



Preface

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Preface: Trans-Humanist Considerations for Psychoanalysis, Critical Theory, and Phenomenology

I am writing this Preface to the 2017 EPIS journal with a sense of an immediate though placid approach. Because I don't need to be tendentious, or to write for personal interest, I hope that my comments will be appreciated for their intrinsic value to our communities. I believe that this is an important time for further transformation of psychoanalytic thought and clinical practice, for theoretical and applied phenomenology, and for students of critical theory. As such, I draft my comments with these potentials in mind.

This is also a productive time and growth period for any psychoanalytic training and research institute such as ours. The topic for this year's issue is creativity and violence, which is intrinsically important but also instrumentally valuable as an historical doorway for deeper investigation into the human anthropology and the sometimes-hidden models we assume in our theoretical and professional work.

I am chiefly concerned about the inner depth of human narcissism, egocentrism, and lack of positive regard humans demonstrate for our Earth and for all the non-human beings with whom we share space and biospheres. The sheer gravitas of the matter, therefore, propels us to look beyond mere human- to-human relationships and human clinical encounters for our material. As such, I would like to present what I take to be our basic autonomous, acquisitive human anthropology and challenge its efficacy and validity to operate as a model for psychoanalytic and phenomenological inquiry. I also point out that this is the model we have created historically. It is the model Freud was aware of and used, and the model that I believe has been at the bottom of the core of 20th century analytic and phenomenological theory and practice.

In its place, I shall offer preliminary ideas about a new model that can supplant the old. To this end, I shall focus on two main ideas, the first being vivantonomy, which rivals both autonomy and heteronomy as the basic relationship to the Other; the second a challenge to the common existential notion of being- in-the-world, which rejects a "one-world" thesis and replaces it with a "multiple world" assumption. In this investigation and argument, I shall integrate these two ideas with the intent of building a proto-statement for new paradigms in psychoanalysis that are no longer based on the autonomous self of the Enlightenment nor the outmoded belief that Dasein could ever be solely in that one world of humanism. This is the idea of a trans-humanist anthropology that leads to a trans-humanist psychoanalysis, phenomenology, and critical theory. It becomes a radically-reconstituted humanism with a different foundation.

In thinking about the progression from autonomy to heteronomy, toward an anthropology of



trans-humanism, we are reminded of the early (Western) modern period, which valorized the development of the autonomous self, in which each of us lives in the world in terms of his own mental categories. In this tradition, we approach Others in terms of our own subjective interpretation of meaning and analyze Others relative to what we already know. It is an appetitive approach in which we consume Others by reducing them to the same cognitive categories of our own minds and experience. This prioritizes the subject over the object, and therefore creates an anthropological mistake. This leads to the problem of this essay: that we must shift the source of meaning from the subject to the object, but in a unique way. We will see in this text here that this idea is crucial for a trans-humanist position, requiring 1) a different noetic and 2) a different interpretation of the “objective.” We already know how tempting it is for professional practitioners to rely on this paradigm, and how rewarded we can be by them.

By addressing this anthropological mistake, shifting the source of meaning to the object, and therefore developing a transcended humanism (a “trans-humanism”), we promote increasing levels of personal responsibility. By deepening levels of responsibility through the shifting of our Archimedean point, we reconstitute what we formerly thought of as “autonomy.” It is now both humanist and trans-humanist, resting on a radicalized notion of heteronomy, concerning the Other. It is antithetical to many of the theoretical and value commitments of the 20th century and 21st century in psychoanalysis, and in other ways, to critical theory and to phenomenology.

To gain such perspective, we must, therefore, render a descriptive and critical account of the “I” of humanism, i.e., the masterful self that attempts to control and regulate meaning in terms of its own subjective categories. By looking at the received view of humanism in a new way, we can revise our humanism from masterful and controlling autonomy to a humanism of responsibility. This is the view that the “I” of humanism should be corrected by a deeper and more accurate anthropological-phenomenological account of the [intersubjective] self. Under this new view, the Other is foundational to the self. This creates phenomenological space for an interpretation of oneself that is not primarily motivated by its own appetite but instead is propelled by its absolute responsibility for the Other, toward every Other. This includes the trans-human. This is the non-human Other. This includes clients, patients, and non-humans.

By correcting the anthropological mistake of modernity, we can pursue a more accurate phenomenological understanding of humans, especially by focusing on our social dimension and interspecies dimensions. This can provide a foundation for a new ethics as well as provide a direction in value that could guide our social and political theory, science and philosophy. Derivatively, this leads to a new psychology, psychoanalysis, and psychotherapy; and new directions in both phenomenology and critical theory. This confronts us with question of how we construct, regard, and treat the ecology of the radical Other.

Let’s think about solidarity by reconsidering the appeal of the Other. In this way of thinking, an individual’s appeal stands in for all other people and all sentient beings, both ethically and metaphysically. This is the origin of solidarity in which we recognize that we are so deeply involved with one another that we are radically intertwined with Others; this leads to a radically deepened notion of responsibility, which I will address next.

