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William Rung

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The Horned Dilemma: Toward a Moral Typology of Psychopathology

William Rung

Clinical Psychology Doctoral Program, LIU Post

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Abstract

This dissertation conceptualizes the psychopathological implications of morality and moral reasoning. In the process several theoretical and practical concerns salient to the field of clinical psychology will be addressed. It is my contention that certain symptom presentations - depression, obsessive-compulsive, dissociative, and psychotic - may be conceptualized as disturbances in the self through the mechanism of dissociation, based upon fundamental incongruities between traditional moral values and human nature. I present this thesis, beginning with an introduction to its underlying premises and followed by an examination of the place and standing of morality within the field of psychology. The development of the self as well as morality will be discussed from the perspective of Freud's topographical model of the mind, with additional insights from his theoretical posterity. The literature on psychological defense mechanisms, particularly from the perspective of their relative adaptiveness, will be introduced, with an emphasis on dissociation and its effect on the integration and experience of self-states. These elements are then combined and presented in a section describing their theorized interplay as a psychopathological vector due to varying degrees of recognition of the incongruence between oneself and one's moral ideals. I propose a spectrum of four typical positions along a continuum, each associated with a particular symptom presentation, which will then be discussed individually along with its theoretical justification and a clinical example. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of the clinical and theoretical implications of my proposed typology.

Part I: Theory and Premise

Introduction

Morality is the arbiter of human experience. It is the oft silent partner in all our behaviors, framing our social comportment and haunting us in our private moments. It has captivated the minds of humanity's foremost thinkers since antiquity and shaped the development and aim of civilization and culture. So ubiquitous is its influence that it pervades the very structures upon which our experience of reality is based: externally, in the form of sociocultural constructs; internally, in the form of the autochthonic personality and ego structures that inform and in turn are informed by the circumstances of one's environment. The interplay of these factors defines our world through the assignment of value attributions – attributions that are, at their core, moral judgments, and which speak as much about the individual as they do about the human condition generally. Indeed, if we are to take the empirical perspective that morality exists not as deontological prescriptions derived from revelation, but instead as the experiential work of navigating the narcissistic demands of the subject with the objective realities of the environment, the reconciliation of these positions into a cohesive orientation toward reality is both a functional necessity as well as a monumental developmental task.

As fundamentally narcissistic beings motivated by the gratification and exaltation of the self, we are inevitably at odds with the realities of our environment that frustrate our innate fantasies of omnipotence (Freud, 1913/1950). In this way we develop in a compromise with our surroundings, a bargain which delicately navigates the imperatives of both the self and the environment. However, the ineradicable residue of narcissism, the initial orientation from which all psychic processes spring, remains the prime mover in these calculations – now overt, now

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covert – with the resultant admixture describing the mode through which one interacts with the world: one’s personality and self-concept (Freud, 1920/1961).

The “golden rule” has come to epitomize the ultimate distillate of traditional morality across cultures, retaining a privileged position even in most modern and post-modern interpretations thereof (Chilton & Neusner, 2008; Reilly, 2008). On its face, this doing unto others as we would have done unto ourselves encounters some significant issues in light of insights from psychodynamic theory. Narcissistic beings that we are, this exhortation creates a fundamental conflict within us, born of the necessity of subjective existence in an objective universe. Out of this conflict arises a deeply ingrained and inveterate tension ascribed in various theories to sexuality, power, or religious psychodrama. It is this situation that results in the circumstances necessary to provide motive force to our internal processes breaking the deadlock of equilibrium they otherwise seek (Freud, 1927/1961; Jung, 1951/1978). But as with any system, there is a risk of failure. Here, it is the potential to become stuck between these moral positions, paradoxically entrapped by ambivalence into a situation functionally equivalent but qualitatively antithetical to the equilibrium it seeks - balance not through harmony and a return to the familiar, but through paralysis and a fear of the unknown – an ersatz good bought at a heavy price, a cruel reflection of what is desired. Rather than the buoyant calm of equipoise, we find ourselves instead in the predicament of Buridan’s ass or, worse yet, confronted by “a problem with horns” as described by Nietzsche (1872/2003).

