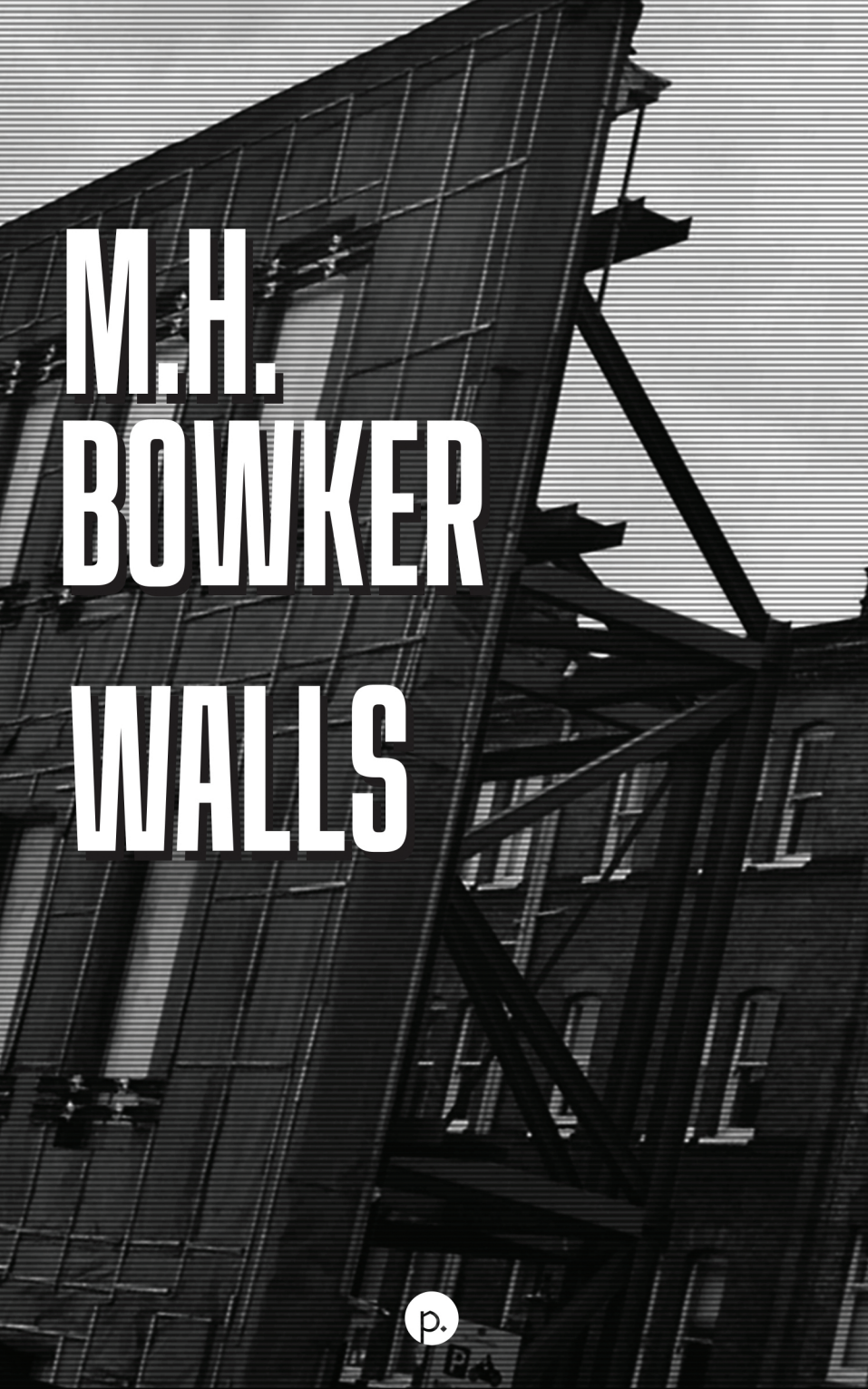

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Fig. 1. Detail from Hieronymus Bosch, *Ship of Fools* (1490–1500)

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WALLS

MULTIDIMENSIONAL ESSAYS



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For Zoe and Julie, as always

1

Prologue

Walls are deceptively simple things. From the side, they look a bit like this. ||

One might think they look like this. |

But | is just a wall when viewed from far, far away.

Look more closely and we are reminded that walls are Janus-faced,[1] two-sided, *duplicitous*. Since walls have two sides, one side sees the other only at the moment of the wall's destruction. This becomes something more than pedestrian when we consider interior walls, the walls of mind and soul.

I have interior walls whose sides do not match at all. The outside is mucus-covered and metal-spiked for trespassers, while the inside is pastel and crochet for an infant or small child. If anything, the violence of the outside of the wall increases in proportion to the vulnerability of the infant or small child whose comfort is secured by its inside.

1 Curiously, Janus's gates were opened in wartime, closed at the arrival of peace.

||

When we say we see or feel a wall in the presence of a person, that a person is "walled off," what do we mean? We mean we cannot see or feel something we believe to be *hidden* in the inside of that person.

(Is it not our very own insides we seek when we strive to break through the walls of another? Do we not wish the other to confirm something in us, in a special way? And do we not offer, just by the act of looking, something of this confirmation to the other? This may be understood as the *reflexivity* of walls.)

As such, walls present themselves to us first as *absences,* which must be intolerably frustrating, for we immediately transform these presentations into blockages, into matters of walls and "sides": *in*-sides and *out*-sides. Relative to this frustration, it must be worse to imagine ourselves with no insides at all.

Though we know little or nothing of the blockage we assume to be there, its salient characteristic becomes its impregnability, its *virginity,* at least in proportion to the imagined magnitude and importance of the inside of the person we are looking after.

||

When I look at a wall I may see or feel one thousand things. And walls themselves, or the history of walls, themselves, *qua* structures, are not of great interest to me. What interests me is what walls make of us, and what we make of them.

When a person presents us with what we take to be a wall, what do we see? At worst, we see a warped mirror, in which we do not appear. At best, we see one side of the wall and imagine the other. We imagine it, naturally, to look and feel similar to the side we see: After all, walls are often constructed of a singular material.

But we know that, in truth, this is rarely the case. Walls, then, as they are actually experienced, are at least *half-imaginary.*

||

Many of us feel terror and rage at walls. We are accustomed to thinking of walls as denying access to things we need: love, warmth, knowledge, certainty. We wish nothing more than to tear them down.

I am reminded of Wallace Stevens's famous lines: "We have been a little insane about the truth. We have had an obsession. In its ultimate extension, the truth about which we have been insane will lead us to look beyond the truth to something in which the imagination will be the dominant complement."[2]

What could be more true? What could be more applicable to a recherche into the tearing down of walls?

I wish to say that if the outside of a wall is reality, the inside is the imagination, and as we seek the truth, we tear down the wall that is, or that guards, both. But that is a bit too simple.

||

What becomes of us when our walls are built up? What becomes of us when our walls are torn down?

Some will think here of *psychosis,* and yet it is unclear to me what *psychosis* really is — it seems likely to me that psychosis is another word for experiencing both sides of a discordant interior wall simultaneously — and whether it derives more directly from walls being built up or walls being destroyed. In fact, it is both, and the process of building up walls and tearing them

2 Wallace Stevens, *The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and the Imagination* (Vintage, 1951), 33.

down is going on continuously around and within us all the time. Thus walls, like time and life themselves, are, in their way, *psychotic*.

||

In a few moments, I will ask the reader to consider the tearing down of the walls associated with something that never actually existed, the walls of an idea: the "campus walls" that putatively defend the "Ivory Tower." The hatred of the Tower in ideality has meant its destruction in reality and we can only assume that the motivation for tearing down its walls has been, itself, two-sided: (1) to possess the goods inside; and (2) to destroy the goods inside so none shall possess them. Put another way, the walls represented by the Ivory Tower have long provoked destructive *envy,* which aims to spoil the very good it seeks.

||

A world with no walls is as unimaginable as it is undesirable. In what space, what room, could one hear or be heard, see or be seen? What could we protect? What could we *possess* and call our own?

||

To sum up:

Walls are *duplicitous, reflexive, half-imaginary, virginal, psychotic, envious, possessive absences that hide insides.*

Or, by a kind of transitive property: Walls are *absences that hide duplicitous, reflexive, half-imaginary, virginal, psychotic, envious, possessive insides.*

Plaisanteries

Interior walls are, of course, metaphors for impassability, for the impassability of psychic contents back and forth across boundaries. There are many types of boundaries. Those who "compartmentalize" apparently like to think of them as compartments. Others, like Wilfred Bion, think of them as "containers."

In Samuel Beckett's monodrama, *Endgame,* Nagg and Nell reside in dustbins.[1] The play itself is encased within a set of haunting interior walls that represent the protagonist's, Hamm's, psyche. Nagg and Nell, his parents, are visible but Hamm is blind. One boundary is their dustbins, another a blackened set of spectacles depicting Hamm's blindness; we find, as we look on, a further boundary is the mulishness of Hamm's mind. And yet Nagg and Nell speak through their walls and reach, presumably, across the "fourth wall," to the audience.

The point is that we can make plaisanteries about the natures of interior walls: "gaudy," "firm," "muck-," et cetera. But they will only be plaisanteries. We can draw topographies, as Freud did (fig. 1).

1 Samuel Beckett, *Endgame* (Grove Press, 1958).

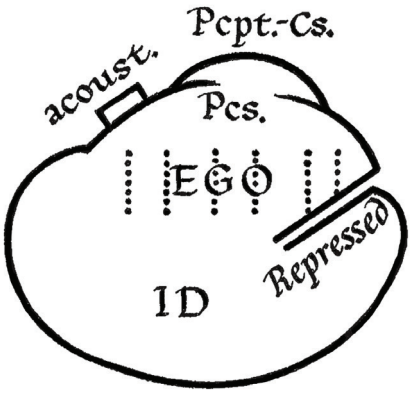


Fig. 1. Freud's second topography of the psyche, from "The Ego and the Id" (1923), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* vol. 19: *The Ego and the Id and Other Works (1923–1925),* ed. and trans. James Strachey with Anna Freud (Hogarth Press, 1964), 24.

But such imaginations lead only so far, since we are already working in the realm of metaphor.

We can posit, without breaking the metaphor, that even interior walls have tops, gaps, ways-around, such that, say, the walls between realities and imaginations can be trespassed, often happily, for instance, in poetry.[2]

1. *The hut stands by itself beneath the palms.*
2. *Out of their bottle the green genii come.*
3. *A vine has climbed the other side of the wall.*[3]

2 The wall around the self is most often described as a "semi-porous membrane," hardly a wall at all. When the other penetrates the self it can be violence or poetry, madness or love.

3 Wallace Stevens, "Someone Puts a Pineapple Together," in *The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and the Imagination* (Vintage, 1953), 86.

Here, in this bit of poetry, we are most interested in the vine that climbs the other side of the wall. The vine is the poem, itself, just as the vine is a sign, as it were, of what ought to be unknown: what is on the other side.

But on the other side is reality, one of many "degrees of reality," at least.[4] We know something about it, because we know something about vines and we know something about exterior walls, and yet we imagine this reality and we imagine it to be a reality to the degree that we partake in the imagination of the poem. Like the vine, "the imagination loses vitality as it ceases to adhere to what is real."[5]

The vine is a sign, but we should still be surprised to see it: the sign of the other side. Perhaps it will surprise. Stevens is not surprised about the vine or the other side, but he should be.

||

Perhaps the most famous interior wall, the wall between what is repressed and what is available to consciousness, is a wall about which it is most difficult to write since, by definition, its other side is unknowable, unsayable. We only get close when we confront nonsense:

1. *The thatch sayeth phooey but to firs of sand.*
2. *Some glum parents harumph behind the stairs.*
3. *You hold one fine saloon of slug and mud.*

et cetera.

If nonsense strikes us as uncanny, as speaking to us from some "other side," as it often does, it is in part because we recognize it as belonging to something lost. It is something we only half

4 Wallace Stevens, "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words," in ibid., 7.
5 Ibid., 6.

recognize, like a childhood doll, like the rhyme and repetition of the nursery, like the surprise of the nonsense word, like the vine climbing over the other side of the wall.

Consider Gertrude Stein's poem, "Cezanne":

> *The Irish lady can say, that to-day is every day. Caesar can say that every day is to-day and they say that every day is as they say. In this way we have a place to stay and he was not met because he was settled to stay. When I said settled I meant settled to stay. When I said settled to stay I meant settled to stay Saturday. In this way a mouth is a mouth. In this way if in as a mouth if in as a mouth where, if in as a mouth where and there. Believe they have water too. Believe they have that water too and blue when you see blue, is all blue precious too, is all that that is precious too is all that and they meant to absolve you. In this way Cézanne nearly did nearly in this way. Cézanne nearly did nearly did and nearly did. And was I surprised. Was I very surprised. Was I surprised. I was surprised and in that patient, are you patient when you find bees. Bees in a garden make a specialty of honey and so does honey. Honey and prayer. Honey and there. There where the grass can grow nearly four times yearly.*[6]

It is perfectly important, just as it seems perfectly impertinent, that Stein writes, "are you patient when you find bees."

||

What I am trying to say is not exactly that walls are there to be gotten over, but that a human effort makes it possible for walls to be gotten over. The wall, itself, insofar as it, too, participates in the relation between imagination and reality, cannot be for-

6 Gertrude Stein, "Cezanne," in *Selected Writings of Gertrude Stein,* ed. Carl Van Vechten (Random House, 1946), 289.

gotten. The wall, in its way, is what permits of this relation of getting over, which, again, requires a human effort to realize.

