way we relate to others, with our way of identifying with the Lord, with our cultural milieu, with our social class, in other words, with all that can stand in the way of a real, profound solidarity with those who suffer, in the first place, from misery and injustice. Only thus, and not through purely interior and spiritual attitudes, will the 'new person' arise from the ashes of the 'old.'"[475] But Gutiérrez has tended to neglect the great extent to which the emergent spiritual dimension of the subject can exert downward causation on other constitutive aspects of the person. Without acknowledging the presence of spirit in every subject and its capacity to influence matter, mind, and sociality, we end up with either an elitist Maslowian hierarchy which holds that the oppressed don't have higher spiritual needs or a reductionistic materialism that refuses to recognize the work of God and the openings of Emptiness that occur in the midst of untoward conditions.

To embrace a soteriology that takes all these particulars into account, though, is often to move from the detached equanimity of Emptiness to the messiness of a commitment to align with the lure of God. Yet in the end, one does not have to completely wed oneself to one form of liberation. To every soteriology, there is an occasion, and standing behind both forms of deliverance are the two sources: the Godhead, or Emptiness, and God. To establish a non-foundationalist basis for the hybridity I am advocating, we must go now to these sources.

[475] Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, tr. and ed. Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988), 118.

The Two-Source Hypothesis

In 1838, Christian Hermann Weiss developed the now widely accepted two-source hypothesis to account for the way the gospels of Matthew and Luke to a great extent follow Mark but also have a significant amount of common material between them that is not in the latter. Weiss's solution was to posit that there are two prime sources behind Matthew and Luke: Mark and a no longer extant document of sayings of Jesus which Johannes Weiss named Q, from the German *Quelle*, meaning "source." Two sources: one of them Mark, the other Q. Mark is a galloping, parataxic march to the cross, in which the word *euthus*, "immediately," is used almost irritatingly frequently. This happens. Then *immediately* something else happens. Predicated on becoming, Mark hastens past the present towards the cruciform climax which, in the original text, is never completely resolved. Q, on the other hand, is more tranquilly pedagogical, yet still full of the disruption of parable. It does not hurry past the moment but dwells in a sophiological present which impugns given forms of iterative, culturally closed becoming. In Q what seems to be eschatological futurity is relevant in this instant; the already and the not-yet form a radical fusion. If Mark is focused on the particularity of what transpires, the Jesus of Q sees the big picture even as he tries to disrupt the prevailing mythical portraits that affirm the diurnal structure as it is. If you will allow me a bit of exegetical liberty, Mark's march is the Western commitment to progress and investment in historical particularity, whereas Q comes from a more Eastern big mind that can detach from the everyday and see the sort of grand patterns that impugn the episteme conferred by the dominant culture. Two sources, both offering a distinct and necessary vantage point. Mark reflects the divine investment in the granularity of haecceity and the particulars of diachrony. Q resonates with the transgressive detachment through which Emptiness is realized and one wakes up from the fictions of worldly discourse and conformist praxis.

In the vein of certain forms of Hinduism, Plato, Plotinus, Meister Eckhart, Schelling, Whitehead, and John Cobb, I want to assert that there are two sources to the cosmos: an Emptiness that is roughly analogous to Q and that ceaselessly but indifferently begets the All, and a God, represented by Mark, who diachronically lures the cosmos into increasing degrees of order, complexity, relationality, depth, and novelty. Within the cosmos, the encompassing stasis of space points to the Nothingness that is the beginning, while a temporality that is fragilely teleonomic, but not inevitably teleological, points to the God who is weakly strong and influentially directional.

As I have said, Christian theology and spirituality have tragically conflated these two sources, but with Meister Eckhart, there is the beginning of a recognition of their difference. The Godhead, the ultimate Source, is often described by Eckhart as being beyond God: "God and his Godhead are as different as heaven and earth. I will go still further: The inner and outer person are as different as heaven and earth. But God's distance from the Godhead is many thousand miles greater still."[476] There is a depth beyond God, distinct from God, that is analogous to the profound inwardness of the subject which contrasts with one's superficial presentation. This depth is precisely what Zen calls Sunyata. Suzuki has found the thought of Eckhart to be largely compatible with Zen Buddhism. Upon reading an Eckhart text, Suzuki remarked, "[T]he ideas expounded there closely approached Buddhist thoughts, so closely indeed, that one could stamp them almost definitely as coming out of Buddhist speculations. As far as I can judge, Eckhart seems to be an extraordinary 'Christian.'"[477] Commenting on Eckhart's key distinction, he writes,