Here, I submit that this essential conflict, often cloaked in the moralistic guises of good and evil, right and wrong, and the lure of the unequivocal, can also be represented as the conflict between self and other, between our autochthonic selfishness and egoism and the inevitably ego-invested objective world which, while introjected and recognized as our own, forever retains the

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essence of the uncanny and alien. We are forever assailed both by *in vivo* processes as well as sociocultural expectations that demand a rigorous pruning of the self, casting off the unacceptable and aspiring to internalize or embody unachievable abstractions. It is this necessary but arduous striving that I contend can provide a lens through which to view psychopathology, particularly when this arrangement ceases to contain the conflict through dynamic tension, instead becoming an overcorrecting influence that coerces and mutilates the ego self.

The latter situation occurs, in part, due to the asymmetrical demands put upon us by moral prohibitions (Wilson, 2011): Individual susceptibility to moral strictures is not uniform, and it is often those whom would most benefit that are least affected – the incorrigible, the narcissistic, the sociopathic (Freud, 1930/1961). Conversely, it is precisely those whom least require a restrictive hierarchy of morals who are most negatively affected thereby – the meek, the mild, and those who have adequately internalized prosocial values (Nietzsche, 1901/1968). It is this dilemma, I suggest, that creates the spectrum of pathology I am delineating through the subtle (and not so subtle) effects of self-recrimination, resulting in the devaluing, distortion, and disavowal of self-states and parts of the self. It is my hope that, through a more nuanced conceptualization of this process and how it has the capacity to promote alienation from the self, the field of clinical psychology can better attend to the wellbeing of those who seek its aid.

Morality, Psychology, and the Self

The place of morality within the realm of psychology predates the latter's formal recognition as a discipline. Indeed, the two have been intertwined from the outset: From possession by spirits to operant conditioning, from atavistic stigmata to neurological deficit, each formulation addresses the same fundamental question of "moral insanity" couched in the epistemological sensibilities of its time (Leahey, 2004). Across each of these iterations, however,

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both as an object of philosophical and psychological inquiry as well as a matter of law, morality is at its heart a question of agency. The moral agent at once both defines and is defined by its choices, which in turn reflect its character – the means through which one’s values are expressed and by which such values may be inferred by others. It is no wonder, then, that such intimate parts of ourselves would come to be scrutinized by psychologists, for much in the same way Freud famously credited dreams as the *via regia* to the unconscious, it may be said that morality offers a similar thoroughfare into the self.

Generally, the manner in which the field of psychology approaches morality is defined by its interest in its most extreme outcomes: on the one hand, an interest in sociopathy and an absence or paucity of moral reasoning, and the other, a tyrannical super-ego or fixation upon the minutiae of right action. This is also reflected in the literature (Fairbairn, 1943; Tankersley, 2011). This bipolar all-or-nothing view between absent versus expressly overinflated moral presentations disregards the more subtle influences of moral values on mental health, particularly from the perspective of cognitive and socioemotional functioning. Some researchers, however, have avoided casting moral phenomena in such high contrast by instead examining the mechanisms and manner in which morality is experienced and applied rather than focusing on its pathological outcomes. Such findings invariably demonstrate that morality is a complex, multifaceted process that can neither neatly nor conclusively be laid at the feet of any single psychological function.

Historically, theorists have typically couched the development of morality within a broader metapsychology, relegated to the role of ancillary epiphenomenon rather than the focus of developmental theory. Such theories are usually structured as discrete, sequential stages, suggesting linear, incremental trajectories whereby each successive level is built upon the

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consolidation of the experiences of the previous, with approaches and strategies associated with the latter left by the wayside along the lifepath. What constitute these stages and how they are conceptualized is a matter of some debate among theorists. In the field of psychoanalysis, for instance, each theorist and school has weighed in on this matter in some form or fashion (Elliott, 2015). Broadly, these differ more on the directionality of influence than on the mechanisms at play. Freud and his intellectual posterity, including drive theorists and ego psychologists, posit the growth of self-other distinctions as one develops increasingly differentiated ego structures to be at the heart of an internally-directed, externally-shaped process (Marcus, 1999). Object relational perspectives, on the other hand, view the internalization of valued objects to be a more externally-directed, internally-shaped process, whereby the self is molded by one's environment and its relationship to other objects (Safran, 2012). In both cases, there is an acknowledgement of the reciprocal interplay between self and other, with the complex interaction of desire and frustration producing characteristic patterns of cognition and behavior that come to be associated with self-states, the most prominent and central of which coalesce into what we recognize as character or personality. Of course, there is an unspoken factor here that underlies the curated ego self – one's set of moral premises. What is good, what is bad - these things are the predicate upon which judgments about the utility and value of ourselves and others are built and as such reciprocally inform the face we present to the world, all the while fueled by our frustrated, sublimated drive to narcissistic omnipotence.