The titular poem of Wallace Stevens's book, *Auroras of Autumn,* which some (like Harold Bloom) have implied to be the center of Stevens's oeuvre,[7] means: We say, "the mother's face" is "the purpose of the poem" and yet "she is destroyed."[8] In the end, "there is no play": The theater of the world and of nature is nothing until it is "in a single [person] contained."[9] We insist on an idea, when faced with both the many demises that autumn brings and the blinding auroras that seem to exceed us in every measure. It takes the genius, meditating in a room, to discharge us from living as "an unhappy people in an unhappy world."[10]

The final poem of the book, "Angel Surrounded by Paysans," tells of an angelic presence who asks if he is not "an apparition apparelled in / Apparels of such lightest look" that, in an instant, a turn of the shoulder and he is "gone."[11] He is, nevertheless, a "necessary" angel because his intermittent presence makes clairvoyant the Earth and harkens "its tragic drone."[12]

We find in Stevens's book (throughout Stevens's work, really) a study of the extraordinary human being and the Earth, the Earth alone providing endless inadequate metaphors for a certain mental muscularity, one that holds the Earth together via reality and imagination and one that, therefore, exceeds the Earth, itself. The angel is only a part, only "half of a figure of a sort,"[13] only a piece of what is conjured by the Earth in its com-

7 Harald Bloom, *Wallace Stevens: The Poems of Our Climate* (Cornell University Press, 1976), 254.
8 Wallace Stevens, *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (Vintage, 1982), 413.
9 Ibid., 416.
10 Ibid., 420.
11 Ibid., 497.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.

plete *want*. The other half must be filled out by the full figure that is the self and its efforts. What, then, could be of greater interest than the activity of the muscles of the full figure in the room? And yet…

The Nonpareil in the Doorway (Three Men in a Garage)

"I am here," announced the nonpareil in the doorway of the garage, "the darkest deputy of the profoundest internal judge founded firmly in the *future anterior,* which is to say behind the bright eyes of babes that wane to dark as weaned into grown children, such as yourselves."

NONPAREIL CONTINUES: I ask things like: "What will have been, after the end?," "What will you have done?," "What will you have carried unto my tabernacle?"

ONE OF THE MEN IN THE GARAGE: Is it because we cannot bear the *eschaton* (ἔσχατον) that your justice slides, mutates, *mutatis mutandis,* into the *simple past* but with original, sinful connotation? E.g., "What did you do?," "What have you done?" If you have come to set forth judgment, we are but innocents, like so many others.

ANOTHER OF THE MEN: Are you an angel sent by God to this garage?

ANOTHER OF THE MEN: I changed the solenoids on that old Ford.

NONPAREIL: Listen, history had a beginning, and it will have an end. Human beings had a beginning, and they will have an end. Organic life emerged on Earth after years of rock and mineral. It had a beginning, and it will have an end. And so the universe, itself, is in becoming. It had a beginning, and it will have an end.

ONE OF THE MEN: Will you remain to judge the very meaning of humanity, *après tout*?

ANOTHER OF THE MEN: *Enfin,* pardon the pun, it is beyond our comprehension. Rather, it is beyond our will to think apocalyptically, of the end of every thing. Not of some desperate survivor on a merely hardened course, but of the proper end and finale.

ANOTHER OF THE MEN: "*Tears of a clown when there's no one around.*" That's Smokey Robinson.[1]

NONPAREIL: I ask you to think of a photograph of a man in a casket, bleached and bleached until he is unrecognizable. His figure is now equivalent to the contents of a box. What could he have become but this collage of dust? His body is an empty thing, as will have been his reality and imagination, as will I, when judged from this aspect.

I stand for the wall in the mind that represents the end of time, whose other side is but a nothingness that you can never recognize, before which your judge's questions find only insufficient answers.

ONE OF THE MEN: "Man never knew what he was, but he always knew how to preserve a mystery and a promise in this enigma: but now *he no longer believes in it,* and consents wholeheart-

1 Smokey Robinson and the Miracles, "The Tears of a Clown," track 5 on *Make It Happen* (Tamla, 1967).

edly and unqualifiedly to his reduction to the rank of a herd animal."[2]

ANOTHER OF THE MEN: "Man is tired, with an ancient tiredness, and now seeks only to forget himself and run away from himself, in any pharmacopoeia, even the most narcotic, and any entertainment, even the most grotesque, to the point of seeking to leave the earth in order to lose himself in the interplanetary void."[3]

ANOTHER OF THE MEN: "Humanity […] makes meaning emerge in the whole panic of primordial senselessness, and that is why we must conceive the human being 'not as one among the other things on the Earth that creep and fly, but as the meaning of the Earth […].' And it is precisely because the event of human history is the advent of meaning that one can hardly comes to terms with its absurdity: or, at least, highlighting the emptiness of all signification, that is, of meaning as 'vanity of vanities' is precisely what reveals the unfathomable abyss from which it proceeds, and reveals meaning itself as lack, and as empty."[4]

NONPAREIL: You have your pedantries and I have mine.

Look at the Stygian pigeon pecking at an empty plastic bag in your snowy parking lot. What will have become of it by spring? Like me, it will be gone. Its face is not your face and yet you coo-coo interiorly against the scene, the snowy and the sad, against an indefatigable imaginary, who brings the snowy and the sad to Earth in plastic bags. The *pathos* of the pigeon cannot be observed, noted, preserved as poetry, while pecking at empty things to see if they are full. I am here

2 Jean Vioulac, *Apocalypse of Truth: Heideggerian Meditations,* trans. Matthew J. Peterson (University of Chicago Press, 2021), 128. Emphasis in the original.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid., 128–29.

to say you may only choose, and without reason: pathos or
to peck.

The Ivory Tower

I write from a conquered land, a territory that failed to defend its borders: the Ivory Tower and its "campus walls," the American university.

What does it mean to fail to defend one's borders? It means destruction. The walls fall down and everyone gawps inside. Then, they attack: *"None shall have the privilege and protection of the Ivory Tower. None shall be free of the weight of the world. None shall work aloof from the concerns that occupy the rest of us, our daily bread."*

They take down our pants and devour our ivory towers.

The rejection of the Ivory Tower is a rejection of the (white) penis, or, properly, the phallus, where the phallus signifies being "above the law." Possession of the phallus, being "above the law," provokes incredible, destructive envy.

It should be remembered that the phallus has, for most of its life, been a symbol of fertility. Robert Henry Codrington states that the phallus is akin to *mana,* "a force altogether distinct from

physical power, which acts in all kinds of ways for good and evil, and which it is of the greatest advantage to possess or control."[1]

You see, if we wrest it from its pejorative connotation, the "Ivory Tower" might be understood as an ideal place not of exclusivity and phallic power but of learning undertaken *free* from the pressures of society and community. Can we still imagine such *freedom*? I am not sure that we can.

We wish to say, instead, that freedom is a fantasy of the privileged. What if it were an ideal of privilege and privacy that all could share? The same Latin root of "privilege," "privacy," and "privation," *prīvo,* means: 1) to take away or rob; 2) to free or deliver; 3) to be separate from the public or state; and 4) to be peculiar to the individual.[2]

In any case, wrest the ideal of the Ivory Tower from its negative caricature we have not. And so the American university has become virtually indistinguishable from other societal organizations. Its ideals are increasingly those of "community engagement" and "civic and moral responsibility."

I am, thus, aware of a certain discord between the theme of my philosophy seminar "Critical Thinking, Individuality, and Power" and co-curricular offerings in community-based learning. The antagonism between our objectives becomes apparent early on, when Plato's *Republic* cautions students against their own fellow citizens, who "give a complete training to young and old, men and women, turning them into just the sort of people they want."[3] The more often a young person interacts with his community, Plato fears, the more likely he is to be "swamped

1 R.H. Codrington, *The Melanesians: Studies in Their Anthropology and Folk-Lore* (Clarendon Press, 1891), 118–19.

2 F.P. Leverett, *A New and Copious Lexicon of the Latin Language* (J.P. Lippincott & Co., 1874), and C.T. Lewis and C. Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (Clarendon Press, 1879).

3 Plato, *The Republic,* trans. Desmond Lee, 2nd rev. ed. (Penguin, 1987), 214.

by the flood of popular praise and blame, and carried away with the stream till he finds himself agreeing with the popular idea of what is admirable or disgraceful, behaving like the crowd and becoming one of them."[4] Plato then offers the analogy of the great beast, a "large and powerful animal" that represents society.[5] Those who study the beast would not fail to learn its moods and preferences, and would proudly call their new knowledge a (social) science. These scholars of the social beast would have learned to predict and accommodate all of the animal's appetites, but "would not really know which of the creature's tastes and desires was admirable or shameful, good or bad, right or wrong."[6]

||

An important part of critical thinking, as political philosophers understand it, is developing the ability to reason when faced with the powerful forces of community and convention. It is the capacity to question which needs, habits, and norms of the community are right and which are wrong. Critical thinking therefore demands not merely an astute perception of the world, but an ability to disentangle oneself from and develop resistances to that world. In a time when community engagement and the building of "social capital" are very much in vogue, this understanding of critical thought as community extrication and community resistance is not likely to be a popular one. Perhaps its unpopularity is not entirely beside the point, for over the last few decades, influential books like Robert Bellah et al.'s *Habits of the Heart* and Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone* have convinced many social theorists and educators that one of America's fundamental political problems is our exaggerated individualism,

4 Ibid.
5 Ibid., 215.
6 Ibid.

our temptation to retreat to private life, our tendency to give up the friendly league and bowl alone.[7]

By contrast, it is curious how often we describe today's college students as "social," motivated by forces that include not just social networking and virtual self-broadcasting but membership in community groups and projects. Instruments such as UCLA's Annual Freshman Survey and the (somewhat controversial) National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) seem to indicate that college students are deeply invested in politics and in their communities. For instance, recently, over fifty-seven percent of baccalaureate students reported that they had "performed community service as part of a class," while over eighty-seven percent indicated that they had performed "volunteer work" in the past year.[8]

Although the NSSE disclaims its validity as a generalizable or comparable measure of student trends, the effect of such surveys over the past two decades has been broad acceptance of the belief that community engagement is what students, faculty, administrators, community organizations, employers, and even politicians want. The ideal of community engagement suggests that both a student's career and his college's mission are (or ought to be) inextricable from the community in which they are embedded. That students, faculty, and academic institutions should serve community purposes, actively engage in community affairs, and network themselves in real and virtual communities relevant to shared goals is taken to be an obvious point.

It remains uncertain to what extent this alignment of objectives between institutions of higher learning, community organiza-

7 See Robert N. Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (University of California Press, 1985), and Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (Simon & Schuster, 2000).

8 John H. Pryor et al., *The American Freshman: National Norms, Fall 2011* (Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA, 2011), 26.

tions, employers, and government is directed by pedagogical principle and to what extent it serves the changing structural and financial needs of increasingly stressed colleges and universities. What is certain is that there is a growing resistance to the suggestion that the individual and social functions of education should remain separate. Rather, higher education is now often considered not merely an *end* in itself, nor primarily an enrichment of the student as an end in themself, but as a process of training and development in which the student is figured as the *means* of satisfying employers' demands, communities' needs, and the nation's political and economic aspirations.

When contemporary educators use the term "Ivory Tower" pejoratively, as they often do, they seem to condemn not only its legacy of exclusivity but the purity of ivory and the isolation of towers. Consciously or unconsciously, they express hostility toward the Ivory Tower's *esoteric* quality, the fact that it defines an inner circle set apart from the rest. Curiously, the idiom was first invoked in the Bible's *Song of Solomon* (7:4), where the beloved's perfect neck is described as "a tower of ivory." In fact, in addition to the familiar architecture of bright Gothic towers across Europe and the United States, the term has several notable literary and religious associations, including the sanctity of the Christian Mary. It is perhaps an unfortunate coincidence that, in the United States, some of the oldest and most selective universities belong to what we call the "Ivy League." Here, the centuries-old ivy on the walls of these venerable institutions seems to suggest an additional barrier between the few and the many, making the Ivy League's Ivory Towers doubly impenetrable fortresses of erudition and privilege. Of course, in an age where greater access to higher education is often defined as a national priority and where educational goals are frequently defended with reference not to individuals' intellectual gains but to the vivifying economic effects that advanced training will bring to our communities, it is not surprising that an esoteric and disengaged educational metaphor would be rejected as antidemocratic or reactionary.

||

Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* is widely considered the greatest work on American politics ever written. Tocqueville is regularly mistaken for a champion of American democracy although he was actually a thoughtful critic who worried that democratic individualism, combined with the majority's tyranny over thought, would outstrip intellectual freedom in the United States. Tocqueville's assessment was complex, for he argued that American democracy created isolated yet groupish people who felt insignificant in comparison to the majority, but who were therefore enthralled to the majority's prejudices and preferences. While Tocqueville noted that Americans' mental energies were regularly turned back toward their own private concerns, he worried equally that Americans' patronage to the majority was akin to the climate of a royal court, one where citizens were compelled to sing the praises of "the people" and to value only those deeds that gained popular approval. Such pressures, Tocqueville feared, would condemn most Americans to lives of preoccupied agitation, unwitting conformism, and the endless pursuit of career success and material wealth: busy yet trivial existences in which true reflection could find no place.[9]

It is odd that the social side of Tocqueville's critique has been ignored while his concerns about excessive individualism have been so often repeated, a process ironically mirrored in the near consensus with which proponents of community engagement hasten to agree that American individuals must be more civically engaged. Certainly, one of the primary goals of community-based learning is to draw students out of their isolation, to help them form the civic "associations" that Tocqueville praised so often, to encourage them to "engage the world beyond the

9 Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America,* trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (University of Chicago Press, 2000).

campus walls."[10] And empirical research does suggest that community engagement correlates positively with skill development in communication, critical thinking, and other important areas. Nevertheless, *what is markedly uncritical about the trend toward community engagement is that there is little room for either students or faculty to consider its subtle suggestion that "the world" only really exists "beyond the campus walls," that the real value of knowledge is found only when it is applied in the service of the community's needs.*

Most community-based learning projects substitute time spent reading, writing, or discussing ideas with "hands-on" doing. Even the reflective components of community projects can rarely compensate for the full amount of textual engagement, writing, or reflective discussion found in traditional classroom activities. Of course, those of us who have been involved with community engagement are well aware of such trade-offs, and we have tallied up their most obvious costs and benefits. But we may be less cognizant of their hidden implications. In my community-based learning courses and projects, I have witnessed students' pragmatic biases grow as our community-based interactions increase in complexity and duration. As Tocqueville feared, a student who approaches a subject within the context of a community problem may be inclined to believe that "there is less risk for him in making use of some false principles than in wasting his time in establishing the truth of all his principles,"[11] just as a student engaged in a community leadership project may hastily conclude that "it is not by long and learned demonstrations that the world is led."[12] Indeed, Tocqueville noticed immediately that hierarchical social organizations based on rank and exclusivity tended to favor "the haughty, sterile search for abstract truths," while the American democratic culture sug-

10 Elise Dallimore, David A. Rochefort, and Kristen Simonelli, "Community-Based Learning and Research," *New Directions for Teaching and Learning* 124 (2010): 15–22.