> God goes and comes, he works, he is active, he becomes all the time, but Godhead remains immovable, imperturbable, inaccessible. The difference between God and Godhead is that between heaven and earth and yet Godhead cannot be himself without going out of himself, that is, he is he because he is not he. This 'contradiction' is comprehended only by the inner man, and not by the outer man, because the latter sees the world through the senses and

[476] Meister Eckhart, "Sermon Three: How Creatures Are God and How God Becomes Where Creatures Express Him," in *Breakthroughs: Meister Eckhart's Creation Spirituality in New Translation*, tr. Matthew Fox (NY: Doubleday, 1980), 75-82, 76.
[477] D.T. Suzuki, *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist* (NY: Routledge, 2002), 1-2.

intellect and consequently fails to experience the profound depths of Godhead.[478]

God is the Supreme Being who is always becoming, even as God lures the cosmos towards greater novelty and order and incorporates the elements of cosmic becoming within a mutably eternal self. In Catherine Keller's Whiteheadian terms, there is "a cosmic appetite for becoming, for beauty and intensity of experience." This divine desire is "a lure to our own becoming, a call to actualize the possibilities for greater beauty and intensity in our own lives."[479] God's invitation is a small bandwidth of the virtual. There is a gracious severity to the initial aim: it is the narrow gate that leads to the fullness of life but excludes many other options. There is something of the absoluteness of the Word of God in the lure, but if there is a discursive element to the aim, it is merely epiphenomenal. And the absoluteness pertains just to the specific event, so it cannot be absolutized as a proposition to be enforced and promulgated. To align with God is to celebrate the particular, have the freedom to become, and fight on behalf of those creatures whose particularity is neglected and whose becoming is stymied.

For every divine call, there is an absorbing response. God is an empath who incorporates cosmic events into Godself. Writes Keller, "The responsive love … can be called the *divine Agape*. The Eros *attracts, it calls*: it is the *invitation*. The Agape *responds* to whatever we have become; in com/passion it feels our feelings: it is the *reception*. They are different gestures of divine relationality – yet their motions are *in spirit* inseparable, in constant oscillation."[480] To align with such a God is to recognize God's trace in the face of the other and treat the other's suffering as one's own. One can not be free or just apart from such a commitment.

God's will, therefore, is persuasive and not coercive, and the divine mind is able to feel and incorporate the specifics of cosmic events in order to formulate ever new initial aims that are

[478] Ibid., 9.
[479] Catherine Keller, *On the Mystery: Discerning God in Process* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 99.
[480] Ibid.

attuned to the particularities of becoming. The judgment of God is internal to Godself[481]; it is the process of sifting through and evaluating the consequent influx and, from this process, formulating new, tailored initial aims. Moreover, as God is begotten by Emptiness and constituted by what transpires in each universe, God originates in dependent relationship with everything else and is permanently impermanent. God thereby lacks the self-being and stasis which would be incompatible with Buddhist metaphysics. There is therefore a weakness in divine strength which makes our pursuit of justice and freedom through the divine impetus necessarily cooperative.

If God is the Supreme Being who is always becoming, the Godhead, which is equivalent to Sunyata, is beyond the binary of being and becoming. It is both more transcendent and more immanent than God in that it is ineffably primal and profoundly difficult to access but also the matrix of the cosmos that nurtures the gestation of all forms. Eckhart's distinction between the Godhead and God is Neoplatonically rooted. Plotinus calls the Godhead, which for him is "the One," "a spring that has no source outside itself."[482] It is the One not because it can be likened to worldly forms of unity (and domination) but because it is nondual and simplex. Yet all that is manifold is funded by it. All that is, in fact, is indebted to its genesis. The One is both Emptiness and the Source of everything. The goal of Neoplatonism, as for Zen, was to return to this ineffable alpha. And one did this, as in Zen, by surpassing the intellect and realizing a depth within continuous with the ultimate. Such subjects have realized the freedom to be. Yet in both Neoplatonic and Zen iterations of spirituality, this freedom has not been sufficiently extended with a freedom to become and the pursuit of justice.