Although Freud (1909/1960; 1912/1963) located the advent of morality in the capacity for object-love associated with the overcoming of auto-erotism and born of practical self-interest in the face of infantile helplessness, its progression was conceptualized as a dynamic process co-occurring within the broader context of psychosexual development without being tied discretely

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to any particular stage thereof. Subsequent theorists conceptualizing in the psychodynamic frame for the most part retained this convention, and it was not until Anna Freud's pupil Erik Erikson that a formal reimagining of the stage theory was put forward. Erikson's (1950/1993) psychosocial theory expanding Freudian theory, extends the process of psychological maturation throughout the life course. Consistent with the school of ego psychology of which he was a part, his model deemphasized the privileged role of sexuality in early life while retaining the importance of a desexualized libido in the form of competing instincts and drives, as well as the focus on object-choice and self-interest as the motive force of early development. In this way Erikson created a framework wherein each stage is defined by what is essentially a moral dilemma – a question of what is meaningful through increasingly complex and abstract value attributions about others, the environment, and ultimately the self.

Unlike the psychosexual model, the boundaries between Erikson's stages were considered to be semi-permeable, allowing for greater flexibility in the timing and ultimate resolution of each of these conflicts. An even less temporally restrictive interpretation was posited by Melanie Klein, who conceptualized these dilemmas not as a series of stages but a pair of positions that describe the quality of an individual's orientation toward others. The initial position, the paranoid-schizoid, is theorized as the default state of the neonate, an inchoate psyche tasked by necessity with discerning between self and other – a task which it achieves through the utilization of high-contrast value attributions about what is "good" and what is "bad" – a moralistic couching if ever there was one. This sharp distinction is refined in the second, or depressive, position, in which ambivalence can be experienced and tolerated for the first time, allowing for more nuanced, integrated conceptualizations of the self and others. Although Klein's model still involved what initially amounts to a sequential progression from one position

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to the next, once an individual gains the developmental ability to enter the latter these positions exist in a state of equipotentiality, ready to be freely moved between based upon the prevailing psychological needs of the individual.

Taken from the perspective of this theoretical progression of schools of psychodynamic thought, the shift from Freudian, to post-Freudian, to object relational conceptualizations along the axes of development of self and theory of mind is consistent with a parallel shift in focus from the inner world to the outer, the subject to the object, the self to the other. What one thinks and feels about oneself and infers about others and one's environment is founded upon the ground of monistic hedonism, its foundation increasingly obscured by the vast superstructure of baroque psychological contrivances aimed at burying and distancing oneself from the narcissistic scar, the acknowledgement of our own limitations through the inevitable frustration of our grandiose infantile notions of omnipotence. We become oriented toward the other by the necessity of our own helplessness and dependence, and it is precisely this necessity which in turn shapes our values. These values, be they based in the raw pleasure principle of drive theories or the object-directed desire for relatedness of the object relational perspective, are ultimately reducible to the question of whether a given object or experience is "good" and therefore desirable, or whether it is "bad" and therefore best avoided – or, more succinctly, a moral question.

Although through psychodynamic theories we have seen the development of morality explained as a functional byproduct of the emerging psyche, formal inquiries into the development, structure, and process of moral reasoning from a more descriptive, mechanistic perspective emerged from the field of cognitive psychology. An early pioneer in this area, Jean Piaget (1932/1997), most famous for his theory of cognitive development, also produced one of

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the earliest systematic attempts to investigate moral reasoning. An outgrowth of his inquiries into the former, Piaget investigated the latter in terms of children's understanding of justice, responsibility, and rule-orientation, identifying two distinct orientations toward moralizing which emerge in middle and late childhood. The earlier, "heteronomous" stage, was identified as occurring from ages 5 to 9 and consists of externally-imposed moral precepts and a preoccupation with punishment, whereas the latter, "autonomous" stage, occurs around age 9 or 10 and represents a shift to more internally-driven or relative moral guidelines that are both imperfect and mutable.

