

In order to explain deconstruction's "surplus of responsibility," this essay reformulates Freud's account of psychic integrity in terms of a subject that is constitutively split and yet compelled, categorically, to cohere. Freudian psychoanalysis thereby provides a quasi-legitimate account of the responsibility to render reason that deconstruction relentlessly pursues.

Why *Must I*? A Freudian Response to the Question of Ethical-Political Responsibility

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When Immanuel Kant first made the argument that moral values can be determined rationally on the basis of the pure use of (practical) reason, he clearly linked ethics to the same conception of reason on which modern epistemology depends. Not surprisingly, therefore, the contemporary insight that there is no universal subject whose "truth" can be determined absolutely has radically undermined the grounds of ethical-political responsibility and the possibility of legitimate, normative critique. In other words, the argument that representations of almost any kind of "truth" are contingent (historically, culturally, racially, in respect of gender or class, etc.)—and, hence, are to some extent implicated in ideology, opinion, and injustice—has left many scholars worried that the moral values founded upon them are only relative. This, in turn, seems recently to have led to the conclusion that, in order to combat relativism (or nihilism), it is necessary to reconsider *pre*-modern sources of ethical legitimacy such as religion; such sources are increasingly being offered as "post-secular" understandings of morality.

Yet in contrast to both the worry and its purported solution, Derrida himself always insisted on the “surplus of responsibility” that deconstruction entails, and he always remained at least ambivalent (if arguably less so in his later years) about the philosophical integrity of such religious justifications as Levinasian ethics, for example, for deconstruction’s supposed imperative. In particular, Derrida’s reading of Levinas, most notably in “Violence and Metaphysics,” contests the hasty embrace of Levinasian ethics by those who would turn *to Derrida* for a new way to think about responsibility and justice. For while there is no doubt that Derrida desired and wrote profoundly about ethics, responsibility, and justice (“Force of Law”), it is not clear—if we read his own relation to Levinas with care (see Hägglund)—that he ultimately answered the challenge he so admirably posed.

That challenge is this: if, on the one hand, the question of ethical–political responsibility is *not* simply said to end in deconstruction, and if, on the other hand, it is not plausibly answered *either* with recourse to the philosophical discourse of modernity, *or* by an appeal to the religious discourses of either pre- or post-modernity, then how is deconstruction’s “surplus of responsibility” to be understood? In this essay, I turn to Freud to answer the question that Derrida’s work provokes: what is deconstruction’s ethical–political force? My argument is that the responsibility at issue in deconstruction is still a responsibility to reason, albeit a paradoxical one, and that such an imperative—and, hence, the possibility of moral and political legitimacy more broadly—is best explained through a Freudian understanding of psychic integrity.

This is a reading of Freud *après la lettre*, however; it follows Derrida in at least three respects. First, I draw on the Freudian analysis to answer the question Derridean deconstruction poses with respect to responsibility. I propose that the legitimacy of ethico–political critique hinges neither on a transcendental subject that grounds itself, as per Kant, nor on a radically humbled subject that is constituted in the ordinary religious relation described by Levinas. Rather, moral and political legitimacy issues from a *decentred* subject, one that *takes the form* of unified ego (an *Ich*, or an *I*), but that never fully constitutes itself, and is never fully constituted, as such. Responsibility—the ability and the impulse to respond by giving a moral account—is thus essentially tied to a psychic imperative to maintain an impossible form, to continue to battle against a threat of incoherence that menaces constantly. Seen from this point of view, the so-called “responsibility” that impels a deconstructive, political critique emerges as an outcome of commitments that are strictly psychic, rather than moral, in character. Thus the ethical and political agent that the Freudian text ultimately depicts qualifies only as *quasi*-responsible, not as transcendently grounded.

Second, this Freudian account of responsibility also follows Derrida in the sense that the moral subject cannot be taken as universal or transcendental in nature, nor can it be seen as internally coherent. For, after Derrida, subjectivity must be understood as socially and historically contingent. Consequently, any moral commitment that is considered legitimate nevertheless depends upon the reproduction of a particular social subject that is, in turn, ultimately unjustifiable in any strict sense. And third, the Freudian analysis I present in what follows is post-Derridean in the sense that it takes the deconstructive turn as read; no attempt is made here to cover over, reconcile, or otherwise occlude the unmistakable and ultimately ineradicable aporias and paradoxes of Freud's own thought. On the contrary, it is precisely through a careful attention to these very paradoxes, I argue—through the revelation of the subject's "differential" structure as it issues from the Freudian text itself—that an account of an ethical "must" can be delineated at all. I begin with an elaboration of the Derridean problematic before proceeding to the Freudian account.