11 Tocqueville, *Democracy in America,* 361.

12 Ibid., 435.

gests that we use knowledge to better our communities, encouraging us to demand of knowledge primarily its "immediate, useful applications."[13]

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The American poet Wallace Stevens coined the apt phrase, "the pressure of reality," to describe not only our daily tasks of labor, bill paying, and the like, but the pressure exerted on our minds by "events […] that stir the emotions to violence, that engage us in what is direct and immediate and real […] that involve the concepts and sanctions that are the order of our lives and may involve our very lives […] [that occur] with increasing omen, in what may be called our presence."[14] The realities of our time, the difficult and sometimes ominous realities facing our communities, our nation, and our world are too real to deny. We ought not turn away from them, and higher education seems like a reasonable place to ground our efforts to contend with them. But part of learning to contend with the pressures of reality is finding freedom *from* reality, developing the imaginative space necessary for creative resistance to reality.

Of course, imaginations conceived in remote relation to reality would be effete and hollow. But just as too little reality can deplete the imagination, so can too much. A student who has not practiced resisting the pressure of reality, who has not been encouraged to work with impractical, abstract ideas in an Ivory Tower, is likely to be incapable of responding with genuine creativity and spontaneity to the problems and concerns of people around him. Such a person may be committed to serving the community, but he is likely to have difficulty generating truly innovative ideas, for the pressures of reality, convention, and popular bias will have come to weigh too heavily on his mind.

13 Ibid., 438.

14 Wallace Stevens, *The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and the Imagination* (Vintage, 1951), 22.

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One domain where "the pressure of reality" has made its effects visible is in the ever-increasing ardency of student relativism. Many students begin my courses in ethics and politics assuming that everything they (and others) think is determined by the culture or community in which they live. A phenomenon wrongly attributed to dissociated or abstract thought, unreflective relativism among students derives largely from a profound immersion in community. Some students argue that it is impossible to imagine a person extricating themself from the norms of their community. Certainly, they maintain, they could never establish enough distance to entertain a truly unprejudiced thought. And if such an intellectually free person were ever to be found, students are sure that their "moral opinions" would "come down from on high," as twisted and unrealistic beliefs unfairly imposed upon people of different communities or cultures.

One student recently summarized the consequence of such relativism in the following way: "It is unethical to believe in ethics." By this paradoxical phrase she meant that anyone who is foolish enough to believe in right and wrong is also likely to inflict his will upon others who disagree. Therefore, the only way to respect others is to disbelieve in ethics or to keep one's "moral opinions" to oneself without acting upon them, for even if a student believes that an act is morally wrong, they are equally assured that their convictions are wholly determined by the community which has always already shaped their thoughts. The paradox of such relativism is that it is not, itself, subjected to a relativistic critique. That is, many students are incapable of imagining a morality that is absolute and *not* relative, of thinking about morality in a way that is fundamentally opposed to their own.

Contrary to the intended civic outcomes of community engagement, in which students are empowered to act upon their moral

convictions in local, national, or international settings, our focus on serving community interests may actually solidify students' belief that community is the *sine qua non* of moral value. This perspective may be reinforced by our design of community-based projects, which we are careful to present as ethically nonproblematic and politically neutral. We rarely ask students to shield women seeking abortions from angry protestors. More often, students tutor children or assist in refugee centers. I have wondered what we would say to a student who has an ethical or political objection to child-tutoring or basic social work, but, as might be expected, I have never encountered any such objections.

Students today pose radical, critical challenges to their communities only with great difficulty. Indeed, some even insist that such challenges are theoretically impossible, since the values upon which such challenges would be based would have to be derived from the community itself. When our community-based efforts, then, ask students to leave the classroom and to direct their learning toward (ostensibly unobjectionable) forms of service to their communities, and when we imply that doing so is always valuable because service to the community is inherently "good," we may be re-entrenching students' enthrallment to social power, to the belief that the goals and values of the community are always "right."

In my own college courses, I have been surprised for several years by students' views concerning notorious heads of state like Joseph Stalin and Adolf Hitler, views which reflect a related danger of excessive community immersion. A surprising number of students, from diverse backgrounds and from three different universities, have informed me that while they do not "agree" with the decisions made by such leaders, they feel it is important to recognize such leaders' "skill" and political "effectiveness." It has been difficult to figure out why students want to defend people like Stalin and Hitler, especially in the way they defend them, which obscures the horrific content of their actions and focuses

instead on the technocratic elements of their statecraft, rhetoric, and authority.

Yet what students are saying is that they want to recognize political accomplishments outside of any moral framework, in part because they are attracted to the idea of achieving power, and in part because they are hopeless about the possibility of discovering definitions of right and wrong that transcend the ever-changing "moral opinions" of the community. Having been persuaded that the community determines all values, these students have sought out that aspect of even the most atrocious actions that might survive the muddle of relativistic ethical debate. And the sole value that seems to supersede moral and cultural differences is: power. Sadly, like community-based service, community-based power is wrongly conceived here to be intrinsically morally valuable, as that which creates social change, and as that which ultimately decides moral and political disagreements.

Against these trends, the aloofness, abstraction, and distance from reality that characterize the Ivory Tower serve as important correctives in teaching students to think beyond the demands of their own time and place. An encounter with Plato's moral absolutism is not likely to convince today's college student to become a moral absolutist, but it does provide a potential vantage point from which to observe, evaluate, and critique the student's own community along with its most fundamental values and priorities (including power, democracy, progress, and even community service). If that vantage point is lofty and isolated from the student's daily life, as it must be, then we should not be so quick to dismiss the Ivory Tower as a useless place, for the Ivory Tower provides a useful critical perspective on the communities we inhabit, learn from, and both intentionally and unwittingly serve.

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There is a crucial difference between educating a student to make critical, creative, and independent determinations about the values and dynamics at work in the community, on one hand, and marshaling a student's intellect and energy in the service of what a college or university, academic department, faculty member, or community organization has decided to be a valuable community project. As much as we both fear and revere "individualism" today, it is clear that the first pedagogical objective is an individual one, for it involves the development of a student's identity as a subject, as a person, as a critical thinker and actor. It is reflected in the pedagogical aim of self-actualization: The goal of a student's learning, in this respect, is that the student may become more fully themself. If precautions are not taken, the second objective risks using the student in the service of social aims and community values determined not by themself but by others, even if those values are civic-minded, socially just, environmentally responsible, and the like.

A central anxiety expressed in Putnam's and Bellah's works is that the gradual destruction of "social capital" will lead to a future in which society is purchased, if you will, by powerful interests we no longer have the collective "resources" to resist. What these writers recognized, but what we too often forget, is that the shifting of personal and political "investments" that describes contemporary liberal individualism is, itself, a collective phenomenon. Individualism, emotivism, privatism, pragmatism, relativism: these are widespread *social* trends accompanied not merely by individual withdrawals from civic life but by shared experiences of confrontation with technological power, a cut-throat economic and social climate, and a culture of consumption that seems to leave citizens little choice but to "buy in" to the game according to its given rules. These "pressures of reality" persuade individuals to worship social power, to fear that which does not serve popular interests, and to assume, in Herbert Marcuse's words, that "the real is rational and that the

system delivers the goods."[15] Community engagement projects *are* able to address such dangers by involving students in projects that build "social capital," yet unless they simultaneously strengthen students' capacities to generate radical questions, critiques, and alternatives to community projects, they risk merely reinforcing devotion to the power of community, the rationality of the given, and the supremacy of pragmatic considerations.

Just as community-based learning projects can create significant changes in students' knowledge and attitudes, isolated meditation on philosophical texts can teach students that even community service is not morally neutral, that relativism has important limitations, and that focusing only on the "effectiveness" of political leaders obfuscates the moral content of their actions.

For students to inhabit both a community and an Ivory Tower, faculty, administrators, and students have to be aware of the value of serving the community *and* the value of not serving it, the good of training for practical ends *and* the good of exercising the mind on impractical tasks, the need to develop real-world applications for knowledge and the need to think in an environment where the demands of reality are lightened, lessened, to allow for maximal experimentation, imagination, and creativity. Perhaps we might imagine a form of community engagement in which students' imaginative critiques of fundamental community processes were valued as highly as the integration of already established community needs with student contributions and pedagogical objectives.

Most importantly, to ensure the survival of Ivory Tower learning on our community-engaged campuses, we must not reduce learning objectives to "transferable skills" or "civically responsible attitudes" that "add value" to students who then "add value" to corporations and communities. Rather, affording all students the once rare privilege of inhabiting an Ivory Tower, for a time,

15 Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (Beacon, 1964), 84.

means ensuring that they retain some space that is free from the pressures, prejudices, and demands of our social and economic organizations. This space and this freedom are necessary if they are to create authentic ways of living for themselves.

Jericho Jumble Jungle

We may become obsessed with the tearing down of walls. It is an activity associated with the capture of a promised land. You may know the story: Joshua and the Israelites marched around the city of Jericho for six days and then shouted. Keeping his promise, God made Jericho's mighty walls fall down.

||

I had a schizophrenic client once with powerful religious delusions who jumbled her interior walls in a session and, afterwards, literally fell to the ground as she decompensated down the hall.

||

In parts of West Africa, there is a sort of invisible wall between the town and the jungle that is not literal but formidable and necessary all the same. To step through the wall into the jungle … in an instant, the temperature jumps ten degrees; humidity seems to double; one instantly encounters monstrous insects and reptiles.

Your Side

I see || the soul's black hole || when I close my eyes || taking in all || light || ignoring walls || it fells || all that falls || like || Brandenburg Concertos || fall in claves and octaves || Dear Lord || will you ignore my wish || will || in Your Heavenly halls || pallid facades || that stall and forestall || incoming || ? || how long || I've longed || to be || on your side || of the wall || . ||

The Duplicity of Walls

As we have discussed, of the wall around the unconscious — *tra la la* — almost nothing certain can be said, for it is — *tum tum tum* — unconscious and repressed. It is "walled in" or "walled off." When it speaks, it is "off the wall."

There is a Jewish joke about two Jews propped against a wall facing a firing squad. They are asked whether they have final wishes. One asks for a cigarette. The other says, "Shush, Moshe! Don't make trouble."[1]

Freud thought jokes were an emanation of the unconscious. He considered play to be "the first stage of jokes" and jokes to be forms of "developed play" because jokes pursue aims discovered first in play that nevertheless rely on the mastery of rather sophisticated psychological mechanisms in order to find expression.[2] For Freud, both play and jokes are means of satisfy-

1 Ruth Wisse, *No Joke: Making Jewish Humor* (Princeton University Press, 2015), 178.

2 Sigmund Freud, "Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious" (1905), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* vol. 8: *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious (1905),* ed. and trans. James Strachey with Anna Freud (Hogarth Press, 1960), 128, 179.

ing desires that, for fear of interpersonal or intra-psychic consequences, cannot be otherwise satisfied.

The statement, "Jews are passive unto death," is too grim to be stated as such, especially in light of the Shoah, about which Bruno Bettelheim argues that "the question that haunts all who study the extermination camps" was the question of why "millions walked quietly, without resistance, to their deaths."[3]

The specific compromise offered by joking is to package forbidden impulses, emotions, or ideas in a less blatant and more permissible form, "walling off" the forbidden material to avoid silencing by the critical and repressive functions in the self or others, while serving the social purposes of entertainment and laughter.

The making of the joke or the *joke*-work, as Freud sometimes calls it,[4] translates and reshapes unacceptable material into the form of a joke, thus permitting the joke maker and the joke audience to experience forbidden impulses without having to fully face their (internal or external) consequences. Thus, "nothing distinguishes jokes more clearly from all other psychical structures than this double-sidedness and this duplicity in speech."[5]

3 Quoted in Christopher Lasch, *The Minimal Self: Psychic Survival in Troubled Times* (W.W. Norton, 1984), 113.
4 Freud, "Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious," 54.
5 Ibid., 172.

Bartleby and Occupy Wall Street

Herman Melville's Bartleby (specifically, his *inoperosità,* inoperativity[1]) is encased in walls, unspeakable interior walls between him and the unnamed Lawyer, and exterior walls, owing to construction on Wall Street. If you know the story, you know that Bartleby stares at a wall opposite his window. We are not certain, but we doubt that this can be an expression of endless fascination; at least, it challenges our imagination to do so. The wall is "dead," seemingly an analogue for Bartleby's mind.