There is no inherent or good reason to confine the notion of the Face only to humans, or the



appeal of the Other only to humans. Let me, therefore, explain what I mean.

Phenomenologically, the eyes of other sentient beings, for example dogs or monkeys, have no relevant difference from those of humans. Look for yourself. Other animals have the same capacity to make an appeal, and they, too, have a Face. They, too, are universal examples of our wider community that goes beyond the human. We must, therefore, address the principles of solidarity and responsibility as they bear on a new approach to disciplines concerning human subjectivization and therapeutic practice. Otherwise, we risk our own existential fragmentation.

Solidarity comes from a recognition that the Other comes from the same community. In humanism, the community is the set of humans. In a trans-humanist approach the community is all sentient beings, and includes the whole environment—not just humans.

In this new perspective, the community is comprised of all sentient beings in the ecosystems of the world. A new understanding of solidarity articulates this. This idea is particularly important in analysis and critical theory, because we can all too easily create a self-Other, polarization even with the best of intentions, and even in the consulting room or the conceptual drawing board. A new examination of solidarity addresses this risk, which I believe can act as a corrective to ontological dis-parities, drawn by fiat.

In the scientific vernacular, by definition, all beings in an ecosystem are interrelated. In a spiritual-phenomenological vernacular, each sentient being has the capacity to make an appeal to this inter-related community of beings. To deny that all sentient beings ought to be included in a community of solidarity is simple deception, pathology, and existential distortion. It is like denying that I am alive. I have explained the reasons elsewhere, but they stem from narcissism. This is the not seeing what is directly in front of our eyes – a highly inter- related ecosystem. Nothing is separate. Human beings are not separate. Unfortunately, humans have been living as if they are separate. We have pretended that it is only our interests that are important and relevant; that we only have direct moral duties to other humans; and that we only owe duties to non-humans if they bear some relationship to the inter-human community. Yet, we should not be afraid to ignore the appeals of other sentient beings, and we should not be anxious about our dominating, possessory tendencies. This sickness has spilled over into the consulting room and the conceptual drawing board. Let's now address an understanding of responsibility that is informed by this new sense of solidarity.

Responsibility implies an awareness of all relevant considerations and then acting on them. In a humanist account, we focus only on humans and on other considerations, but only as they are related to our rights and duties, and the overall good of humans. Thus, we create and valorize a teleological, instrumental type of thinking toward any being that falls outside of the subset of humans. We create a hierarchy of being that projects an ontological disparity. This kind of thinking, however, creates permission to harm anyone or anything of perceived lesser value. Moreover, this type of thinking permeates inter-human relationships, too, unfortunately, some of them professional and social. In my judgment, this type of ontological perspective has profound effects on the total possibilities of our self-structures. This is the reason why it is relevant for any discourse that purports to study subjectivity and inter-subjectivity.

There is a deepening sense of responsibility as we move through the cultural valorizations of



autonomy, heteronomy, and the radical revision that we see in theoretical constructions of trans-humanism. In autonomy, responsibility primarily comes from the law and is based on the reciprocal system of rights and duties that deter violent impulses. Heteronomy is a reversal of autonomy and deepens a rights and duties expectation by an underlying foundation of covenant. Here, my responsibility soars to all, within the human community without regard to rights and duties. Here, I act solely from my responsibility to my covenant, and to the priority of the Other. Yet, something is lacking and that is an anthropology and construction of responsibility that goes beyond the human; Its very foundation comes from a source more primordial and that is life itself.

This is an extraordinary—and radical—move that unsettles our humanism further as a new Archimedean point. Recall that we moved from geocentrism to heliocentrism in our epistemological understanding of the universe. We then came to understand that we are bounded by language and that within our cultural perspective, it is our semiological containers that propel and limit thought. Further, we see how Freud reverses Cartesianism by showing how the unconscious is master of our mental house, not consciousness. We also shift and increase human responsibility as we shift our understanding of the inter-human and inter-human dimensions. A trans-humanist argument, which proposes a vivantonomous starting point—a prioritization of life and not just the human—creates a foundation for responsibility that starts, not with the fact of being human but with the inherent and intrinsic value of all living matter, especially living beings who are sentient. Notice that I use “who” rather than “what.” This is because each sentient being has a natural dignity based on its life, as gift from the universe, that is equal to the natural dignity of human beings, which is similarly based on their life as gift from the universe. There is no difference. This is ontological parity or ontological equality and it applies in both the inter-human community and in the intra-human community.

I propose two important points about this new understanding of responsibility. The first is that our understanding of the Other is deepened and broadened to include all life forms—all Others—especially those who are sentient, which are included in those beings whose face can appeal to us with vulnerability and need. The second is that as our understanding transcends both autonomy and heteronomy—their dialectic—that we come to understand that no being is Other, and everything is the Same. This comes from the truth that everything comes from the same origin, having a common root, and therefore, an ontological parity with everything else and everyone else.