In one of his many treatments of Freud, *Resistances to Psychoanalysis*, Derrida announces that he always resisted analytic attempts to render sense and meaning to what remains. He did so, he says, in response to what he experienced as a *necessity*, a demand to *take into account* "the phenomena of anomaly, accident, the marginal and the parasitic," as well as "what resists analysis as psychoanalysis" (*Resistances* 34). And he did so by analyzing tirelessly, hyperbolically, the resistance that "clings to" all attempts to "reappropriate, retribute, or reconstitute the social bond, most often [...] by renaturalizing it" (35). In this sense, deconstruction is, as it were, a kind of non-resistance, one that takes the form of a *certain* analysis, whereby the stakes of analysis are raised, and resistance(s) are multiplied. For if psychoanalysis is a resistance to—an analysis *of*—the ego's resistance to analysis, deconstruction would be a resistance to the (psychoanalytic) resistance to resistance. More specifically, in resisting *analysis*, deconstruction puts into play the aporetic question of the reason for reason itself; it brings to light, so to speak, the problem that reason cannot account for its own desire for light. In other words, deconstruction leads inexorably to the question of desire, that is, to what Peggy Kamuf has aptly characterized as "the very order of the unjustifiable" ("Preface" xi), the order of the lawless, non-essential essence of reason.

If the imperative to render reason (to analyze) is thereby displaced in Derrida's radicalization of analysis, however, it is never renounced altogether. For, most importantly, what Derrida calls "the analytic concern" is the desire to "render reason from meaning by posing questions about the origin, by returning to the elementary, by breaking things down and deriving" (*Resistances* 35). Immediately, then, there is a double bind: once

one puts the analytic concern *itself* into question, the desire for reason can be neither uncritically embraced nor renounced. “*One must*,” as Derrida says, “analyze the ‘one must’ of analytic desire” to “attain a primitive, proper, or elementary simplicity that would be by rights the sole and the true point of departure, the sole legitimate beginning” (36). But “to analyze such a desire [for origins] does not mean to renounce its law” (36), as he says; it is not to forego the principle of reason, which one must also take into account. Thus Derrida’s non-resistance to analysis, the deconstruction of the psychoanalytic drive to untie, solve, and dissolve the knots of resistance, shares with psychoanalysis the impossibility of renouncing the very *form* of analysis it resists, and thus finds itself compelled to account for itself as well.

To be sure, Derrida clearly acknowledges this demand, but an adequate response to it arguably remains lacking. “What *drives* [*pousse*] deconstruction to analyze without respite,” he writes, “what resembles there the drive and the pulse of its own movement, a *rhythmic compulsion to track the desire for simple and self-present originarity* [. . .] drives it to raise the analytistic and transcendental stakes. [. . .] For [. . .] it was necessary to accede, in a still more radical, more analytic fashion, to the traditional demand [. . .]: whence all the impossible [quasi-] concepts—*above all, a donating affirmation that remains the ultimate unknown for the analysis that it nevertheless puts in motion*” (*Resistances* 29; first emph. Derrida’s). An “ultimate unknown,” then, there at the non-origin of deconstruction’s pulse, its drive, its compulsion. An ultimate unknown, there at the non-simple origin of every analysis, of every analytic exigency. Thus a hyperbolic responsibility is not only one which cannot be contained by the protocols of reason that set it in motion; beyond this, these protocols (of hyperbolic reason, of a certain analysis) are themselves, in turn, the effect of a cause that is no cause: “*a donating affirmation that remains the ultimate unknown*” (29). Yet let us recall that what we are talking about is the desire (the compulsion, Derrida says) to track the desire for origins. A hyperbolicism of analysis to be sure, but not a renunciation of analysis (of its traditional concept, of its desire), nor is it a rejection of reason. On the contrary, it is more than ever subject to that exigency. And therefore analytic hyperbolicism is not an alibi for the abdication of the responsibility to account for the exigency to render the reason for it, to answer to the paradox of the double bind.