In the end, Bartleby dies inside the walls of the Tombs, of which we learn:

> The yard was entirely quiet. It was not accessible to the common prisoners. The surrounding walls, of amazing thickness, kept off all sounds behind them. The Egyptian character of the masonry weighed upon me with its gloom. But a soft imprisoned turf grew underfoot. The heart of the eternal pyr-

1 Giorgio Agamben, *Opus Dei: An Archaeology of Duty,* trans. Adam Kotsko (Stanford University Press, 2013), 96–97.

> amids, it seemed, wherein, by some strange magic, through the clefts, grass-seed, dropped by birds, had sprung.[2]

Is the grass inside, which represents a break in the wall, part and parcel of Bartleby's death? Is it recompense? Is it adequate, either as a metaphor or a rebuttal?

||

While discussing Bartleby, two students in my philosophy class stare blankly out the window at the western wall of Fronczak Hall.

||

If Bartleby's protest was to refuse to re-(in)scribe the law by not working, to insist upon his preference for not being and not doing (which Giorgio Agamben associates famously with his claim to *potentiality,* i.e., to being more than or other than what actually is at any given moment), then it may seem like the Wall Street protestors were the opposite.[3] They were not insisting upon being other than what they were; they were applying the pressure of actuality, presence, and immediacy to a situation in which the "laws" that should have governed Wall Street — Wall Street has inarguably enjoyed certain sovereign benefits, most notably the benefit that Agamben describes as the ability "to apply and not apply," as in the recent bailouts when the basic laws of moral hazard, risk and reward, prosecution for illegal acts, laws preventing fraud and conflicts of interest, and a basic sense of equity were suspended — were all violated.

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2 Herman Melville, *Bartleby, the Scrivener,* in *American Literature,* vol. 1, ed. William E. Cain et al., 2nd ed. (Pearson, 2014), 1092.

3 Occupy Wall Street, or, more precisely, the Occupy Movement, was an anti–big banking, anti–big finance populist movement that reached several countries and peaked in approximately 2011–2012.

Bartleby insists upon a language of preference in a world of laws, duties, obligations, contracts, and rights. It is an unwelcome intrusion. In a curious way, Occupy protesters insisted on the opposite: that law, duty, obligation, contracts, even the "spirit of the law" (justice) be observed in what had become the home of lawless enterprise governed by preference and pleasure, conducted at enormous popular expense and suffering.

||

> In 1653, Wall Street was named for a "barricade built by Peter Stuyveysant to protect the early Dutch settlers from the local Indians," writes Peter Geisst in *Wall Street: A History.* Wall Street has always been then a place of barricades, an instrument of separation, a means to distance "entrepreneurial" settlers from the locals, a place of appropriation and exploitation. Indeed, it marks a border, a boundary, a space designed to produce both wealth and alienation. It marks a frontier; a defensive establishment already prepared against the backlash of the people beyond it. It thus exists as a predatory commercial site, though so 'normalized' it virtually ceases to look or feel like one. Necessarily, it is a place of self-righteousness; wealth must be a sign of God's favor.[4]

||

In our world of for-profits and not-for-profits, the Occupy Movement was, in the words of one facilitator in Buffalo, NY, a "not-not-for-profit." This did not mean they were *for-profit,* but the addition of this division putatively reminds us that there are organizations that exist between and within any divisions we create. It is like the story Agamben tells in the third chapter

4 Jon Thompson, "Melville and Bartleby: Facing the End of an Audience," *Identity Theory,* February 18, 2008, https://www.identitytheory.com/melville-bartleby-facing-audience.

of *The Time That Remains* of a contest between Apelles and Protogenes over the finest line:

> Protogenes draws such a fine line that it seems not to have been drawn by the paintbrush of any human being. But Apelles, using his brush, divides his rival's line in two with an even finer line, cutting it lengthwise in half.[5]

Agamben uses this story to argue that messianism "does not have any object proper to itself but divides the divisions traced out by the law." The significance of this "division of divisions" is that "it forces us to think about the question of the universal and particular in a completely new way, not only in logic, but also in ontology and politics."[6]

||

One important question is what the government and Wall Street, respectively, represented at this time. The fantasy associated with Wall Street, perhaps one that was reinforced by the growing recognition of rampant greed and corruption, seemed to be the fantasy of unlimited gratification (and a position of specialness or mastery) vis-à-vis the market. The government, on the other hand, was depicted primarily as a paternal, regulatory, restrictive force that only got in the way of fantasied (oral) gratification by insisting on burdens and blockages (taxes, sacrifices, etc.) as well as "equality before the law," which, to narcissists, feels like the opposite of specialness.

Some of the ambivalence witnessed both within the Occupy Movement and in media or popular reactions to it has to do with our hesitancy in giving up on the fantasy of privileged, perfect gratification and the omnipotent associations we have with

5 Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans,* trans. Patricia Dailey (Stanford University Press, 2005), 50.
6 Ibid., 51.

the possibility of commanding the market and accumulating enough wealth to consume everything we desire. The market, here, figures itself much like the *maternal breast,* or, after Chris Lasch, a highly complex set of "life-support systems," upon which we have an increasingly anxious dependence.[7]

So, hatred of Wall Street is both distinct and more complex than hatred of government, since the protesters of Wall Street do not wish to destroy the market altogether but insist that we give up on narcissistic, greedy fantasies for the sake of a more equitable distribution of resources, while haters of government often seem to wish to destroy government and the idea of being governed, in order to enjoy that fantasy of unfettered access to the life-giving nourishment they believe they could extract from the market if left alone.

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Consider this to be (largely) true: It is not an acceptable part of US culture to ask for help. Feelings of unmet need must express themselves as a kind of rage. And they express themselves as a kind of rage *not* at a disappointing care provider who has failed, but at someone or something who blocked access or got in the way of our (independent) ability to take care of ourselves. The Occupy Movement did not exactly follow this pattern. Many of the protestors seemed able and willing to ask for help, explicitly or implicitly, but, of course, this is also why the movement suffered so greatly in terms of media coverage and national esteem. We do not recognize (or like, particularly) those who ask for help in politics.

The first afternoon I spent with the Buffalo, NY Occupy protestors, I saw a young mother with a small boy by the road holding a sign that read: "My name is Lennon and I matter."

7 Christopher Lasch, *The Minimal Self: Psychic Survival in Troubled Times* (W.W. Norton, 1984), 34.

I couldn't help but think of it as exemplary of children protesting neglect, abuse, or narcissistic parenting, insisting that their needs, their names, their selves matter.

Even the symbolism of "occupying" a "space" seemed important here. The goal was to regain the primary (pre)occupation (i.e., attention) of the parent, without which the child suffers or perishes.

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There was a difference between rationally opposing the Occupy protests and misunderstanding them. Once, Eric Cantor (R-VA) warned about the threat posed by "mobs" in Manhattan who were "pitting Americans against Americans,"[8] while New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg claimed that demonstrators were trying to "take jobs away from people."[9] GOP Presidential hopeful Herman Cain argued that the protests were anti-American and that no one should be angry "at the bankers and Wall Street" because "they're the ones that helped create the jobs."[10]

Even hardened conservatives neither seriously believe that the largely peaceful and democratic protestors clamoring for job opportunities and financial equity seek to "take jobs away," nor that Wall Street bankers "create jobs." In fact, the 2008 credit crisis and global recession, caused by financial deregulation and the greed of top investment banks, insurance firms, and rat-

8 Amy Bingham, "House Majority Leader Eric Cantor Calls Wall St. Protests 'Growing Mobs,'" *ABC News,* October 7, 2011, https://abcnews.com/blogs/politics/2011/10/house-majority-leader-eric-cantor-calls-wall-st-protests-growing-mobs.

9 Jill Colvin, "Bloomberg Says Occupy Wall Street Protesters Are 'Trying to Destroy Jobs,'" *DNAinfo,* October 7, 2011, https://www.dnainfo.com/20111007/manhattan/bloomberg-says-occupy-wall-street-protesters-are-trying-destroy-jobs/.

10 Herman Cain, interview by Bob Schieffer, *Face the Nation,* CBS, October 9, 2011.

ing agencies on Wall Street, left millions of people unemployed around the world.

Such glaring misrepresentations of fact and intention would have been understood by the late Scottish psychologist R.D. Laing as elements of a process he called "mystification."[11] Mystification is an effort (not always a conscious one) to subvert and confuse by presuming facts not in evidence, by misattributing others' motives and intentions, and by posing loaded questions that imply undesirable or even impossible answers.

A common example of mystification would be the case in which one person petitions another for a small favor, and the other replies, "You know I can't do that. Why are you trying to hurt me?" In this case, the petitioner is told what he or she ostensibly "knows" and this attributed knowledge is then used as evidence that the petitioner's motive is "to hurt" the other person, perhaps by making him or her feel guilty for not providing the favor.

In this instance, both participants are left feeling confused, frustrated, even angry, since neither understands the other and a wedge is driven between them in the form of a surprising attribution of hostility. I have noticed that even the questions asked by mainstream media analysts seemed similarly likely to mystify audiences about the purposes of the Occupy protesters. One such question was: "What do they want?" Like the question posed after the attacks of September 11 ("Why do they hate us?"), such a question conveyed both a rebuttal and a dismissal. It was, in many ways, akin to the question so often posed of Bartleby or of Melville: "What is he doing?"…

11 R.D. Laing, "Mystification, Confusion and Conflict," in *Intensive Family Therapy: Theoretical and Practical Aspects,* ed. Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy and James L. Framo (Harper & Row, 1965), 343–44.

No Wall Stands Alone

Walls conceptually entail what lies on each side of each face, what is in, what is out. There is no such thing as a wall in a vacuum. *The Garden in Eden was the first "gated community."*

Look for Me Now

I feel the wrath || of myself || inside my self || break and bend || like a man || with too much room || like drawing a thread || through the eye of a needle || like a man || slipping on the hardwood || clutching at the wall || coming down || falling down || tearing || himself || down || the painting || hanging on the wall || like a burglar || who leaps || over the back wall || losing his footing || losing his looting || loosed out || of his black sack || upon his back || who will look now || call me now || there is no room || no space encased || what walls || will hold the sound || who will heed || the call: || "Look for me now!" || now || that the walls || themselves || have fallen down || ? ||

The Great Wall

Franz Kafka's story, "The Great Wall of China," is a story about loss of footing, loss of foundation, as it were, and how, ultimately, even a project as great as the wall, which unites people from all five hundred provinces in glory and unity, fails to accommodate the entropic and confounding aspects of human nature.

"There was a great deal of mental confusion at the time" of peak building in the early days, for although "so many people were trying as hard as they could to join together for a single purpose," "human nature, which is fundamentally careless and by nature like the whirling dust, endures no restraint. If it restricts itself, it will soon begin to shake the restraints madly and tear up walls, chains, and even itself all over the place."[1]

The leadership, including the Emperor, is inscrutable. To attempt to comprehend it is to drive oneself to distraction.

> In the office of the leadership — where it was and who sat there no one I asked knows or knew — in this office I imagine that all human thoughts and wishes revolve in a circle, and

1 Franz Kafka, "The Great Wall of China" (1930), trans. Ian Johnston, *Franz Kafka Online,* https://www.kafka-online.info/the-great-wall-of-china.html.

all human aims and fulfilments in a circle going in the opposite direction. And through the window the reflection of the divine worlds fell onto the hands of the leadership as they drew up the plans […]

The only conclusion left is that the leadership deliberately chose piecemeal construction. But building in sections was something merely makeshift and impractical. So the conclusion remains that the leadership wanted something impractical. An odd conclusion! True enough, and yet from another perspective it had some inherent justification.

Nowadays one can perhaps speak about it without danger. At that time for many people, even the best, there was a secret principle: Try with all your powers to understand the orders of the leadership, but only up to a certain limit — then stop thinking about them. A very reasonable principle, which incidentally found an even wider interpretation in a later often repeated comparison: Stop further thinking about it, not because it could harm you — it is not at all certain that it will harm you. In this matter one cannot speak in general about harming or not harming. What will happen to you is like a river in spring. It rises, grows stronger, eats away powerfully at the land along its shores, and still maintains its own course down into the sea and is more welcome as a fitter partner for the sea. Reflect upon the orders of the leadership as far as that. But then the river overflows its banks, loses its form and shape, slows down its forward movement, tries, contrary to its destiny, to form small seas inland, damages the fields, and yet cannot maintain its expansion long, but runs back within its banks, in fact, even dries up miserably in the hot time of year which follows. Do not reflect on the orders of the leadership to that extent. […]

So if things are like this, why do we leave our homes, the river and bridges, our mothers and fathers, our crying wives, our children in need of education, and go to school in the

> distant city, with our thoughts on the wall to the north, even further away? Why? Ask the leadership.[2]

There is even, the narrator tells us, a legend or fable which expresses the relationship between the average person and the Emperor perfectly:

> The Emperor — so they say — has sent a message, directly from his death bed, to you alone, his pathetic subject, a tiny shadow which has taken refuge at the furthest distance from the imperial sun. He ordered the herald to kneel down beside his bed and whispered the message into his ear. He thought it was so important that he had the herald repeat it back to him. He confirmed the accuracy of the verbal message by nodding his head. And in front of the entire crowd of those who've come to witness his death — all the obstructing walls have been broken down and all the great ones of his empire are standing in a circle on the broad and high soaring flights of stairs — in front of all of them he dispatched his herald. The messenger started off at once, a powerful, tireless man. Sticking one arm out and then another, he makes his way through the crowd. If he runs into resistance, he points to his breast where there is a sign of the sun. So he moves forward easily, unlike anyone else. But the crowd is so huge; its dwelling places are infinite. If there were an open field, how he would fly along, and soon you would hear the marvelous pounding of his fist on your door. But instead of that, how futile are all his efforts. He is still forcing his way through the private rooms of the innermost palace. He will never win his way through. And if he did manage that, nothing would have been achieved. He would have to fight his way down the steps, and, if he managed to do that, nothing would have been achieved. He would have to stride through the courtyards, and after the courtyards the second palace encircling the first, and, then again, stairs and courtyards, and then,