In this worldview, humans do not have a greater ontological value than other sentient beings. Thus, we extend our notion of responsibility, and we do this in a way that is both a quantitative change as well as a qualitative change. In short, we change ourselves. More formally, we reconstitute our subjectivity in the construction of a new human anthropology. What these new parameters are is somewhat vague and nebulous because this movement in our history is incipient and nascent. It is to this part of the equation that I now turn, hopefully to shed some light.

There are many species of beings that we humans will never see, and many that are in our daily ecosystems that we choose not to see. Yet, they are there—here—rather, constantly watching, looking, appealing—usually to we humans. We don't see them because of our own systems of



value that are informed by our narcissism: our egocentrism. This type of consciousness therefore closes itself in on itself, not seeing other life, other humans, and our very selves. This is the possessory, dominating subjectivity that instrumentalizes all others, and even in a system indoctrinated by rights and duties, fails to see the Other's world on its own terms, as its unique manifestation.

We understand all too well that an anthropology based on autonomy constantly struggles within the consciousness of a desiring, egocentric self. This is what leads to formulations and developments of heteronomy wherein I prioritize the Other over myself. Here are six basic axioms that I have laid out in previous work, but here also because of their importance.

First, we must dismiss the notion that humans are better, of more worth, or higher on a value scale. We must substitute it with a new axiom of ontological parity. This is for the reasons I mention earlier. This applies to all sentient beings. We are all equal. Second, we must agree that in principle that most of us have little knowledge about the whole: about how all beings, processes, and structures work together in an ecosystem. We substitute it with a new axiom of rigorous inquiry. This is a requirement for all of us, always. Third, we must accept a new Archimedean point. We cannot pretend to be at the center of the universe or the planet earth. This means that we must render an accounting of all life forms, including ours, holding that all living beings have equal interests and rights. We must, therefore, have an axiom that recognizes we play a part in the whole but are not the whole, and that we must mediate and weigh our interests relative to those of other life forms. This applies to inter-human relationships, too. Fourth, we must recognize that all life forms come from the same source. This leads us to the reconstituted notion of solidarity. This is a trans-human notion that includes the human equally with all other life forms, and that recognizes all humans are equal. Fifth, we must acknowledge and accept a new depth and breadth of our responsibility to others, including humans, other sentient life forms, additional life forms, and the environment in general. We must, therefore, try harder. Sixth, we must work diligently to formulate and articulate a new philosophical anthropology for human beings. This means we must strive for new meaning and understanding of the world and our place within it. This is neither the autonomous subject nor the heteronomous subject but it is a new human. This re-formulates the reality principle. It is the very reality principle we must interrogate and transform.

If we look at these six axioms together we can see that there is an isomorphism between individual narcissism (disregarding the Other human) and cultural/species narcissism (disregarding other life forms). Both include the same preoccupation with self or culture, and both ignore or actively trounce on the interests of Others. Moreover, we can see that there is an over-reliance on the law, which is a retreat to the familiarity of the superego position, i.e., the dominant proscriptions of one's society and culture. This is a denial of the transcendent in both the individual and in the social elements of a culture. There is also a compulsion to rely on the words used to taxonomically differentiate one type of being from another, which includes different levels of ontological value, rights, and protections. For example, in many jurisdictions wild animals are considered property, and become personal property once they are taken from the forest. This allows the human taker to do anything he wants to the "property." Analogously [and curiously], there are historical examples amongst humans, in cases of race and gender, in which different categories of humans were assigned different value. It is the same kind of



thinking. Although this is a change in name, it is not necessarily a change in action although this might be the first step in a long- term, developmental process of change.

Where does this leave us with psychoanalysis? Phenomenology? Critical theory? Well, presently, even amongst senior members of these practices and theoretical traditions, there are individuals who cling tightly to the autonomous self of the Enlightenment. Thus, we often have egocentric selves ministering to egocentric selves coming for treatment. Theoretically, it is much the same, various claimants striving for dominance in dispersions of truth that are also regulated by egocentrism and narcissism.

I do not have the answers to these questions, but I think we should all carefully consider why psychoanalysis is effete without phenomenology, and why we need critical theory to correct insular notions of Dasein and human anthropology. We must interrogate even more deeply the question of the meaning of our human beingness; our understanding of the whole; how we live within our history but transcend it—how take a critical position toward what we think we know. This is ultimately a “thinking against oneself,” which is one of the most difficult things one can do. This type of thinking always involves the Other, both human and non-human.

What I think can be most difficult, especially for senior theorists, psychologists, academics, and psychoanalysts, is how to bracket our commitments to our practices, our concepts, our training and experience, and our strong beliefs. I also believe that these strong beliefs and commitments place themselves within a constellation of autonomous, heteronomous, and vivantonous worldviews—often sedimenting and fortifying our disability to enter new paradigms. In my experience, more senior professionals do it more than less senior professionals.

It is with these musings that I introduce this year’s papers on the subject matters of violence and creativity, perhaps mutually originating from the same well spring. It is imperative that we learn more about the origin of our violence and our ability for creativity, to think our way to transcendence. As such, it is imperative that we consider a trans-humanist understanding and an approach that is based on the principles of vivantonomy.

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