It is true that Derrida says that “deconstruction begins only with a *resistance* to [the] double motif [of all analysis],” namely, archeology and eschatology, for “what is put in question by its work is [. . .] the possibility of recapturing the originary” (*Resistances* 27; emph. mine). But it does not follow from this that deconstruction, as he says, thereby puts into question “also the *desire to do so* or the phantasm of doing so” (27, emph. mine)? For, if deconstruction leads to the inexorable discovery that

there *is* no origin—that there is, rather, a gap, a mystery, a secret right *there*, there where the origin should or would be—this is no more and no less than the outcome of the same analytic exigency that drives analysis in general. It is an exigency which, if rigorously pursued, leads to the displacement of the centre, of the origin, of the essence or the presence of the simple, but it is *the* analytic exigency nonetheless. Indeed, what is the “compulsion to *track* the desire” for an origin if not itself a response to the principle of reason, which states that for everything there must be a reason (reason must be rendered), including for reason itself? In short, if deconstruction itself “undeniably obeys an *analytic* exigency,” as Derrida says, and is therefore “at once critical and analytic” (27)—and is in this sense driven by a “hyperbolic” responsibility—then one must also analyze, in turn, this hyperbolic responsibility itself. No matter how many turns around the spiral of abstraction we take, we will still be compelled to undertake a certain analysis, a hyperbolic analysis, but an analysis nonetheless of the subject of this imperative, the locus of this “must.”

Such an analysis and the responsibility that attends it is thus hyperbolic in a precise sense: it exceeds the authority from which it issues. For any analysis that seeks to account for the desire for simple and self-present originarity puts into question the very responsibility it simultaneously enacts. Here, with the recursive move of turning responsibility back upon itself, a constitutive *undecidability*—an ultimate limit with respect to our capacity to render an absolute distinction between the responsible subject and its analytical objects—emerges as irreducible. Kamuf illustrates this point lucidly. She writes, “It is here, within this circle [of the legitimated figure of legitimacy], that the question of a destination *not already comprised* by the space of legitimated knowledge arises. But how can that question arise *within* the circle? Unless an opening has been left, a space wherein the auto- or the self- of destination *dis-closes* itself? Unless the dis-closure of the circle opens up a space that is neither within the legitimated domain nor simply outside it, but along the edge where the two divide?” (“Going Public” 102; original emph.). By the same token, the “I” that asks itself “Why *must* I?” “dis-closes itself” “along its unfigurable edge” (“Going Public” 103). This paradox emerges directly from the question the subject poses recursively to itself to account for its own responsibility. Hyperbolic responsibility is thus indeed caught in the “stricture” of the double bind Derrida describes, whereby “one can only unbind one of its knots by pulling on the other one to make it tighter” (*Resistances* 36).

With this difficulty in view, I want to pose the following question: where does this desire for an origin—or, raising the stakes, this desire to track the desire for an origin—come from? Whence the *necessity*, the demand to take into account or to render an account? The question itself is of course implicated in the same double bind: “one must

analyze the ‘one must’ of analytic desire” (*Resistances* 36) without renouncing its law. To endure the double bind with respect to *this* question, however, is at least to give the possibility of asking it, and even the possibility of displacing it. It means that one must return to the desire for reason to trace its source, even while one “cannot *not* give in to the necessity and the affirmation,” as Derrida says (28) of, in this case, the discovery that there is no pure conscience or origin or elemental cause of responsibility as such.

In the face of this dilemma, Derrida’s proposal to attribute deconstruction’s drive to “a donating affirmation that remains the ultimate unknown”—or, as he puts it elsewhere, to an “incalculable and giving (*donatrice*) idea of justice” (“Force of Law” 28)—misses the point. For this is to *replace* the possibility of a simple element or origin with a non-simple, un-rooted, ineffable (non)originaryity that impels from without, rather than to *displace* that very distinction. The responsibility of responsibility is not an ineffable *thing*; it is the effect of an “unfigurable edge,” whereby the subject *dis-closes* itself as soon as it seeks to render an account of (to *close*) itself. This means that the originary element of responsibility is no more an *indeterminate, non-thing over there* (ultimate unknown) than it is a *determined, identifiable self-presence over here* (a cognizable object); rather, the responsibility of responsibility remains beyond hermeneutic reason for all the reasons Derrida provides regarding his own quasi-concepts (*Resistances* 30). As he says, “it is because there is no indivisible element or simple origin that analysis is interminable” (*Resistances* 34); above all, it is because the subject of responsibility is infinitely divisible, because it is not *one*. And the infinite divisibility of this subject is nowhere more apparent than in the crevices, paradoxes, and margins of the Freudian text, insofar as Freud’s own attempt to theorize the origins of the “I” illuminates the way in which the subject’s desire for closure is inextricably linked to the inevitability of its own *dis-closure*. I turn next, therefore, to Freud’s account of the genesis of the ego.

Freud’s theorization of the self or the “I” (*Ich*) to which responsibility accrues is actually quite baffling, for he describes two separate yet inextricably entwined developmental trajectories. They are what I will call the “narcissism” trajectory and the “melancholic” trajectory of egoic development. Read together, they indicate an impossible splitting at the origin of the subject, and an absolutely untenable distinction (on which the Freudian account of egoic coherence nonetheless depends) between the subject and the object of responsibility.