In terms of a formally operationalized framework by which to qualify the structure of moral reasoning, the cognitive developmental model of Lawrence Kohlberg (1976) serves as a template by which to understand its typical trajectory. Despite being most associated with cognitive psychology, Kohlberg's theory is essentially in agreement with psychodynamic perspectives in practice if not in theory: The individual is seen to be an active participant in structuring their reality through social interactions with their environment, in line with the psychophysiological maturation of the brain. Comprised of three sequential levels, each is composed of two characteristic stages. The first or "pre-conventional" level encompasses immature formulations of moral behavior based upon immediate personal consequences. The second, "conventional" level begins to involve the role of the other as a subject, extending consequences and responsibility outside the self. The third, "post-conventional" level includes the internalization of moral behavior and ethical principles.

These perspectives from the field of cognitive psychology, in addition to complementing insights from psychodynamic theory from the standpoint of the functional process of morality in practice, also act as important corollaries and addenda thereto. For instance, where Klein's

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positional theory speculates on the earliest moral operations of the infant, Piaget's theory describes the moral outlook of late childhood, at which time a child's growth in the capacity to mentalize coalesces into a formal recognition of negative consequences as containing the same "badness" Klein describes as the negative pole of early object choice. With this comes the ability to begin to consciously reflect upon "badness" conceptually, and not simply as a visceral or intuitive recognition of uncomfortable or unpleasant circumstances or self-states. This progression from heteronomous or autonomous morality also recognizes the progression of the focus of one's concern from the self to the other, a directional distinction consistent with the typology I will propose – that is, the self as an innate, fundamentally nativistic phenomenon that, rather than being shaped by external factors, reacts to and interacts with them. Like the drive theorists who, while acknowledging the role of the external world and its influence on the self, nevertheless retained the goings on of the internal world and how it reacts to the environmental and interpersonal circumstances as the subject of theoretical focus rather than on the externalities it comes to internalize, the progression of self to other is less consistent with the Kleinian idea of an ego present at birth and striving for relatedness, and more with the narcissistic id as posited by Freud in which the self is forced by necessity first to begrudgingly acknowledge and then by necessity to relate to others.

For the purposes of the theoretical model I will propose it is also important to contextualize Kohlberg's stages in psychodynamic terms according to Freud's topographical model of the mind. At the pre-conventional level, moral judgments – if they can be called "moral" at all - are related to pleasure seeking and pain avoidance, consistent with the activity of the id and emerging ego. Gradually, as these develop from the personal to the social sphere, the conventional stage develops in line with the ego, which recognizes the necessity of conforming

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to the environment. Finally, internalized authority figures exert their force through the super-ego, sublimating our self-interest and investing in ideals and others.

Development of the Ego and Its Sociocultural Analogue

*“Oh life is bigger
It’s bigger than you
And you are not me”
-R.E.M., “Losing My Religion”*

The topographical model of the mind posited by Freud (1920/1961; 1923/1960; 1933/1965) holds that the psyche’s initial state – the id - is one of narcissism and boundless omnipotence, out of which the ego gradually develops through the inevitable frustration of selfish aims by the practicalities of corporeal existence. This check on one’s self-gratification is in most cases not simply restricted to such practical considerations, however: As the strictures of one’s environment are integrated into the self, one forms an internalized reification of the implicit and explicit messages imparted from one’s experiences and the experiences of others. In this way, an ethos is developed, a sociocultural narrative that becomes morally instructive for one’s behavior over and above its practical benefits or repercussions.