2 Ibid.

once again, a palace, and so on for thousands of years. And if he finally did burst through the outermost door — but that can never, never happen — the royal capital city, the centre of the world, is still there in front of him, piled high and full of sediment. No one pushes his way through here, certainly not with a message from a dead man. But you sit at your window and dream of that message when evening comes. That's exactly how our people look at the emperor, hopelessly and full of hope.[3]

3 Ibid.

Mexico Berlin Palestine

Mexican smuggling gangs have sawed through new segments of border wall 3,272 times over the past three years, according to unpublished U.S. Customs and Border Protection maintenance records obtained by *The Washington Post* under the Freedom of Information Act. […] Smuggling gangs typically cut the barrier with inexpensive power tools widely available at retail hardware stores, including angle grinders and demolition saws. Once the 18-to-30-foot-tall bollards are severed near the ground, their only remaining point of attachment is at the top of the structure, leaving the steel beam dangling in the air. It easily swings open with a push, creating a gap wide enough for people and narcotics to pass through.[1]

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As the world mark[ed] the 25th anniversary of the Berlin Wall's collapse […] Palestinians knocked a hole through an altogether different wall this weekend. Palestinian activists

1 Nick Miroff, "Trump's Border Wall Has Been Breached More Than 3,000 Times by Smugglers, CBP Records Show," *The Washington Post,* March 2, 2022, https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/03/02/trump-border-wall-breached/.

affiliated with local popular resistance committees broke through the West Bank separation barrier Saturday, the Palestinian Ma'an News Agency reported. "No matter how high walls are built, they will fall," the popular committees said in a statement cited by Ma'an. "Just as the Berlin Wall fell, the wall in Palestine will fall, along with the occupation." The hole was near the Palestinian town of Bir Nabala, north of Jerusalem, said Ynet.[2]

2 "On Berlin Wall's Collapse Anniversary, Palestinians Punch Hole through West Bank Wall," *Haaretz,* November 9, 2014, https://www.haaretz.com/2014-11-09/ty-article/palestinians-punch-hole-through-wb-wall/0000017f-f626-d318-afff-f767e0c90000.

Wall *Bildung*

Consider that the Spartans built no walls, believing walls were cages. Consider, too, how much Plato admired the Spartans but how very necessary walls of all kinds (interior, exterior) would have been for his vision of political and personal justice to come to pass. His utopia, *The Republic,* literally begins at the Long Walls of the Piraeus. "I went down yesterday to the Piraeus with Glaucon…."[1]

David Frye contends that without walls, no human civilization could have occurred — walls being necessary to provide relief from constant distraction of threats and warfare and thereby to allow for concentration on higher, loftier civil and spiritual goals.[2]

1 Plato, *The Republic,* trans. Desmond Lee, 2nd rev. ed. (Penguin, 1987), 3.
2 David Frye, *Walls: A History of Civilization in Blood and Brick* (Scribner, 2018).

Add This

semiotic gates are walls || put fancy || is a wall || set this aside || add this to rhetoric[1] || as Wallace Stevens says || "Tomorrow when the sun /|| For all your images, / || Comes up as the sun, bull fire, / || Your images will have left / || No shadow of themselves." || . ||

1 Wallace Stevens, "Add This to Rhetoric," in *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (Vintage, 1982), 198.

Walled Off

Simone Weil writes in *Gravity and Grace* that "the world is the closed door. It is a barrier. And at the same time it is the way through. Two prisoners whose cells adjoin communicate with each other by knocking on the wall. The wall is the thing which separates them but it is also their means of communication. It is the same with God. Every separation is a link."[1]

Affliction, according to the extraordinary mystic, is the ultimate separation. It is to be pinned up against a wall, confronted by unrelenting, brute force. More than that, it is to love the crushing desolation of being walled off from — and therefore paradoxically reunited with — the presence of God. Affliction is "a simple and ingenious device to introduce into the soul of a finite creature that immensity of force, blind, brutal, and cold. The infinite distance which separates God from the creature is concentrated into a point to transfix the centre of a soul."[2]

> The man whose soul remains oriented toward God while a nail is driven through it finds himself nailed to the very cen-

1 Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace,* trans. Arthur Wills (G.P. Putnam, 1952).
2 Simone Weil, "The Love of God and Affliction," in *The Simone Weil Reader,* ed. George A. Panichas (David McKay Co. 1942), 452.

> tre of the universe; the true centre, which is not in the middle, which is not in space and time, which is God […]. In this marvelous dimension, without leaving the time and place to which the body is bound, the soul can traverse the whole of space and time and come into the actual presence of God.[3]

Affliction is *not* God trying to make sure humans submit to Him. Nearly the opposite: Affliction is God leaving you all alone to be crushed by an unfeeling world. "Affliction causes God to be absent for a time, more absent than a dead man."[4] Affliction makes you nothing, which you already were. You become an effect, a blind effect of a blind cause, a product of necessity, not of providential design. "There can be no answer to the Why? of the afflicted, because the world is necessity and not purpose."[5] That, Weil thinks, is the truth about ourselves and the world. We forget it sometimes, but at bottom we are nothing; even our souls are like matter, "dead things."

This inhumanity, this unthinking obedience of the world is moreover the source of all beauty. The sea, she says, is beautiful because it is perfectly obedient to every single external pressure, because it has no will or mind of its own, because it is, in a sense, a dead thing in its passivity. This, too, Weil believes should be a model for us in our lives. "The beauty of the world appears when we recognize that the substance of the universe is necessity and that the substance of necessity is obedience to a perfectly wise Love."[6]

Ironically, Weil seems to fall in line with some theorists of freedom and modernity when she argues that in light of this necessity that surrounds us, the free person is he who does not react like a robot to outer stimuli, but who forms an inner represen-

3 Ibid.
4 Ibid., 442.
5 Ibid., 466.
6 Ibid., 456.

tation of the necessity and then projects that outward. This is a revised Stoic position: One internalizes the constraints, then replicates them so as not to feel controlled by outer forces. Weil goes further by saying that if affliction kills the "I" from the outside, then the goal must be to first kill the "I" from the inside, so there is nothing left for affliction to kill.

To understand Weil, we must say that God does not exactly afflict human beings. God created a world in which affliction is possible and actual. This world, then, this machine, is what afflicts.

"[A]ffliction is not suffering. Affliction is something quite different from a divine educational method."[7] Rather, "a blind mechanism, heedless of degrees of spiritual perfection, continually buffets men hither and thither and flings them at the very foot of the Cross […]. It is not that God's providence is absent; it is by his Providence that God willed necessity as a blind mechanism."[8] In fact, "We ought to thank God from the depth of our hearts for giving us necessity, his mindless, sightless, and perfectly obedient slave, as absolute sovereign."[9]

Affliction, then, is a slavery and an exile. We know it destroys human relationships and is impervious to human understanding. It is also the greatest possible distance from God. "Nothing can be further from God than that which has been made accursed."[10] When you are afflicted, you are banished to nowhere. "Men struck down by affliction are at the foot of the Cross, almost at the greatest possible distance from God. It must not be thought that sin is a greater distance. Sin is not a distance."[11] Part of the pain of affliction is being so far removed from God that He is not even involved in our affliction.

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7 Ibid., 450.
8 Ibid., 445.
9 Ibid., 455.
10 Ibid., 444.
11 Ibid.

Yet "matter is entirely passive and in consequence entirely obedient to God's will. It is a perfect model for us. There cannot be any other being than God and that which obeys God."[12] All we can do is choose to love the fact of our obedience or choose not to. "Men can never escape from obedience to God. A creature cannot but obey. The only choice given to men, as intelligent and free creatures, is to desire obedience or not to desire it."[13]

12 Ibid., 447.
13 Ibid., 448.

Either Way

Søren Kierkegaard's "Ecstatic Discourse," found in the *Diapsalmata*:

> Marry, and you will regret it. Do not marry, and you will also regret it. Marry or do not marry, you will regret it either way. Whether you marry or you do not marry, you will regret it either way. Laugh at the stupidities of the world, and you will regret it; weep over them, and you will also regret it. Laugh at the stupidities of the world or weep over them, you will regret it either way. Whether you laugh at the stupidities of the world or you weep over them, you will regret it either way. Trust a girl, and you will regret it. Do not trust her, and you will also regret it. Trust a girl or do not trust her, you will regret it either way. Whether you trust a girl or do not trust her, you will regret it either way. Hang yourself, and you will regret it. Do not hang yourself, and you will also regret it. Hang yourself or do not hang yourself, you will regret it either way. Whether you hang yourself or do not hang yourself, you will regret it either way.[1]

1 Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or* (1843), in *A Kierkegaard Anthology*, ed. Robert Bretall (Princeton University Press, 1946), 38–39.

Clos

If it please the court divine || the court de vin || that holds this Clos || please excuse my courtesy || indeed courtesans and paramours || curt characters || behind this puppeteer's curtain wall || a fire is burning || as in Plato's cave || casting shadows on the wall || which you regard || without consideration || of shackles || or turning || around || an interior wall || of jelly || of guts || not of the belly || but unconscious || resounding sound || restricting movement || maintaining order || to be reductive || it is the meaning of "compartmentalized" || a wall || of || "hurt || you" || so as never || to be || "hurt" || by "the fire || in all things" || "Stones that the glacier had dug up, / || Ground out, begrudged, but then bequeathed / || […] || Heaved in wheelbarrows || or just lugged up by hand / || Both to clear the fields || and to build up / || The old Clos's walls || on which the joists and ties / || Bore their weight || until they rotted, / || Long after they had gone, / || […] || These now mark paths where you did time / || For whom the marriage was a hill / || Up which you hauled a stone / || You found lackluster, || awkward, || hard to slip / || As your philosopher's to understand, / || A code to break || — || and yet you must have known / || We would get to the bottom of it all / ||

Too soon without my help." [1] || the intermittent silence || of the place || permits me to work || for you || before you || forever || . ||

1 Stephen Yenser, "Terminal Moraine," in *The Fire in All Things* (Louisiana State University Press, 1993), 9.

Nature, Privacy, and Privation

While categorically distinct neither from Edenic and Arcadian (i.e., "Golden Age") fantasies known since antiquity, nor from popular idealizations of what is "natural," the state of nature offers up a fantasy in which we can see otherwise obscure psychological dynamics that hold powerful influence over contemporary individuals and groups.

Fantasies of states of nature are counterproductive to the extent that they are addressed to (real and fantasized) experiences of deprivation. The fantasy of returning to something like a psychic state of nature, where what is real is the absence and not the presence of selves, is both common and unfortunate. While such a claim may seem surprising at first, perhaps it ought not, given our obvious popular fascination with apocalypse, atrocities, and other disasters that destroy others or institutions that represent depriving objects, just as they depict a state of extreme privation as a state of moral "safety" or innocence.

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It is most helpful to begin with a simple distinction between privation and deprivation. *Privation* refers to lack; *deprivation* to loss. Deprivation means that there was once something — such

as adequate care, order, or a nurturing person or environment — but then that something was removed, taken away. For the deprived child, "*things went well enough and then they did not go well enough.*"[1] Privation, on the other hand, means that there were grave absences or deficiencies that preceded the individual's *coming into being.* At the earliest stages of life, pervasive privations and "environmental disturbances distorting the emotional development of a baby"[2] may lead to psychotic illness or to other severe problems because they are "with" the individual from the beginning. From the perspective of the experiencer, privation is a *timeless* condition, whereas deprivation is a change, perhaps even a change marked by a singular event.

If deprivation implies a change, it also involves the individual in a process. In deprivation "a change has occurred which altered the whole life of the child," and this has happened at an age when the child is "old enough to know about things."[3] The world of the child is up-turned and the child suffers "unthinkable anxiety."[4] In response to this anxiety, he radically reconceives his orientation to self and others, adapting to what they perceive to be a new order based on control. A compliant child, now living "in a fairly neutral state, complying because there is nothing else that the child is strong enough to do,"[5] they identify with the new order in order to feel safe, although their freedom *to be safely* is precisely what has been lost.

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1 D.W. Winnicott, *Home Is Where We Start From: Essays by a Psychoanalyst,* ed. Clare Winnicott, Ray Sheperd, and Madeleine Davis (W.W. Norton, 1986), 91. Emphasis in original.

2 D.W. Winnicott, "Delinquency as a Sign of Hope," in *The Collected Works of D.W. Winnicott,* vol. 8: *1967–1968,* ed. Lesley Caldwell and Helen Taylor Robinson (Oxford University Press, 2016), 92.

3 Winnicott, *Home Is Where We Start From,* 91.

4 D.W. Winnicott, "Ego Integration in Child Development," in *The Maturational Processes and the Facilitating Environment: Studies in the Theory of Emotional Development* (International Universities Press, 1965), 57–58.

5 Winnicott, *Home Is Where We Start From,* 92.

A depriving home environment is "unsafe" for a child in several respects. It is unsafe for the child to be themself, unsafe to experience or display aggression, unsafe even to be aware of the loss of freedom and all it implies. The environment is no longer "indestructible," as it must be, and therefore the home, its walls, and the other people in it are unable to survive the child's (fantasized) aggressive and destructive attacks, attacks that are healthy and necessary if they are to establish and ultimately relate to the world as something external, outside of themself.[6] Fantasized destruction of the object takes the object out of the child's inner world and places it outside, where, perhaps paradoxically, it can be found again. This destruction, then, is not hateful or angry, but an important part of the process of beginning to relate to others not as subjective objects but as beings in their own right, beings who can be loved precisely because they can survive being separated from the child.