Which comes first: the cathexis of the *self*, the primary narcissistic investment, which is eventually parceled out to the others (from in here to out there), without which

no attachment, or even a sexual object, is possible at all? Or is it the internalization of the paternal other (from out there to in here) and, thus, the constitution of the ego (and the superego) from without, through a melancholic process of identification? Is it the narcissistic desire for egoic unity and intelligibility, or is it the melancholic production of a “sadistic” superego that is intent on hammering the “I” at every turn? These chiasmatic relationships, between the ego’s inside and its outside and between the subject and the object of libidinal cathexis, are instructive. For these paradoxes, rather than Freud’s own explication of conscience, lead to the insight that while the “I” is essentially bound to reason’s imperative, it is constitutively incapable of fulfilling that demand. This double-bind that constrains the subject at the level of its desire, I submit, captures perfectly the imperative of deconstruction to which Derrida constantly refers.

Let us follow Freud. On the “narcissistic” account, the “I” is said to emerge (as *Ich*, an ego) strictly as a consequence of the biological instinct for self-preservation. Specifically, the ego purportedly develops as a consequence of the need to distinguish between real and hallucinated satisfactions. This need arises when, Freud explains, the hallucinated correspondence between a need and its satisfaction results in disappointment and the unwelcome increase of tension, which Freud first defines as unpleasure in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (V: 598), and on which he elaborates in his “Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning” (XII: 219). For insofar as the satisfaction of a vital need is merely *imagined*, the experience is a “bitter” one, and this provokes the development of a second system, that of consciousness, which replaces the hallucination with a thought (V: 566). The task of this secondary system, Freud explains in “Two Principles,” is to bind the energy issuing from the primary system by connecting it with “verbal residues,” thereby making “thinking” “perceptible to consciousness” (XII: 221). Freud writes, “a new functioning was thus introduced; what was presented in the mind was no longer what was agreeable but what was real, even if it happened to be disagreeable. This setting up of a *reality principle* proved to be a momentous step,” for it inaugurated the possibility of ego development, while simultaneously ensuring the preservation of the biological organism (XII: 219).

Yet if the ego (“I”) is at this stage of Freud’s thinking no more than a border or surface between the psychical apparatus and the external world—a “surface entity,” as he says in *The Ego and the Id* (XIX: 26), or a “crust” that has been so “baked through” by stimulation that it would present the most favourable possible conditions for the reception of stimuli and become incapable of any further stimulation,” as he says in “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” (XVIII: 26)¹—the ego is *also* “itself the projection of a surface” (XIX: 26). It is both a “coherent organization of mental processes” (XIX: 17), a unity, *and* that which unifies, that which originates in an “impulsion to bind

together and unify” (XX: 98) or, as he says elsewhere, that which exerts a “logical force” (IV: 55). The ego is thus ambiguous in nature; while it may in one sense be no more than a border between psychical and empirical “reality,” it can also present *itself* as a possible object of cathexis insofar as it takes the form of a representation.

The latter hypothesis is put forward, but never fully explained, in the essay “On Narcissism.” Here Freud argues that there is an original cathexis of (or libidinal investment in) the ego, an ego *drive* (XIV: 75), as it were, which is initially indistinguishable from the (vital) instincts of self-preservation (XIV: 73–74), but which is ultimately related to the later developments of conscience and self-regard (XIII: 96). In this process, the ego takes itself as its own object, idealizes itself in the form of an “ideal ego” against which the “self” (*Ich*) is later judged, and only *thereby* becomes a coherent agency capable of relating to others in a healthy, non-pathological (non-“narcissistic”) way.² Narcissistic ego-libido, it emerges, is thus not a “perversion” at all; it is, rather, “the libidinal complement to the egoism of the instinct for self-preservation, a measure of which may be found in every living creature” (XIV: 73–74). As Freud writes, “we form the idea of there being *an original libidinal cathexis of the ego*, from which some is later given off to objects, but which fundamentally persists and is related to object-cathexis much as the body of an amoeba is related to the pseudopodia which it puts out” (XIV: 75; see also VII: 218; XIV: 306; XVII: 139; XVIII: 112; and XXI: 118).