In line with the primary narcissism of infancy, no meaningful distinction initially exists between self and other, with all objects being experienced as a part or function of the grandiose infantile proto-self. In this auto-erotic state where that-which-will-become-the-self seeks only its gratification through the impulsive realization of its appetites, the stage is set for the inevitable collapse of this native and naive solipsism; an event so catastrophic it forever creates a rift between known and unknown, unconscious and conscious, self and other. How this transformation from an undifferentiated narcissistic monad of auto-erotic impulses to a

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differentiated self able to distinguish between subject and object occurs, as well as how objects eventually come to reside within the ego, is attributed to the latter's introjection through the mechanism of identification or fusion with the object, through and in which one's fate and value are bound to together (Druck, 1989; Fairbairn, 1943). Freud (1914a/1966a; 1917/1963) describes this process as stemming from an acuity of attentional focus along with its concomitant allotment of libidinal interest which capture and cathect the object, respectively. Typically, the child's first objects follow from what would naturally engross the neonate: namely the activity of its caregivers, particularly with regard for attending to the functions which sustain and gratify it. It is the residue of these primitive objects that come to define the psychic space that will become the ego.

According to Freud (1917/1959; 1923/1960), the process through which this transformation occurs begins with object loss – indeed, he goes so far as to assert “that the character of the ego is a precipitate of abandoned object-cathexes and that it contains the history of those object-choices.” Due to *homo sapiens'* prolonged period of natal helplessness, these first objects are invariably those of the caregiver upon whom the infant relies, who draw the child's attention outwards for the first time, and whose idealized introject is inevitably shattered by disappointment. Like a grain of sand in an oyster – an analogy utilized by Freud (1917/1989) elsewhere to describe the formation of hysterical symptoms, but equally applicable for our purposes - the irritation associated with being confronted by proof of the practical limitations of one's desire becomes the basis of the reflective subject: Jung (1954/1991; 1960/1990) is correct in likening the development of the ego to the persistent wound of Amfortas, though rather than bleeding eternally it is the scab that forms around the never-healing narcissistic scar that serves as the foundation upon which the great psychic edifice of the ego is built. Differentiated from the

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id in this way, the ego nevertheless remains dependent upon it; for through the libidinal innervations of the former, the latter is sustained and able to mediate between desire and reality, and eventually to sustain the boundary between self and other.

At this point it is important to introduce another concept crucial to understanding the functioning of the psyche according to the topographical model – that the nature of psychic processes is bidirectional. The framework for this, from the perspective of Freud (1914a/1966a; 1917/1963; 1923/1960), comes from the ability to distinguish between internal and external experiences of pain, and that it is this pain that occasions both a significant increase in attention to, as well as the resultant withdrawal of libido from, objects. While this explains the loss of primitive objects after learning of their inconstancy and the resultant flight from one's sense of infantile outrage and betrayal, we must also remember that this unpleasant intrusion from the outside world constitutes a novel experience, as to this point one had been limited to attending to stimuli emanating from the inner world – that is, exclusively within or as a function of the proto-self. We would be remiss, however, not to acknowledge this world too as the source of significant unpleasure; but without the point of view of a second (external) perspective, the contrast upon which consciousness itself functions is lacking – like the id, the proto-self exists in a timeless state in which comparison is impossible due to its undifferentiated simultaneity of experience. The imposition of the undeniable existence of the other and a vast world which exists outside the proto-self compels both the necessity of the ego at the point of friction between these worlds, as well as the emergence of consciousness, itself a byproduct of this contrast.

In addition to the external mechanism described by Freud, in which the perception of external stimuli precipitates a reaching out of the psyche to cathect these objects, Jung (1959/1990) posits a complementary process in which external objects reach *into* the psyche.

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Archetypes, conceptualized as archaic patterns laid down in our inherent neurological hardware as the legacy of phylogenetic development, are theorized as residing in the deep or “collective unconscious,” directly inaccessible to conscious reflection or introspection, but available to the preconscious in the form of ideographic or symbolic representations thereof. For his part, Freud (1917/1963) allows that “[i]f inherited mental formations exist in the human being ... these constitute the nucleus of the Ucs. [unconscious].” It is these occulted constructs that are triggered through the recognition of objects and situations which resonate with these patterns, resulting in the potentiation of these pathways and their associated projections outwards from the deep unconscious and throughout the psyche (Jung, 1989/2011).