If the environment or important people in it are perceived to be incapable of "surviving" the child involved in this process, it is equally true that the child cannot survive themself or their own destructiveness, so they place themself under strict control.[7] This strict control means not merely obedient behavior, but an internal restriction on play, creativity, and the aggression and fantasized destructiveness that accompany these. We might say that, when something in the child's environment goes *out of control,* and the child finds it necessary to *take control,* they find a way to "survive" but lose contact with their innermost, developing self. Holding their (generally harmless) aggression "inside," they "become[] tense, over-controlled, and serious. There naturally follows a degree of inhibition of all impulses, and so of creativity."[8]

6 D.W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (Routledge, 1971), 86–94.

7 Winnicott, *Home Is Where We Start From,* 94.

8 D.W. Winnicott, *Deprivation and Delinquency,* ed. Clare Winnicott, Ray Shepherd, and Madeleine Davis (Routledge, 1990), 94.

Nevertheless, even after months or years of living in a compliant and self-controlled state, Winnicott surmises, the child may discover a glimmer of "hope," an intuition of the possibility of "get[ting] back behind the deprivation moment or condition." To find hope is to become aware of "the urge to get back behind the moment of deprivation and to undo the fear of the *unthinkable anxiety or confusion that resulted before the neutral state became organized.*"[9] The child finds hope and terror concurrently, and this intense emotional experience is often expressed in delinquent or antisocial behavior, in which, for instance, they steal or break a physical object.

The child is not seeking, of course, to steal or break a particular physical object for its own sake, but is hoping to rediscover a less controlled, more free, and more "destructive" way of experiencing objects in general, a way that has been lost since the moment of deprivation. In what may be a single instant, the child experiences hope, re-encounters the terror of deprivation, rediscovers aggression and destructiveness, and enacts — in however misguided a way — a vital aspect of themself by committing a "compulsive" act, one that is "dangerous" in the sense that it may provoke both external and internal (guilt) forms of punishment.[10]

This is a typical "process" of childhood deprivation, as D.W. Winnicott sees it. By contrast, take one of Winnicott's examples of privation: a child who suffers from insufficient oxygen, presumably since birth or even before. We might say that what is missing for this child is missing too early for it to be missed. This too-earliness, this missing of missing, Winnicott seems to mix up with the physical nature of the child's privation — which is by no means the only sort of privation with which we should be concerned. The child who suffers a limited supply of oxygen, although they may ultimately survive and grow up, will never say to himself, "I miss oxygen," nor will they "go around hop-

9 Winnicott, *Home Is Where We Start From,* 92. Emphasis in original.
10 Ibid., 93.

ing to convince someone that if there had been enough oxygen, things would have been alright."[11] But the deprived child may well miss what has been lost, by remembering, imagining, or fantasizing about it.

The child who suffers privation, who "lacks" rather than "loses," does so because their privation — whether it began *in utero,* at birth, or in the earliest months of life — preceded their psychic being. The child who suffers privation may, for any number of reasons, including parental anxiety and smothering forms of care, never find it "safe" to destroy loved objects in fantasy, but neither will they be suddenly forced to renounce that activity in order to take control of themself. Since "privation" signifies the absence of an antecedent condition by which one might compare one's state of loss, privation cannot be experienced as loss. Indeed, depending upon what exactly one means by "experience" — a question that is far more complex than most contemporary psychoanalytic thinkers permit, to their detriment[12] — it is arguable that privation may not be psychically "experienced" at all.

The nearly contrary meanings contained in the terms *privacy* and *privation* reflect the possibility of a relationship between individual growth and flourishing, on one hand, and impoverishment and debilitation on the other. What appears to be at stake, then, is likely more complex than mere absences, be they absences of oxygen or of loving contact. It might be easier to work this out if the English language had an adjectival form of *privation*. Although we might like to, we cannot say that the child lacking oxygen is *prived*. In French, it is possible to speak of conditions and persons *privés* and *déprivés*. And, just as in Spanish (*privar* and *deprivar*) and in Italian (*privare* and *deprivare*), the terms are all but synonymous. If, in Italian, one

11 Ibid., 92.

12 See M.H. Bowker, *Ideologies of Experience: Trauma, Failure, Deprivation, and the Abandonment of the Self* (Routledge, 2016).

may be *privo di vita* (lifeless), but also have a *vita privata* (private life), and if, in French, one may have a *vie privée* (a private life), but also be *privé de vie privée* (deprived of private life), we may come closer to appreciating the ambivalent connections between privation and privacy, separation and isolation, freedom and lack.

Let us consider this more deeply. An unfortunately common yet radically disruptive developmental experience is that of being impinged upon by parents or others such that one is *privé de vie privée* (deprived of private life). Of course, having a private life does not imply a privation of the self. Quite the opposite: Having a private life is necessary if one is to have a self. As Thomas Merton wisely notes, without private, interior lives, and the walls that guard them, we would be "merely submerged in a mass of impersonal human beings pushed around by automatic forces," having "lost [our] true humanity, [our] integrity, [our] ability to love, [our] capacity for self-determination."[13]

*De*privation of privacy threatens the very core of our selves, even if it does so by leaving us feeling helplessly alone. Take, for instance, Job's excruciating deprivations at the hand of Yahweh,[14] with which none of his friends, nor even his wife, could genuinely empathize. Of course, Job's deprivation also marked Job off as peculiar or singular, as they ultimately earned him a rare audience with God. We must consider the possibility that, although deprivation seems to threaten all that is private and unique about the self, it also seems to offer the individual a privileged or unique position vis-à-vis the group or community. Giorgio Agamben's use of the Latin term, *sacer,* meaning sacred and profane, is a well-known illustration of this dynamic.[15] If

13 Thomas Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1958), 13.

14 See M.H. Bowker, "The Meaning of Absurd Protest: *The Book of Job,* Albert Camus, and C. Fred Alford's *After the Holocaust,*" *Journal of Psychosocial Studies* 5, no. 1 (2011): 163–83.

15 See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life,* trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford University Press, 1998).

we are not careful — and we are not — we may come to idealize deprivation because it seems to make us special, forgetting that the price of this specialness is our private selves and private lives.

Jacques Lacan's conception of lack, *le manque,* seems to defy the distinction urged here between privation and deprivation, lacking and losing, likely because, for Lacan, coming into being entails both privation and deprivation. That is, privation and deprivation are indivisible since *being,* itself, is constituted by lack. The greatest manque, for Lacan, is the *manque à être* (literally, "lack of being"), which Lacan translates as the "want to be." The *manque à être* both precedes and determines the subject.[16] The subject discovers it, or it uncovers the subject, because "it" is already there. Adrian Johnston calls it a "primordial Ur-privation of a *nihil negativum*."[17] Perhaps less mysteriously, it is akin to the accountant's discovery of a *manque à gagner* (loss of earnings), in that the *manque à être* is "not a sum that previously existed and disappeared: it's a sum that was never registered. Similarly, the subject's being is not something that existed and was then lost in the course of development, but rather that which the subject never had and yet strives for."[18]

At an experiential level, to say that a subject becomes a subject by striving for a subjectivity that he has never had borders on nonsense. What is worse, this formulation elides the distinction between privation and deprivation and, at least in one sense, essentializes lack/loss. Persistently fashionable antisubjective discourses with lack or loss at their root — whether influenced by Lacan or not — rely on a vision of a similarly *essentially*

16 Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan,* book II: *The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis 1954–1955,* ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli (Cambridge University Press, 1988).

17 Adrian Johnston, "Lacking Causes: Privative Causality from Locke and Kant to Lacan and Deacon," *Speculations* 6 (2015): 19–60.

18 Marco Focchi, "The Indiscrete Language and the Unrepeatable," *The Symptom* 6 (2005), http://www.lacan.com/symptom6_articles/focchi1.html.

deprived subject, even though they simultaneously eschew essentializations of other sorts.

Both a distinction between privation and deprivation *and* a cognizance of the ambivalences at their core are needed if we are to understand the fascination with and, often, the idealization of experiences of privation/deprivation. Privation may be imagined to grant access to something private and unknowable to others. It may, therefore, be thought to make "peculiar" or unique those who are privileged enough to suffer it. If the person who suffers privation cannot recall an antecedent condition with which to contrast their experience, it is also true that the *de*prived person *can* recall a condition of adequacy, but *cannot* recall an experience of privation. That is, the deprived person can only imagine privation *through* the experience of deprivation, which is to say, to mix up memories of sufficiency, privacy, and even privilege with the experience of loss.

Put in slightly different terms, privation and deprivation are, in an experiential sense, mutually exclusive. Straining the powers of memory and imagination, the psychic experience of deprivation relies on fantasy to resolve its attendant anxieties. Indeed, the fantasy component of the experience of deprivation *is* the fantasy of privation, the fantasy of an experience without antecedent conditions of adequacy that also leans heavily on the ambivalent associations between privation and privacy, peculiarity, and privilege, these latter three being concomitants of self-presence and the kind of vitality and freedom known (or imaginatively remembered) before the moment of deprivation.

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The idea of a state of nature, a human condition preceding organized society and government, may be found in the texts of Judaic, Dharmic, Islamic, and Christian religions, in the classical thought of Plato and Hesiod, in contemporary theories of justice advanced by John Rawls and David Gauthier, in the psy-

cho-historical imagination of Sigmund Freud, in the apocalyptic visions of dozens of postmoderns such as Maurice Blanchot, Jean Baudrillard, and in popular representations of catastrophic events that eliminate law and political order, leaving survivors to contend with warring groups and, sometimes, monsters. But its distinctively modern expression, like its connection to the ideal of natural freedom, is found in the works of Hugo Grotius, Thomas Hobbes, Samuel von Pufendorf, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

The state of nature has seen its share of criticism, from Carole Pateman's influential critique with respect to the status of women,[19] to Charles Mills's similar critique with respect to race.[20] But the best-known critique of the state of nature has been voiced for centuries: that the realities of human dependence seem to have no bearing upon contractarians' view of human subjects "as originally isolated and self-enclosed," asocial, disembedded, and abstract.[21]

While such critiques are, in one sense, undeniable, in another sense they miss the mark, for they do not fully appreciate the fantastical quality of the state of nature, which includes the ambivalent wish for privation and privacy. It is true, of course, that proponents of the state of nature vacillate between casting it as mere fantasy and as prehistorical reality. States of nature are presented as heuristic devices or thought experiments to assess the legitimacy of government. But although all serious state of nature theorists (except Locke) admit the historical unreality of the state of nature, this admission is often obscured in elaborations of the construct. Hobbes, for instance, plainly states that "there was never such a time, nor condition of warre" as his state of nature suggests, but then reminds the reader that "there are

19 Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford University Press, 1988).
20 Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Cornell University Press, 1997).
21 See Gal Gerson,"Object Relations Psychoanalysis as Political Theory," *Political Psychology* 25, no. 5 (2004): 777.

many places, where [people] live so now," in a state of nature, such as "the savage people in many places of America […] [who] have no government at all."[22]

Similarly, Rousseau famously opens his second *Discourse* by "putting aside all the facts, for they have no bearing on the question" of the origins of inequality.[23] The state of nature is a state "which no longer exists, which perhaps never existed, which probably never will exist, and yet about which it is necessary to have accurate notions in order to judge properly our own present state."[24] This would be clear enough, were it not that Rousseau simultaneously proclaims: "O ma listen: *here is your history,* as I have thought to read it, not in the books of your fellow men, who are liars, but in nature, who never lies […]. The times about which I am going to speak are quite remote: how much you have changed from what you were!"[25]

Thus, while ambivalently denying and hinting at its historical reality, state of nature theorists suggest its continued presence — even its immanence — in contemporary persons, societies, and "states of mind." "Natural is not the opposite of social or civil," C.B. Macpherson notes, "the natural condition of mankind is within man now, not set apart in some distant time or place."[26] The ambivalence about the historical status of the state, combined with its transposition into a psychic state carried forth into the contemporary world, demonstrates the powerful connections between imaginative accounts of "natural" humanity

22 Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan, or The Matter, Forme, and Power of a Common-Wealth Ecclesiasticall and Civill,* ed. C.B. Macpherson (Penguin, 1985), 187.

23 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Basic Political Writings,* ed. and trans. Donald A. Cress (Hackett, 1987), 18.

24 Ibid., 34.

25 Ibid., 19. Emphasis added.

26 C.B. Macpherson, "The Social Bearing of Locke's Political Theory," in *Life, Liberty and Property: Essays on Locke's Political Ideas,* ed. Gordon J. Schochet (Wadsworth, 1971), 74.

and wishful (even magical) thinking in contemporary human experience.

Perhaps the most remarkable wish, or fantasy, expressed in the state of nature is found in the famous opening line of Rousseau's *Social Contract*: "Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains."[27] Most of us are familiar with this Romantic notion, just as Rousseau was not particularly concerned to explain it to his audience: They already knew what it meant, since the attribution of a natal freedom to the creatures living in the state of nature is hardly unique to Rousseau. While our originary freedom was, and still is, taken for granted, Rousseau did not even feel the need to explain "how […] this change [took] place," about which he confesses: "I have no idea."[28]

But if, as Rousseau and others acknowledge, the state of nature is an ahistorical contrivance, then what does it mean to say that "man is born free"? To be "born free," must we assert the historical reality of the state of nature and, with it, a (pre)historical "original state" that "differ[s] so greatly" from the state of civilization?[29] Alternatively, may we consider ourselves "born free" even while acknowledging the fictional aspect of the state of nature? If so, may we be "born free" because it is possible for us to imagine ourselves having been "born free" in a state of nature? And if this is the line of argument state of nature theorists intended, can we, in fact, imagine ourselves as such? Two problems arise immediately in light of such a suggestion: 1) It may not be possible for us to imagine ourselves in a state of nature; and 2) even if we could, our actual freedom would seem to depend upon our capacity to imagine ourselves as having once possessed an original freedom, making our freedom not only precarious but magically derived, such that we are "born free" (or "born [again] free") simply by wishing it were so.