Yet just what kind of object is the ego supposed to be, and how does it transition from a psychical border to an object worthy of investment? The theory of narcissism fails to clarify these questions. If narcissism is primary, prior to, and necessary *for* object cathexis, then whence the concept or experience of an objectified “self”? In order to idealize itself (its “self” as *such*), the organism must already have formed some kind of representation *of* itself, however rudimentary. As Jean Laplanche clarifies, “We are thus led to admit the existence of an identity that is both extremely early and probably also extremely sketchy in its initial phase, *an identification with a form conceived as a limit*, or a sack: a sack of skin” (81, *emph. mine*) or, alternatively, as “a *network* of cathected neurons”—a kind of *Gestalt*, or *form* (62; *emph. mine*). Similarly, Karyn Ball proposes that Freud’s argument in the “Narcissism” essay is “suggestive, because it anticipates an understanding of the ego *as the object of a fantasy of unity*” (169; *emph. mine*).

Jacques Lacan’s notion of the mirror stage is particularly helpful in this regard, as Laplanche remarks, because it helps to fill this gap (81). Briefly put, Lacan proposes that between six and eighteen months the infant interiorizes an image of itself as a unified form, notwithstanding the infant’s physical experience of disunity. As Lacan elaborates, “The jubilant assumption [*assomption*] of his specular image by the kind

of being—still trapped in his motor impotence and nursling dependence—the little man is at the *infans* stage thus seems to me 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” (qtd. in Laplanche 76). Significantly, this developmental moment does not depend on an actual visual experience or on the material presence of a mirror. As Laplanche clarifies, “The scenario of the child at the mirror is only the index of something that occurs, in any event, without that apparatus: the recognition of the *form* of another human and the concomitant precipitation within the individual of a first *outline of that form*” (81; *emph. mine*). Thus the narcissistically–cathected ego is to begin with no more than a mere form of unity and, more significant than this, this form is given from without.

Contra Lacan, however, it does not seem possible to argue that the ego can be a *pre*-linguistic form. In other words, the Freudian text makes it more difficult than the passage above would suggest to distinguish sharply between the imago of a unified form that is prior to objectification in language, and the subsequent linguistic assumption of the “I” which is said (inexplicably) to “restore” the infant’s subjectivity. For, as I explained earlier, cathexis entails the binding of energy in the form of a representation that is presented in *words*. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, for example, Freud explains that while the “primary process endeavors to bring about a discharge of excitation in order that [. . .] it may establish a ‘perceptual identity’ [with the experience of satisfaction],” the secondary process abandons “this intention and [takes] on another in its place—the establishment of a ‘thought identity’ [with that experience]” (V: 602). And thinking itself, Freud insists, is essentially linguistic in nature (XII: 221).³ As he further clarifies in “The Unconscious,” “by being linked with words, cathexes can be provided with quality even when they represent only *relations* between presentations of objects and are thus unable to derive any quality from perceptions. Such relations, which become comprehensible only through words, form a major part of our thought–processes” (XIV: 202). Thus, as Samuel Weber explains, the task of the secondary process is to undertake a “process of ‘binding,’ by which mental energy is ‘attached’ to representations” (*Legend* 37). The idea is spelled out in “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” in which Freud reiterates that “one of the earliest and most important functions of the mental apparatus is to bind the instinctual impulses which impinge on it, to replace the primary process prevailing in them by the secondary process and convert their freely mobile cathetic energy into a mainly quiescent (tonic) cathexis” (XVIII: 62).

Significantly, therefore, the process of binding through which the ego is constituted and consolidated as the projection of a form depends upon the acquisition of language

because the secondary process only achieves its purpose by replacing a thing–representation with a word–representation (see Weber, *Legend* 44), and word representations are essential to the conscious thought–processes of the secondary system. Once this is understood, it becomes clearer just what kind of idealized object this rudimentary ego is: it is essentially a purely formal *concept*; that is to say, the originary “I” in which narcissistic libido is invested is essentially an *idea* of unity—indeed, it is the ideal of the purely logical coherence of form. Insofar as the ego is an object of narcissistic love, in other words, what is “overvaluated” is an ideal unity that coheres, and which persists by virtue of the self–preservative drive to maintain its coherence and its unity as such. This coherent form is what constitutes the “ideal ego,” against which the ego is judged, and upon which the individual expends such efforts of maintenance and preservation. For, most importantly, the ego drive is initially identical with the self–preservative drives; the ideal ego is initially identified as part and parcel of the individual’s vital life. As Freud says, “To the ego, therefore, living means the same as being loved by the superego” (XIX: 58), and this in turn means corresponding with its unitary ideal.