Moreover, in Plotinus, all is too tranquil. There is too much harmony in the Plotinian cosmos. The relationship between the Intellectual-Principle, the source of order and mind, and the

[481] If this sounds somewhat Barthian, so be it.
[482] Plotinus, *Enneads*, tr. Stephen MacKenna (NY: Penguin Books, 1991), VIII.1.10.

One is one of static mystical gazing. And all activity is described by Plotinus as being a weaker form of contemplation. Plotinus is all Mary and no Martha. I am reading Plotinus' One as the equivalent of Sunyata and the Godhead and his Intellectual-Principle as an insufficiently personal depiction of God. In this sense, Plotinus does help this theodicy-attuned complexification of origins. However, Plotinus' beginnings are too stable and serene. We need some chaos, as well as the personhood of an alluring God.

We are now in a position to make this Zen-Christian hybridity completely explicit, even as we gesture towards the complexity of the origin. Sunyata (or the Godhead or the One) is nondualistic but contains the seeds of duality. Its nonduality is a virtuality that tends to become two, but its virtuality is more real than what we take to be actual as we gaze upon a binarily coded world. Moreover, the pure twoness it engenders is impure; it is not unequivocally dichotomous but contains strong elements of hybridity. Emptiness is beyond the duality of order and chaos but primally engenders both order and chaos, even as order and chaos cannot strictly be pried apart. The order that Emptiness engenders is quintessentially ordinal: the source of order, the one who orders. And the one who orders is begotten concurrently with that which is far more than mere chaos; the Godhead eternally engenders, along with God, what Catherine Keller has called the deep. Yet this is not an unequivocal duality, for chaos inhabits God as a drive energy that renders God's creativity strongly semiotic; God is a poet, not a positivist. In complementary fashion, there is a capacity to become ordered and cooperate with the divine invitation in the chaotic deep; it is not simply molded by God, but also responds creatively to the divine lure and contributes thereby to the fragile formality of the chaosmos, in which a significant amount of unruliness is retained. The creativity of the Godhead is shared by God as the power to offer a shaping allurement and by the deep as the power to freely align with, and reject, the divine initiative. And the ubiquity of this creativity is both a source of freedom and a necessary component of justice.

Both God and Emptiness have their own lures. These invitations are distinct but can nonetheless converge. Moreover, each lure has a complement in the subject which seeks to discern and respond positively to the invitation of the ultimate. Freud spoke of Eros and Thanatos. Eros is the pull to pleasure, vitality, and union most manifest in sexual desire. The pursuit of pleasure is inextricably tied to novelty: "If a joke is heard for a second time it produces almost no effect; a theatrical production never creates so great an impression the second time as the first; indeed, it is hardly possible to persuade an adult who has very much enjoyed reading a good book to re-read it immediately. Novelty is always the condition of enjoyment."[483] Yet Freud found in many subjects a desire to repeat that often countered the pursuit of pleasure; not only did many of his patients resist the joy of the new by returning to the same, but much of their repetition was a revisitation of a source of pain. Both the recurrent, haunting, intrusive thoughts of those with obsessive-compulsive disorder and the disturbing flashbacks of those with post-traumatic stress disorder are obvious examples. Freud posited that there is a force in all living things that resists change and external influence and seeks to return to the inorganic state which preceded life: "*It seems, then, that an instinct is an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things* which the living entity has been obliged to abandon under the pressure of external disturbing forces; that is, it is a kind of organic elasticity, or, to put it another way, the expression of the inertia inherent in organic life."[484] Modification, growth, and development, he said, are the effect of the environment. The organism seeks repetition of the same and in such recurrence a fundamental stasis. This impetus is the death drive, a deep and abiding will in the organism to die on its own terms and thereby return to the inorganic state from which life emerged. Even the will to preserve life is subsumed beneath the overarching goal of Thanatos: "[The self-preservative instincts] are component instincts whose function it is to assure

[483] Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, in Peter Gay (tr. and ed.), *The Freud Reader* (NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 1989), 594-625, 611.
[484] Ibid., 612.