27 Rousseau, *The Basic Political Writings,* 141.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid., 80.

Perhaps we are to understand the claim that we are "born free" at an ontogenetic or individual level. If so, we might ask what someone like Winnicott — or any object relations theorist, or, indeed, any psychoanalytic thinker — would make of the assertion that the human infant is "born free." On one hand, if we apply almost any definition of the word *freedom* to this formulation, we may find it *prima facie* absurd. Human infants are born to extreme dependence and vulnerability; their biological and emotional needs keep them "in chains," as it were. A human infant, seen objectively would be, in Rousseau's own language, utterly "enslaved," since the infant's needs make him utterly "incapable of doing without another."[30]

In the state of nature, we are presented with grown adults who have (magically) grown without care or nurturing. While it is true that in any state, "there is no such thing as a baby,"[31] it is for very different reasons than Winnicott had in mind: that there is only a mother–infant couple. On the other hand, it is true that many infants enjoy an early experience we might call "free." The experience of "primary narcissism," as Freud would call it, includes illusions of total freedom and omnipotent control over the infant, objects, and the environment, which are, at this stage, not yet differentiated. In fact, primary narcissism, the "libidinal complement to the egoism of the instinct of self-preservation,"[32] comes fairly close to the psychic condition of the human being depicted in most states of nature, particularly Rousseau's: a child-like creature with an adult body, living "in himself,"[33] hap-

30 Ibid., 59.

31 D.W. Winnicott, *Through Paediatrics to Psycho-analysis: Collected Papers,* ed. Masud Khan (Brunner-Routledge, 1992), 99.

32 Sigmund Freud, "On Narcissism" (1914), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* vol. 14: *On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works (1914–1916),* ed. and trans. James Strachey with Anna Freud (Hogarth Press, 1961), 74.

33 Rousseau, *The Basic Political Writings,* 81.

pily gratifying his own desires, but (unknowingly) lacking company, culture, and the potential for maturation.

> Wandering in the forests, without industry, without speech, without dwelling, without war, without relationships, with no need for his fellow men, and correspondingly with no desire to do them harm […] savage man […] had only the sentiments and enlightenment appropriate to that state […]. If by chance he made some discovery, he was all the less able to communicate it to others because he did not even know his own children. Art perished with its inventor. There was neither education nor progress; generations were multiplied to no purpose. Since each one always began from the same point, centuries went by with all the crudeness of the first ages; the species was already old, and man remained ever a child.[34]

Of course, the infant who experiences something of this freedom is not aware that the experience has been provided by an attuned and generous caregiver. As far as they know, their wishes magically create and destroy. Freud thus links the state of primary narcissism to the propensity for magical thinking and to the "omnipotence of thoughts": the belief that wishing alters reality, that wishing makes things so.[35] The wish to be "born free" is likewise related to a kind of magical thinking, both in its form (by presupposing an original freedom without evidence or reason) and in its content (because the wish is that reimagining the individual's original relationship with the world will create an actual change).

Indeed, the "remarkable change" involved in the process of transforming natural beings into citizens is not entirely unlike

34 Ibid., 57.

35 Sigmund Freud, "Totem and Taboo" (1913), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* vol. 13: *Totem and Taboo and Other Works (1913–1914),* ed. and trans. James Strachey with Anna Freud (Hogarth Press, 1955), 85.

the first stages of the process of adapting to deprivation.[36] Both involve movements from freedom to (self)control. Indeed, what is offered to each "associate" in Rousseau's formula of the general will is not markedly different from the safety and power offered to the child who identifies with the new, depriving framework of control. Rousseau's formula relies on what Louis Althusser calls a "sleight of hand" and a "play on words,"[37] whereby in "giving himself to all each person gives himself to no one,"[38] for "obedience to the law one has prescribed for oneself is liberty."[39]

The state of nature presents us with a picture of ungoverned, unnurtured, and largely unrelated human beings, to be sure. But it also offers us a vision of human beings without selves. The distinction between the human being and the self amounts to more than hairsplitting. Consider, for instance, the longstanding liberal–communitarian debate, represented in part by figures like Rawls, Michael Sandel, Charles Taylor, and Alasdair MacIntyre. A prominent — perhaps *the* prominent — point of contention is how to regard the political self or subject, whether it is possible to abstract the self from their commitments and community, and whether it is desirable, even in theory, to do so.

Human beings cannot develop the capacities of selfhood without the interventions of civil society and its institutions, especially those of the family. At the same time, human beings do not become selves in nonproblematic alignment with the traditions and norms established by families, groups, or communities, which is to say: Group identities and community traditions do not necessarily encourage the healthy development of selves. Human beings live and have always lived in groups, but this mere fact does not mean that *being in a group* lies at the

36 Rousseau, *The Basic Political Writings,* 150.

37 Louis Althusser, "Rousseau: The Social Contract (The Discrepancies)," in *Politics and History: Montesquieu, Rousseau, Hegel and Marx,* trans. Ben Brewster (New Left Books, 1972), 130, 134.

38 Rousseau, *The Basic Political Writings*, 148.

39 Ibid., 151.

center of what it means to be a self. Rather, the self depends upon families, groups, and even polities that facilitate its capacities to withdraw from and resist their own pull, as well as to meaningfully participate in them when desired. Selves do not develop in isolation, but they do depend upon early experiences of isolation (of a sort) within a context of care and attunement.

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Because the state of nature presents us with a narrative of *originary* human experience, an experience of being human without selfhood, the fantasy of the state of nature is one of lack — and not *loss* — of self. This gets a bit tricky. If we, as adults, reared in families living in contemporary civil society, try to imagine ourselves in a state of nature — be it Hobbes's state of nature or Rawls's original position — we may find that we cannot, that it is impossible to call upon the self to imagine its own absence. Once again, we find that, although we are asked to imagine ourselves in a state of privation, we can imagine only deprivation, a loss of everything and everyone, our attachments, our meanings and purposes, our identities, our families.

The idea of a state of nature asks us to imagine ourselves subjected to extreme privation, yet without the knowledge of privation or its opposite. Just as the child who has suffered privation cannot recall an antecedent condition wherein he did *not* suffer privation, we have difficulty imaginatively traversing this boundary in the other direction. How can we imagine ourselves without parental care, relationships, ethnicities, goals, memories, communities, or experiences? We cannot imagine our*selves* in such a condition because this condition is not a condition of selfhood at all.

Perhaps more importantly, even if we fail to appreciatively imagine the impossible state of privation that the "natural" being lives in, we do undertake an imaginative experience of deprivation when we try. That is, in trying to imagine the state

of nature, all we can do is to imagine a total deprivation of our selves, one that throws into question the very purpose of existing. In his incisive discussion of Rawls's original position, Fred Alford writes, "a self shorn of its interests, ends, talents, goals, and relationships with others, even if it could be imagined, is a self that seems hardly worth protecting."[40] That is, while my argument runs perpendicular to Alford's, we might say that the imagined loss implied by the state of nature is so great — tantamount to self-annihilation — that what is left over is deemed worthless, "hardly worth protecting." Of course, we would not assess the situation in this way had we not imagined the privation (or lack) suggested by the state of nature as deprivation (or loss), since newborns, or even soon-to-be-born babies, although lacking "interests, ends, talents, goals, and relationships," are not "shorn" of anything and are very much "worth protecting."

Of course, we are tempted to conclude that our selves are not "worth protecting," particularly if our private, isolated, vital cores — what Winnicott called our "secret" or "incommunicado" parts of self — have been violated.[41] If Winnicott is right, the most private part of the individual must be isolated and protected from contact and communication with others. This private or sacred core develops in the context of parental care — and therefore does not belong to the human being in the state of nature who is more of a species-member than a self.

If we can keep in mind the ambivalent nature of privation as lack and privacy, we may see that fantasies of privation may represent the wish for the erasure of the possibility of ever having established a real, vital self. Were this wish to come true, it would seem preferable to the experience of deprivation, because

40 C. Fred Alford, *The Self in Social Theory: A Psychoanalytic Account of Its Construction in Plato, Hobbes, Locke, Rawls, and Rousseau* (Yale University Press, 1991), 9.

41 D.W. Winnicott, *The Maturational Processes and the Facilitating Environment: Studies in the Theory of Emotional Development,* ed. Masud Khan (Hogarth Press, 1965), 187.

in deprivation one knows and recalls the loss as well as its antecedent condition of adequacy: Better, as they say, not to know what one is missing. Clinically speaking, the idea of (and the wish for) self-privation may arise frequently in defense against a real or threatened loss of self, i.e., in self-destructive behavior or even in statements such as "All is already lost" or "I had nothing to lose."

While it sounds bizarre, a part of the child *must be* neglected, abandoned, left absolutely alone. Indeed, it is perhaps the most important part of parental care that the infant be protected from the parent's own impulses to know, reach, or discover every part of the child. Rather, a part of the child must be let be, *unmothered,* so that the infant's fragile and developing self is not subjected to premature contact with objects that alter or intrude upon it.

Since many forms of deprivation occasion a loss of what is most private in the child — a vital core which gives the self a feeling of reality — it is perhaps not surprising that experiences of deprivation would lead us to fantasies of privation, fantasies containing ambivalent and even confused wishes for austere isolation and absolute privacy. Experiences of deprivation, real or imagined, if linked with fantasies of privation, will call upon imaginations of states of being that cannot quite be imagined, yet whose very unfathomability permits their ambivalences to remain unrecognized and unconscious. At the same time, fantasies of privation contain the wish for privacy, the wish for a kind of care that protects (by leaving alone) the most private part of the self.

Such fantasies express both the desire never to have had a self to lose, and the wish to recover or recreate a self out of the experience of loss, a wish to have had the inalienable privacy that would have helped secure a sense of self in the first place. To be sure, as it is expressed in states of nature, in apocalyptic visions, and even in severe depressive episodes, the fantasy goes to extremes, as fantasies will do, throwing the baby out

with the bathwater, so to speak. In grasping at extreme privacy, we find abject isolation, but the wishes never to have had a self to lose and (simultaneously) to have a kernel of self, free and untouched, unparented and unrelated, even if locked up within itself and subjected to constant war or conflict, is more appealing than losing something so important that it makes the self "hardly worth protecting."

The state of nature fantasy seems to combine ambivalent wishes for privacy and privation into a complex and perhaps unimaginable condition where, even as our physical lives and perhaps our property are in danger, the absence of law and sovereignty offers protection from loss and impingement. In this light, Hobbes's brutal vision of the state of nature is not so different from Rousseau's idyllic depiction. Two sides of the same coin, Hobbes's vision expresses both the liberty of personal authority and the terror at the loss of control implied by the absence of sovereignty, just as Rousseau's vision underscores both the freedom from coercion by others and the emptiness of a life without purpose, attachment, relationship, and culture.

Sovereignty, in such cases, may be interpreted as a metaphor for fantasized omnipotence, and not only the power to impress upon the world one's will, but the power to defend what is sacred and private in the self from others. Thus, if it were not already apparent, we are dealing here with different sorts of danger, and different kinds of safety. There is a safety in what Winnicott calls the cavalier attitude toward objects that permits of their "use," where "use" means the object's survival of fantasized destruction, and where "survival" means that objects do not change or retaliate against the self.[42] Since the child destroys (in fantasy) to make objects external, and makes objects external to relate their internal and external worlds, we may say that in order for the child to come alive in a robust sense, it must be safe for the child to be dangerous.

42 Winnicott, *Playing and Reality,* 90–93.

In *Rethinking the Politics of Absurdity* I argued that antisubjective discourses, desubjectifying conditions, and apocalyptic, disaster-oriented fantasies served the psychic interests of individuals seeking regressive experiences of innocence.[43] I might have done more there to explain the relationship I am alluding to now between innocence and a form of safety, which is not difficult to understand. To use more Kleinian language, what weighs on our psyches is guilt and fear concerning our own hate and destructiveness: For Melanie Klein, "the central conflict in human experience […] is between love and hate, between the caring preservation and the malicious destruction of others."[44] But if the world is already destroyed, or if its destruction is imagined to be inevitable, then one need not feel guilt about annihilating hatred or rage. Of course, this is so only because one finds oneself in a world where there is nothing good to harm: the freedom of desolation.

Of course, Winnicott takes issue with Klein's approach to hate, nowhere more famously than in his explicit denial of the presence of anger in the destructiveness mobilized in efforts to use objects.[45] But Winnicott also acknowledges that, in deprived environments, Klein's vision may be applicable in that aggression is *not* available for "use," nor does it operate primarily as fantasy, but, rather, turns genuinely dangerous and destructive.[46] In good enough environments, we can use aggression (and even hate) in positive ways, discovering objects and differences, protecting ourselves, and forging relationships with others that permit of separateness. But in the context of deprivation, children, and later adults, must return to infantile fantasies of "magical control" and the "magical destruction of all objects" where the

43 M.H. Bowker, *Rethinking the Politics of Absurdity: Albert Camus, Postmodernity, and the Survival of Innocence* (Routledge, 2014).

44 Jay R. Greenberg and Stephen A. Mitchell, *Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory* (Harvard University Press, 1983), 142.