This point comes across especially clearly when Freud transposes his analysis of the individual psyche onto that of the social group as a whole. In order to exist, Freud explains in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, the group must entail continuity of either a material or a systemic (structural) sort, and it must have a “definite idea [. . .] of [its] nature, composition, function and capacities”; it must also be able to interact with other similar but differing groups, and it must “possess traditions, customs and habits, and especially such as determine the relations of its members to one another” (XVIII: 86). Modifying these requirements of McDougall’s somewhat, Freud goes on to argue that what holds a group together is the “illusion [. . .] of there being a head—in the Catholic Church Christ, in an army its Commander-in-Chief—who loves all the individuals in the group with an equal love” (XVIII: 94). Thus, Freud theorizes, “the essence of a group lies in the libidinal ties existing in it” and this is nowhere more obvious than in the case of panic. “A panic arises,” he writes, “if a group of that kind becomes disintegrated” (XVIII: 95–96). In other words, the survival of the entity as an entity, its potential coherence, is tied directly to its libidinal investment in a figure that embodies a superegoic ideal.

Significantly, moreover, what is true for the group is equally true for the individual: “In the undisguised antipathies and aversions which people feel towards strangers with whom they have to do we may recognize the expression of self–love—of narcissism. This self–love works for the preservation of the individual, and behaves as though the occurrence of any divergence from his own particular lines of development involved a criticism of them and a demand for their alteration” (XVIII: 102). In

short, the individual ego (no less than the group) fears its own dissolution—indeed, it is panic-stricken or made anxious by that threat—and thus goes to great lengths to maintain its own integrity, especially in the face of difference or outright contradiction. Now if the ideal ego is, before anything else, essentially a logically coherent form, its maintenance will require that it can offer an account of itself—in particular, that differences or divisions within the ego are rejected or expelled, that self-contradictions are disavowed or resolved, and that the questions of its origins and its impulses are determined.

Finally, given that the ego is initially no more than a figure of speech, so to speak, an element of language through which the “I” is represented as an organization, the *method* of its preservation becomes clearer as well. In effect, Freud’s theory of narcissism would seem to lead to the conclusion that it is only through the discursive performance of the self, the repetition of the signifier “I,” that a simulacrum of identity is achieved. I borrow the term “simulacrum” for this purpose from Weber, who uses it specifically to explain the link between language and subjectivity. With reference to the paradox Rousseau describes in the *Social Contract*—that the entity of the “people” required to institute the law can only be its retroactive effect—Weber explains that what is required is “metaleptic sleight of hand” (“Name” 251). This linguistic operation, he continues, “is nothing other than the *recitation of a proper name* as the translation of an anonymous other, in which origin and end, individual and general converge in a ‘simulacrum’ of identity” (“Name” 251). Derek Sayer makes a virtually identical point when he argues that one can only know oneself as a self that is primary or *first*, as an ego, insofar as one loses oneself in the simulacrum of the “I,” which is to say, in an “act of objectification” or “primordial estrangement” (68). Quoting Lacan, Sayer continues: “I identify in language, but only by losing myself in it like an object? Not that this I, *qua* subject, could ever have had any choice in the matter. [. . .] It is not that there was an already existent I who decided to enter language, an original self that was ever there to lose. The subject is only created in this act [. . .]. It is found(ed) [. . .] in this original loss” (68).

So understood, the ego is a unit or form of bound psychic energy, which serves on one hand to resist or channel what Freud calls the “freely mobile” energy of the unconscious—to either repress or sublimate it, in effect—and which on the other hand *itself* embodies a libidinal investment, by virtue of which one is impelled, so to speak, to cohere, precisely because the libidinal investment is initially indistinguishable from the drive to preserve oneself. Insofar as the self can plausibly be said to be constituted through language, however, it follows that the ego cannot originate endogenously, and that the very process of *becoming* an “I” is the same process through which the possibility of *being* a coherent unity, of accounting for myself by being my own source, is lost.

Once put in these terms, it becomes clear that the narcissistic account of ego formation is inseparable from the second developmental trajectory Freud describes, this one based originally on melancholic identification rather than on narcissistic ego cathexis. Now, Freud understands melancholia as a process through which egoic identity is constituted on the basis of an unavowed and unnameable loss, and I want to argue that this is undoubtedly the case. For what is lost is the same thing that is gained in the process of egoic development: the possibility of the ego itself. This is neither, strictly speaking, the loss of the self nor the loss of an object; more precisely, it is both: what is lost and simultaneously gained is the narcissistically-imbued, objectified subject. In other words, insofar as the “I” is the product of a melancholic identification, it is produced through that very process, made into an entity and split from itself precisely by virtue of a melancholic-narcissistic process of idealization.