that the organism shall follow its own path to death, and to ward off any possible ways of returning to inorganic existence other than those which are immanent in the organism itself."[485]

Nietzsche also identified two fundamental forces in the cosmos: the Apollonian and the Dionysian. The former is paradigmatically the realm of dreams and is in Schopenhauerian terms representation as opposed to will. It is incarnated in the sculptor who gives discrete form to meaningless matter. Nietzsche also associates the Apollonian with rationality and laments the Socratic intensification which disproportionately privileged reason. In concert with the products of sculpture and the seeming independence of rationality, Apollo is "the glorious divine image of the *principium individuationis*."[486] The separate, perduring, essential self is the stuff of dreams. The Dionysian paradigm, on the other hand, is intoxication. In the Dionysian cult, partakers reached drug-induced pitches of ecstasy in which the experience of subjectivity as separate was dissolved and there was a primal union with each other and the earth. Writes Nietzsche

> Under the influence of the narcotic potion hymned by all primitive men and peoples, or in the powerful approach of spring, joyfully penetrating the whole of nature, those Dionysiac urges are awakened, and as they grow more intense, subjectivity becomes a complete forgetting of the self … Not only is the bond between man and man sealed by the Dionysiac magic: alienated, hostile, or subjugated nature, too, celebrates her reconciliation with her lost son, man.[487]

The Dionysian is born of the irrational will that precedes Apollonian representation. It is most manifest culturally in music, whose rhythms and movements, Schopenhauer believed, reflect the dynamics of will. The Dionysian shows the *principium individuationis* to be a mere construct even as it delivers a jouissance that identity forestalls.

There is too little pleasure in the Nietzschean Apollonian to identify it with Eros and too much pleasure in the Dionysian to identify it with Thanatos. But both Freud's and Nietzsche's

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[485] Ibid., 614.
[486] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, tr. Shaun Whiteside, ed. Michael Tanner (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 16.
[487] Ibid., 17.

dichotomies are fragile human attempts to name the fundamental energies of the cosmos as discerned by human subjects. There is fallenness in both efforts, and there is fallenness in the rudimentary impulses which they attempt to describe. I am concerned with articulating not the deformed instincts of humanity but those primordial and eschatological forces behind them that can align with the lures of God and Sunyata.

That within us which responds to God's initial aim is like Eros in that that which it is responding to is Eros-in-itself, and like is known by like. But Eros as Freud describes it is hypersexual and selfish, whereas that within which aligns with God's aim seeks joy more than sheer pleasure and emulates God by combining selfless Agape with Eros. Furthermore, this innate but concealed tendency, like Freud's Eros, seeks novelty and more expansive forms of vitality, and this is where the dynamics of emergent evolution coincide with the will of God. This impulse is also akin to the Apollonian. It seeks becoming in the realm of form and values particularity, subjectivity, and rationality. But it is not rationalistic; its reason is secondary to a more pneumatic and visceral discernment of the divine lure. Moreover, in contrast to Nietzsche's example, it has a strong moral sensibility which seeks the welfare of those creatures whose particularity is oppressed by cultural powers.

Our indwelling correspondent to the initial aim of Emptiness is, to an extent, like Thanatos. There is that within me which seeks detachment and wills that I die on my own terms. Yet it wills not to return to an inorganic state but to the Source of the All. And miraculously, through the forwardness of fallenness, the human creature can detach in such a way as to be more relationally connected to everything and die yet go on living. This impulse seeks, through what Zen calls the Great Death, the depth, peace, compassion, and insight of enlightenment. Thus, it militates against the sort of repetitions which characterize the death drive for Freud. It eschews acculturated habit yet seeks disciplines, like meditation, mindfulness, centering prayer, and yoga, whereby the subject might

overcome chronomormativity with Presence and be liberated from a culture of death into a new form of life. That within us which responds to the lure of Sunyata is also like the Dionysian. It seeks to dissolve the illusion of identity and unite with the Ground, and thereby, with all things. However, it avoids the intoxication and ecstasy which are always ephemeral and ensnare the subject even more in samsara. That of which I speak seeks not a fleeting release from cultural and subjective confines but a whole new realm of Being.