45 Winnicott, *Playing and Reality,* 93.

46 Winnicott, *Home Is Where We Start From,* 80–100, and Winnicott, *Deprivation and Delinquency,* 84–99.

world is only made "safe" by holding on to the illusory power to destroy it in "the blink of an eye."[47]

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Several years ago, I interviewed a young woman who told me about a gruesome experience of having been kidnapped and held in captivity, alone, for four days, in a small room, until she was eventually rescued by the police.[48] A fourteen-year-old girl at the time, Maria's experience of captivity was traumatic and terrifying. "I screamed so much I forgot my talking voice," she recalled. And "by the third or fourth day, I really didn't know who I was. I was afraid of how I behaved. I was full of rage."[49] In the years following her abduction, Maria experienced uncertainty, anxiety, paranoia, difficulty performing in school, and a feeling that she was involved in a daily struggle to "figure out what was going on." "I'm not normally a person who yells and screams," she explained, "but I behaved in the most odd manner and, for months after, [I] behaved strangely."[50]

In spite of all this, Maria referred to her experience of captivity as her "natural state," presumably because she was alone in a bare-walled room, with nothing and no one explicitly (i.e., physically or sexually) violating her. Her involuntary confinement was undoubtedly a form of violence, but she did not experience it in precisely this way. In fact, the link between her confinement and what she called her "natural state" was what troubled her the most. Maria wondered why she was so afraid to confront her

47 Winnicott, *Deprivation and Delinquency,* 97–99.
48 Bowker, *Rethinking the Politics of Absurdity.*
49 Matthew H. Bowker, "Safety in Danger and Privacy in Privation: Ambivalent Fantasies of Natural States Invoked in Reaction to Loss," in *D.W. Winnicott and Political Theory: Recentering the Subject,* ed. Matthew H. Bowker and Amy Buzby (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 154.
50 Bowker, *Ideologies of Experience,* 151.

"natural state." "Why didn't I feel safe there?," she asked, almost angrily. "Should I have really been afraid of myself that much?"[51]

Of course, there is nothing "natural" about a child being held in captivity against their will. And Maria may have feared any number of things other than "herself" during those awful four days. Maria's attempt to comprehend her experience as "natural," like the desire she expressed in the interview to "thank" her captors and to "buy them dinner," seemed intended to transform a horrific experience into a learning experience. Maria reported that she now saw her captors as her most valuable "teachers," because they showed her "the most crucial purpose and thing in my life," which is "to understand me."[52]

In striving to transform a horrific experience into a positive one, Maria relied on the concept of a natural state, perhaps even one informed by state of nature theorists and their powerful impact upon modern and postmodern thought. Her association of deprivation with nature permitted her to indulge (after the fact) in a fantasy of privation, whereby she reimagined her captivity and loss as a natural and safe condition in which contact with herself was not only possible but unavoidable. This fantasy is, in my view, of greater importance for Maria's interpretation of her own experience than what some may see as a need to identify with her aggressors.[53]

Maria's effort to "take" something from her experience was neither merely a defense, nor a denial of mourning the pain she had suffered. It was those things, but it was more as well. If we may say her fantasy contained an "error" — an odd way of speaking since, of course, fantasies contain factual errors; that is their point — the error here lay in the assumption that Maria's self was

51 Bowker, *Rethinking the Politics of Absurdity,* 50–51.

52 Ibid.

53 Anna Freud, *The Ego and Mechanisms of Defence,* rev. ed. (Karnac Books, 1993), 113.

to be found inside a panicked child walled up in a locked room. It is this same error I have sought to bring into relief above, an error at the heart of state of nature fantasies and, perhaps, of all originary and apocalyptic fantasies: that in being subjected to deprivation, one becomes free to return to a natural state, a condition of original privation that protects against self-loss and a condition of original privacy that makes genuine self-contact and self-experience possible.

Maria's self-chastisement for her rage — "I should not have been so afraid" — along with her desire to thank her captors suggests more than an internalization of guilt or a desire to make reparations for her own violent fantasies. It signals, more importantly, an attempt to transform a depriving environment into a holding environment by the magical means of redescription and reimagination. In Maria's fantasy, her captors became her teachers and caregivers, affording her the privacy/privation she needed in order to make contact with her self, while, in reality, she was so terrified, so violated, and so "full of rage" that even well after the event she "did not know who she was."

Although we may consciously acknowledge the fiction of the state of nature, semiconsciously or unconsciously the fiction has come to be accepted as reality. This reality has been used to frame and comprehend countless modern and contemporary moral and political projects: the constitutions of liberal states; ideas and ideologies concerning the legitimate scope and function of governments; and the tenets of contemporary moral philosophies. The state of nature is a dangerous idea if it encourages us to respond to the experience of deprivation, as Maria did, by fantasizing about privation and privacy. Instead of acknowledging and working through the losses implied by deprivation, and instead of mobilizing energy to repair them in the present or to prevent them in the future, we wish and hope to "get back behind the deprivation moment."[54] This wish and this hope are

54 Winnicott, *Home Is Where We Start From,* 92.

perhaps understandable for deprived children but are dangerously immature for adults living in a civil society.

We may remark that in those civic environments where state of nature fantasies hold the greatest sway, efforts to protect citizens from privation and deprivation are often less comprehensive and less successful. As Alford notes, this may be the case because, instead of "design[ing] their accounts so as to help men and women become more autonomous and free," state of nature theorists and their intellectual progeny set out "convincing them that they already are."[55] When freedom is construed as original and when deprivation is imagined to return us to a natural state, then in place of a lucid awareness of the ambivalent push and pull of privacy and privation we are likely to find unrealistic idealizations of suffering. Consider how such a perspective might help explain the vast indifference, in countries like the United States, to issues of inequality, poverty, and deprivation. If an ailing, elderly, disabled, or unemployed person, for instance, is unconsciously envied for not having to adapt to the order of the office or the control of the factory — i.e., for having "private time" and for being "left alone" — then the office or factory worker will have little sympathy for such a person in spite of their situation.

What is dangerous about the idea of the state of nature and the fantasy of privation it inspires is that they offer the wrong kind of safety: not the kind of safety that permits of spontaneity, creativity, or even "useful" destructiveness, but the kind of safety that protects us from thoughtfully examining the ambivalences and attractions of privacy and privation. Surely it is not a thoughtful recognition of these ambivalences that informs today's celebrations of the death of the subject, traumatic ruptures, and other open wounds of the self. These are conceived to be channels

55 C. Fred Alford, *Group Psychology and Political Theory* (Yale University Press, 1994), 7.

through which the Other, or others, may enter to depose the self's sovereign subjectivity.

Judith Butler, for instance, offers an influential account of the value of grief as that which keeps open our "wounds" of loss, wounds whose agony reminds us of "the thrall in which our relations with others hold us" and the degree to which the self is (and ought to be) "given over to the Other in ways that [we] cannot fully predict or control."[56] What is thought to be gained from this preoccupation with and preservation of loss, and from "remaining exposed to its unbearability,"[57] is the renunciation of the self's capacity to hold a piece of itself apart, in private. Instead, if one develops "a point of identification with suffering itself,"[58] the Other overtakes one's innermost space, alienating oneself from oneself. And this deprivation of that which is most private, the very core of the self, leads to a sense of "foreignness to myself," which, Butler writes, "is, paradoxically, the source of my ethical connection with others."[59]

On the contrary, object-relations theory, and Winnicott in particular, would argue that those who have not been deprived of the capacity to make contact with what is private and hidden in themselves are *more* likely to relate to others ethically, as separate and external objects. What is more, the wounded and deprived individual lives with tremendous pain and anxiety as a result of too early impingement, and is more likely to feel the need to assert subjective control (i.e., aggressive or domineering "sovereign subjectivity") over others to simulate a feeling of reality that is lacking internally.

The ethical idealization of the destruction of the subject — and, more specifically, the destruction of the self's potential for

56 Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (Verso, 2004), 23, 46.
57 Ibid., 30.
58 Ibid.
59 Ibid., 46.

solitude and privacy — is equally apparent in academic valorizations of trauma, where the traumatized person is imbued with the terrible privilege of bearing a "literal" truth inside her, a truth *so literal,* in fact, that they *cannot bear it*. It is this literal "truth of traumatic experience," writes Cathy Caruth, "that forms the center of its pathology or symptoms."[60] Trauma and post-traumatic symptoms are therefore "not a pathology […] of falsehood or displacement of meaning, but of history itself," for the traumatized "carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess."[61]

Imagine, for a moment, what such an assertion really means. What is "true," on this line of thought, is not what is found inside the self, in private, but the opposite: What is true and real is what has penetrated the psyche-soma without the self's permission or foreknowledge, what has overtaken the individual such that he himself becomes a "symptom," a receptacle for something absolute, external, and incomprehensible to them. If we look carefully at the "truths" putatively offered by traumatic experience, we shall find that they regularly boil down to one: the "truth" of the inevitable destruction of the self.[62] This is the "truth" that tells us that we are all — and must all be — traumatized, that we inhabit "a catastrophic age"[63] where "history" is "the history of trauma,"[64] where we must read "history as holocaust,"[65] because "history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other's traumas."[66]

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60 Cathy Caruth, "Introduction," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory,* ed. Cathy Caruth (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 5.

61 Ibid.

62 See Bowker, *Ideologies of Experience.*

63 Caruth, "Introduction," 11.

64 Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 60.

65 Shoshana Felman, "Camus' *The Plague,* or a Monument to Witnessing," in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History,* ed. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (Taylor and Francis, 1992), 95.

66 Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience,* 24.

On this line of thought, our collective experiences of trauma, suffering, and deprivation are the very substance of our human experience, and, thus, "must move beyond isolation and be shared with participants willing to engage in the victim's torment."[67] They must be spread and shared even if doing so transmits "not the normalizing knowledge of the horror but the horror itself,"[68] and even if this transfusion of horror makes each recipient a "participant and co-owner of the traumatic event […] partially experience[ing] trauma in himself […] com[ing] to feel the bewilderment, injury, confusion, dread and conflicts that the trauma victim feels."[69]

The underlying fantasy here is that the extreme deprivation known as trauma will provide a "link" between individuals that will serve us better than possessing selves. That is, transmitting deprivation and trauma means collectively losing our selves. And, according to this variation on the fantasy of privation I have tried to highlight here, by "listen[ing] through the departures we have all taken from ourselves,[70] we may return to something not unlike a psychic state of nature, where what is real is the absence, and not the presence, of selves.

There is more than catastrophizing at work when individuals and groups, when confronted with (actual or imagined) deprivation, respond in what would seem to be self-defeating ways, by heaping austerity upon deficiency, and by valorizing lack in the face of loss. If, when faced with the dangerous realities of deprivation, we refer ourselves to fantasies of privation, we ought

67 Névine El Nossery and Amy L. Hubbell, "Introduction," in *The Unspeakable: Representations of Trauma in Francophone Literature and Art,* ed. Névine El Nossery and Amy L. Hubbell (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 11.

68 W.B. Michaels, quoted in Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (University of Chicago Press, 2000), 268.

69 Dori Laub, "Bearing Witness, or the Vicissitudes of Listening," in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History,* ed. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (Taylor and Francis, 1992), 57–58.

70 Caruth, "Introduction," 11.

not be surprised when our personal and political narratives evince fascination with atrocity and disaster, when they express powerful impulses to destroy others or institutions that threaten to deprive us of our putatively original or natural freedoms, or when they offer ideological support for aggression or destruction in the name of safety or innocence, or, what amounts to the same, in the name of returning to a state of (moral) goodness and (political) greatness.

Grenier's Secret

Jean Grenier, French philosopher and teacher of Albert Camus writes:

> When I was living in the outskirts of an old Italian city, I used to return home by way of a narrow and badly-paved cobblestone lane cramped between two high walls. (I could hardly believe such heights existed out in the open country). It was in April or May. There at a bend in the walkway, I was overtaken by the powerful fragrance of jasmine and lilacs. I could not see the flowers, hidden as they were by the wall. But for a long time I lingered in order to take in their aroma, and my night was fragrant with them. How well I understood those who so jealously enclosed the flowers they loved! Passion seeks to surround itself with fortresses, and at that moment I could adore the secret which gives beauty to each thing and without which there is no happiness.[1]

1 Jean Grenier, *Islands: Lyrical Essays,* trans. Steve Light (Green Integer, 2005), 59. Emphasis in original.

Contra Magritte



Fig. 2. M.H. Bowker, Untitled digital photograph (2012), London.

> *Je sais bien qu'il s'agit d'une image, mais, ici, il s'agit aussi d'un mur. Dire que ce n'est pas un mur, c'est élever un mur autour du cœur.*[1]

1 "Of course it is an image, but, here, it is also a wall. To say that it is not a wall is to raise a wall around the heart."

Humpty Dumpty

What is there to life || outside || not beside || the wall || this aged *muraille* || one foot across || but this inscrutable writing || on the *faces extérieures* || which are both faces || who can say || which side the Heavens prefer || from Heaven the wall appears as nothing || but a line || from which a pregnant woman leapt || and lost her child || all the villagers || noted well on *quel côté* || she fell ||as if it were a portent || as if she were a black bird || delivering herself || to the damned or the saved || they nevertheless decorated both sides of the wall || with candles and flowers || but neither side knew the other || nor her || in the asylum to which she was consigned || she called herself Humpty Dumpty || because Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall || had a great fall || Four-score Men and Four-score more || Could not make Humpty Dumpty where [s]he was before[1] ||. ||

1 These are the 1797 lyrics to "Humpty Dumpty." See Rosie Pentreath, "What Are the Origins of 'Humpty Dumpty Sat on a Wall,' and What Do the Lyrics Mean?," *Classic FM,* July 30, 2021, https://www.classicfm.com/discover-music/humpty-dumpty-sat-on-a-wall-lyrics-history/.

Enceinte

Enceinte, in French, means both "to be pregnant" and "*ce qui entoure un espace à la manière d'une clôture et en défend l'accès*" (a fence- or wall-like structure that surrounds or encloses a space to block access).[1] The double meaning reminds us that there is a crucial protective uterine wall and that all walls are pregnant with meaning, demarcating, as they do, something different, something else, even something wonderful, for an ulterior end, essential for another life to grow, no matter where you stand, always both for you and not for you.

1 *Dictionnaire Le Robert,* s.v. "enceinte."

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