Recall the characteristics of melancholia as Freud spells them out. First, melancholia, in contrast to mourning, entails a loss of an ideal as readily, if not more so, than it does the loss of an object. As Freud notoriously put it, in melancholia the loss that precipitates identification would seem to be “a loss of a more ideal kind” than in mourning; the patient “knows *whom* he has lost, but not *what* he has lost in him” (XIV: 245). Second, in melancholia the process is for the most part inaccessible to consciousness. Freud writes, “what consciousness is aware of in the work of melancholia is thus not the essential part of it, nor is it even the part which we may credit with an influence in bringing the ailment to an end” (XIV: 257).⁴ Third, the object in question—which in this case is the egoic structure itself, one’s representation of oneself as a self—is actually a retroactive fantasy, one which has been produced by that very process.

Echoing Sayer’s point directly here that the subject only emerges in the act of “losing itself” in language (*as if* an “I” was there all along), Giorgio Agamben writes, “[M]elancholy would not be so much the regressive reaction to the loss of the love object as the imaginative capacity to make an unobtainable object appear as if lost. If the libido behaves as if a loss had occurred although nothing has in fact been lost, this is because the libido stages a simulation where what cannot be lost because it has never been possessed appears as lost, and what could never be possessed because it had never perhaps existed may be appropriated insofar as it is lost” (20).⁵ And fourth, the process of melancholic identification with the narcissistically-invested egoic form (the ideal “I”) results in an internal compulsion, a demand that seems inarguable and perhaps even transcendental, because it is unconscious; it comes from one knows not where. This demand is experienced as a “categorical imperative” to cohere. Thus, in contrast to Freud’s own account of conscience, which ostensibly issues from the dissolution of the Oedipus complex, which fails to account for conscience in women

altogether (because the fear of castration which motivates renunciation is in this case absent), and which ultimately accounts for morality in men on the basis of a dubious Lamarckian theory of phylogenetic inheritance (see XIX: 48),⁶ what emerges here is a view of conscience based on an understanding of the subject as constitutively split and yet simultaneously compelled, unconsciously, to cohere.

A number of conclusions can now be drawn. First, although Freud writes in *Totem and Taboo* that the narcissistic stage of sexual development occurs “at about the same time” that the ego is formed (XIII: 89), the narcissistic cathexis of the ego is *constitutive* of the ego, not prior to or even simultaneous with it. The ego itself is constituted, that is to say, in the very process of its idealization *as* an enduring, perceptual identity. Prior to its idealization, there is no ego (no “I”) to speak of at all.

Second, if the ego is constituted through a binding process that is linguistic, as I propose—through the identification with and the discursive repetition of the word “I” (through a repetition of itself)—this means it is constituted textually (what are cathected are in fact “the ideas of objects”; see XIX: 64). Thus, what is given as an endogenous process is not strictly so; the ego is cathected as a consequence of identification with a conceptual entity that is given from without. Insofar as narcissism is understood as a process whereby the identification with the *heteronomous idea* of an “I” is the condition of possibility for the fundamental splitting (whereby the subject comes to take itself as its own libidinal object and is thereby able to understand itself as a complete and *autonomous* entity), the cathexis of the ego (the postulation of an ego-*drive*) cannot adequately be contained in or explained by a theory that posits the strictly *endogenous* origins of object attachment, as Butler also observes (190). Rather, endogenous narcissistic and exogenous identificatory processes of ego formation are inextricably linked. This means that any attempt to account for itself by positing its source as either strictly external *or* internal will result in the dis-closure of the subject, rather than its unification.

Third, to the extent that narcissistic ego-cathexis depends upon identification, the process has a melancholic quality; indeed, identity is constituted through and as the incorporation of a loss. The theory of narcissism does not only cross through the “melancholic” trajectory of ego development insofar as the latter posits the source of ego identity and the possibility of object attachment as both from without. Beyond this, the ego itself will therefore be the consequence of an unconscious introjection, whereby an idealized “I” is melancholically taken on (or in) through the simulation of a loss. This melancholic process explains (without recourse to religion) both why the compulsion to cohere may be experienced as a moral imperative, and also why it is

one that can never be fulfilled. In the very demand to account for oneself (with the very question, “why *must* I?”), one necessarily *dis*-closes oneself; one’s very form is *de*-formed by the question of one’s *own* originarity, precisely because one never embodies one’s own original, internally-generated source. The Freudian subject is *constitutively* incomplete, even while it faces the demand to *appear* to itself as a self-contained, self-grounding (autonomous) whole.