Yet fallen forms of these impulses usually reign, and the will of the subject thereby tends to fail to coincide with the liberating lures of God and Emptiness. Moreover, culture is full of seductive sirens that can readily drown out the subtle impulse within to align with what is ultimate. Furthermore, conformity to the strictures of a micro-symbolic readily silences that subversive drive to transcend oneself and one's cultural confines and realize a new way of becoming or being. Identifying with a power-knowledge apparatus leads to a fallacious assumption of the security of a temporal and tenuous framework, an overestimation of the repute and importance of one's subject position, a cathexis of insight-precluding discourse, and a readiness to internalize the fallen agendas of the group mind. One can easily get a false sense of security from the in-group sense of superiority and consensus-dependent love that circulates among the likeminded, as the master signifier represents one conforming, alienated subject for another master signifier. Increasingly one's decisions are predicated on the ethico-epistemic framework of the group, and one thereby becomes blind to those common ethical failures which characterize the majority of the kowtowing members and are not addressed by its truncated, clannish code.

To lose oneself in a micro-symbolic is to be secondary to an emergent superject running a manipulating regime and utilizing a discourse that founds one as its minion. Writes Lacan, "Founding speech, which envelops the subject, is everything that has constituted him, his parents, his neighbors, the whole structure of the community, and not only constituted him as symbol, but

constituted him in his being."[488] To be sure, there is no such thing as an utter avoidance of founding speech. But when I am constituted by elements of incompatible language games (Lyotard's postmodernity) and arenas with divergent ultimate concerns (Weber's modernity), the founding is far less determinative and more readily transcended. Yet a consolidation of influence yields reifying subjectification and severe subservience. When the language games are homologous, one is in lockstep union with a proximal set of likeminded others, and the integral movements of one's thoughts and actions are conducted insidiously by the unseen channels that extend centrifugally from interlocking institutions, one is likely to have become the plaything of the phallically penetrating, unifying, and reproductive tentacles of a superorganism. As a servant of the superject, I trade my humanity for a synthetic, symbolic saturation and labor willingly and often remuneratively as the slavish corporeal member of an ego-dominated, emergent superorganism. In the process, I lose touch with those subtle inner forces which seek a Reality which is not simply circumscribed by the Other, subsequent to the signifier, and caught up in the fallen flows of a potently personal but dehumanizing dominion that engenders, utilizes and greatly exceeds my subjectivity.

Because the wills to coincide with God or Emptiness are so readily obscured by indwelling, culturally conferred occlusions, they often only surface following the irruption of the chaotic deep. As I emphasized in my discussion of the koān, transformation requires disruption. Heidegger writes of a worker in a shop whose tool becomes damaged. This interruption, far from being merely annoying, is illuminating:

> But *when an assignment has been disturbed* – when something is unusable for some purpose – then the assignment becomes explicit. Even now, of course, it has not become explicit as an ontological structure; but it has become explicit ontically for the circumspection which comes up against the damaging of the tool. When an assignment to some particular 'towards-this' has been thus circumspectively aroused, we catch sight of the 'towards-this' itself, and along with it everything connected with the work – the whole 'workshop' – as that wherein concern always dwells. The context of equipment is lit up, not as something never

[488] Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954-1955*, 20.

> seen before, but as a totality constantly sighted beforehand in circumspection. With this totality, however, the world announces itself. [489]

The brokenness of the tool causes the worker to step back and take account of the whole relationally teleonomic framework in which his labor is situated. A setting is seen, and beyond that, a whole world. Similarly, if a tool is missing, the worker must take account in a new way of its connection to other instruments, and by extension with the whole process itself: "The environment announces itself afresh."[490] In one instance, a broken thing is epistemically unveiling. In another instance, the lack of a thing opens one's eyes. Let us take the first example, predicated on a damaged *ontos*, as the sort of suffering that attunes one to the call of the God of particulars and the second, predicated on the lack of the entity, as the kind of problem that uncovers Emptiness. Disruption unearths the buried wills that lead to the twin sources. Rays from each respective Source light up the cosmos in different ways, the first as a site of seemingly infinite but singularly invaluable particulars, including all of us broken humans who need the transcending grace of Emptiness, God, and each other, the second as a vast field of dependently originating nonentities undergirded by a Groundless Ground with which one is utterly coterminous.