If Freud’s theory of the subject (of its constitution, of its origins) suffers from the same difficulty that emerged from the Derridean interrogation of responsibility, however, this is not bad news; on the contrary, it is a most productive affliction. For what Freud illustrates, however unwittingly, is an originary splitting of the subject—a fold or *pli* there where the origin should be. This split is produced in and through language. Specifically, the repetition of the “I” as a grammatical subject enables an “originary” binding through which the subject is constituted and preserved (ego-drives), *and* the object is objectified as a libidinal aim (sexual drives). This is, arguably, what Weber has in mind when he says that the “law of law”—or, in this case the responsibility of responsibility that “establishes the enigmatic mediation” between, on the one hand, a unified object of desire and, on the other hand, “an equally unified self, capable of being preserved” (“Name” 243)—is *an effect of the text*, which is to say, of grammar and reference. If the difference between ego and object does not originate in the subject itself, the subject cannot be the ground of its own possibility. And yet it wants to cohere. Thus, to put the formulation precisely, the outcome of the Freudian analysis is that *the origin of the ego is the figurative enactment of the desire for an origin*. In other words, because the “I” is a *fantasy* of logical unity, the “I” is the personification of the desire for an origin, and it originates in its “figurative enactment” insofar as it originates in discourse (figuratively, as a grammatical and referential effect of the text) through repetition (enactment). What this means, in turn, is that the “I” that asks itself “Why *must* I?”, thereby demanding an account of its own responsibility, is always already caught in the double bind of hyperbolicism: the very being that is constituted *as* the desire for an origin, and that therefore cannot *not* ask itself the question of its own origins, *is* the being for which no simple or univocal account can be given. Subjects constituted in this way, in short, are driven by an impossible necessity that can be neither refused nor fulfilled: they are driven by a hyperbolic responsibility that *appears* as a moral imperative.

To be sure, one cannot insist that subjectivity must be constituted in the way that Freud describes, that generally it *is* so constituted, or that egos, so understood, always have been or perpetually will be reproduced in this way. What the preceding reformulation of the Freudian account does illuminate, however, is the drive manifest in

Western philosophy to answer to the imperatives of reason. This subjective exigency is of course not generalizable or ultimately justifiable either, because the textuality of subjective formation is necessarily culturally contingent; deconstruction is thus no more than a quasi-responsible undertaking. But insofar as there is in theoretical work a manifest desire for reason, it is evident that this subject does obtain today, at least insofar as we (theorists) do experience ourselves as unified “I”s—that is, as subjectively constituted through a subjection to the demands of unity and logical coherence. To this extent, no more but no less, the task of (self-)preservation is endless, and the compulsion to deconstruct, to track the desire for originarity, imperative.

This is why the origin of the responsibility to reason is absolutely unknown and unknowable, I venture, or why the root of desire appears as a knot (see *Resistances* 11; IV: 111 and V: 525). Following Freud, the drive for responsibility emerges as what is surplus to reason, as its inadmissible condition of possibility and its ultimately unknowable source. There is no essence there, at the base of the “subject,” any more than there is at the “origin” of deconstruction. Instead, the “origin” or “root” of the desire and demand for reason is a self-preserving reiteration of the subject, a *practice* of repetition that produces what Derrida elsewhere calls “‘operations’ or ‘effects’ (*effets*) of subjectivity” (qtd. in Kearney 125), and which he links to iterability, that is, to the condition of the constitution of identities, of ideality, and, more generally, to the “becoming-objective of the object or the becoming-subjective of the subject, thus the becoming analyzable in general” (*Resistances* 31). One might thus speculate that the ethical-political responsibility that remains is a trace that puts into play *both* the mirrored effect of a responsible subject (that answers to reason’s imperative) *and* that of its analytic objects. This is precisely why analysis is interminable, as Derrida says, but it is also why the chance and the risk of thinking remain.

NOTES

1/ See *The Interpretation of Dreams* for Freud’s schematic image (V: 538).

2/ The point is made again in *Totem and Taboo* (XIII: 89). The distinction at work here is between what Freud calls a “primary” narcissism, which is said to be present in every individual as the pre-condition for object cathexis, and a “secondary” narcissism, “which arises through the drawing in of object-cathexes” and is “superimposed” upon the primary (non-pathological) one “by a number of different influences” (XIV: 75).

3/ Freud makes the same point a number of times in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (V: 594, 602, 617).

4/ Compare Freud’s comment in “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” that the nucleus of the ego is unconscious (XVIII: 19), as well as his remark in “Introductory Lecture XVIII,” where he says that the ego “is not even master in its own house” (XVI: 285).

5/ Judith Butler makes the closely related point that “melancholy is precisely what interiorizes the psyche” (170), and that in this sense “the ego’s loss is constitutive” (171).

6/ See also *Civilization and its Discontents* (XXI: 125).

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