There is thus a degree of mutual exclusivity in these forms of attunement; usually, one cannot heed the call of God and respond to the will to empty oneself at the same time. Both are different forms of *alētheia*, or uncovering, that entail a residual concealment. Karl Barth, drawing on Heidegger, wrote, "The truth is, however, that God veils Himself and that in so doing – that is why we must not try to intrude into the mystery – He unveils himself."[491] I would add that not only does God occlude aspects of Godself when God reveals Godself, but also that God also elides Sunyata.

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[489] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, tr. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (NY: Harper & Row, 2008), I.3.16.
[490] Ibid.
[491] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics, Volume 1: The Doctrine of the Word of God, Part 1*, I.1.5.4.

Likewise, when Sunyata is disclosed, God is hidden, and, on this side of enlightenment, Sunyata itself remains mostly concealed.

Nevertheless, there is a point at which the two lures, that of God and that of Sunyata, come together. And this point is far from peripheral; it lies at the soteriological center of both subject-remaking powers. Both the Buddha and Jesus insisted, in different ways, to be sure, that one must die in order to live. The problem with the Christian version of this is that God is constrained to affirm vitality and the particular and thereby incapable by Godself of eliciting regeneration. If we take the pairing of crucifixion and resurrection as a paradigmatic expression of regeneration, the God who wills the expansion of the subject cannot facilitate the first. This is perhaps why the cross has been seen by Bonhoeffer and radical theologians as a site of divine absence. To die to self is to pass beyond God into Emptiness and unite with That which ceaselessly begets God but from which God is constantly estranged.

Zen, on the other hand, has mastered the art of dying to self, yet its adepts have failed to recognize that Sunyata is not the only ultimate. And though Masao Abe has called Sunyata a dynamic process whereby even Emptiness is emptied, most enlightened Buddhists have failed to realize a fully resurrected renewal. Just as importantly, they have not sufficiently invested in the symbolic order and participated in an enlightened ethics and politics that cooperate with the marginalized to help the latter realize a freedom that is political as well as personal. Just as Christians need Zen in order to realize the empty fullness of dying to self, Zen Buddhists need the vision of the Hebrew prophets and the Pauline concept of the new creation, wherein transformation is not simply personal but extends throughout the whole Earth even as it remakes human society in accordance with God's will of justice and freedom for all sentient beings.

Lacan gave us the framework of the Real, symbolic, and imaginary orders. We might say that the three ultimates, God, Emptiness, and the Cosmos, in their triune *immanence* constitute the Real in

and for itself. Moreover, the immaterial ligamentality of *pratitya-samutpada*, the dependent origination of all things, is the "sinthome" that holds the Barromean knot of the All together. Yet these three dimensions encounter us *economically* as if in analogy to the full range of the Lacanian registers: Sunyata is aligned with the Real, God with the symbolic, and the Cosmos with the imaginary. Emptiness, like Lacan's Real, is beyond description and can be "named" only obliquely and apophatically. God is the Supreme Being who is best approached through analogy. The divine lure is a transrational word that seeks our cooperation in realizing new forms of flourishing. Implied in the tacit divine call to novelty is the imperative to become other. Yet one cannot do so utterly without passing beyond the word and uniting with the Groundless Ground of Emptiness. Likewise, one cannot fully contribute to extending the reach of enlightenment, freedom, and justice to all quarters of this planet without the intellectual and cultural investment and pursuit of the Good to come that issue from alignment with the God of symbolic affinity. Accordance with God illuminates a world of particulars, each with immeasurable haecceitic value. Sunyata shows the things of the world to be so interconnected and ephemeral as to be devoid of substantiality altogether. And somehow both these perspectives are profoundly and paradoxically, if not contemporaneously, compatible. There are also traditions—indigenous, Taoist, Romantic—that may realize direct attunement with the Cosmos, apart from the epistemic mediation of God or Emptiness. Yet such Earth-embracing vision may at least in part funded by a source that is unnamed. The Cosmos is laden with mystery and sacredness. Ubiquitously lacking are subjects whose vision is uncluttered by distorting projection. But seeing is not enough. The one who removes the log from her own eye is optically, noetically, and practically primed to act efficaciously and redemptively in pursuing justice and freedom for all.