In speaking of the preconscious – or what Jung would call the personal unconscious – a transitional space between the unconscious and conscious, Freud (1917/1963) describes the important role of the “derivatives” of the unconscious which are able to elude the censor serving as a barrier between the unconscious and the preconscious, thereby becoming potentially accessible to consciousness. Importantly, he notes that it is precisely the unconscious provenance of these “derivatives” and their propagation in various attenuated forms through each level of the psyche that allows for a therapeutic effect to be achieved at all, as therapeutic interventions travel back along these connections to uncover and affect unconscious contents.

The bidirectionality of psychic processes suggests that a point must exist at which these pathways intersect. Given what we have learned of the origins and function of the ego, it is reasonable that we locate it here. The ego in its interlocutory function plays the role of a psychological Janus – a god of the gate who guards the approach to consciousness by means both internal as well as external. This metaphor is particularly salient to the functioning of the psyche, utilized independently and applied to various parts and functions thereof by Freud (1905/1960),

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Jung (1959/1990), and Nietzsche (1878/1996) to describe its dually-determined and often paradoxical nature. For our purposes, this metaphor can be extended to view the psychic space of the ego as a melting pot of self and other, in which the competing influences of internal and external stimuli coningle, for better or worse, into an identity. By aligning the self with the other, be it a concrete object or ideological abstract, one participates in the power it has proven by its subjugation of infantile omnipotence, bidirectionally lending and being lent value, with the implicit aim of palliating the discomfort of frustrated desires or the indecency of helplessness. Indeed, Freud (1923/1960) notes that “internal perceptions” tend to accrue “greater economic significance” in the functioning of the psyche. Insights from the schools of object relations also suggest that when an object is introjected and (to borrow terminology from Piaget) accommodated or assimilated into one’s identity, it accrues greater subjective meaning by virtue of its increased proximity to the core of the self (Levenson & Strupp, 2007). And yet as these objects are being drawn in, they precipitate the subliminal rumblings of archetypal contents which simultaneously strive toward consciousness through their preconscious derivatives. In this way the inner and outer world meet at the confluence of these two pathways, in the ego, the self as it experiences itself and its environment; and although the ego superficially presents a united front to the external world, it remains in reality a collection of these internalized objects and related experiences – or “complexes” (Jung, 1960/1990) - which, so constellated, we with a measure of conceit deign to call personality.

In recognizing that these complexes reside within or are otherwise related to it, it is important to note that Jung (1951/1978) theorized that the self was not identical with the ego, but that it is but the conscious part thereof – the “ego-self.” In this way the complexes which influence our identities exist across the psyche with connections spanning varying levels of

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consciousness, and providing pathways for the transfer of libido between them. To do full justice to the concept of a wholistic self, then, one must acknowledge the areas which reside within the purview of the unconscious, including the unknowable archetypes dwelling in its depths, as well as their preconscious derivatives. As we will see, the role of the preconscious plays an especially crucial role in the regulation of personality as the repository of repressed material.

To address the question of how the contents of the ego come to be organized in such a way as to produce the effect of an individual identity, Freud (1914a/1966a; 1921/1959) hypothesized a further differentiation of the ego in which one's most preferential objects come to reside – the ego ideal. Initially conceived of as the result of sublimated ego-libido in the wake of the oedipal conflict, the idealized introjects of one's caregivers, educators, and other meaningful developmental figures and experiences, the recognition of the role of this structure in oversight of the ego led to its being conceptualized in its better-known form, the super-ego (Freud, 1923/1960) – an amalgam of narcissistic omnipotence, moderating experiences, and internalized narratives mediating the two. Identified by Freud as the censor between the conscious and preconscious parts of the ego, the super-ego serves not only as a barrier to contents attempting to emerge from the direction of the unconscious, but also as the agent of repression, the curator of complexes which are allowed to populate the area of the ego accessible to consciousness, banishing those which conflict with the values vested in the super-ego into the unconscious. It is by its agency that one prunes unacceptable parts of one's personality and related experiences so as to bolster ego-syntonic complexes with infusions of ego-libido, as well as to fill in the gaps of what idealized traits one lacks by cathecting suitable external objects with object-libido. It is here that the value of a stimulus or idea becomes more than a question of hedonistic calculus and takes upon itself the guise of moral finery – the question of goodness and badness rather than

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pleasure or pain – although this, too, I would argue, is but a permutation of the pleasure principle: by displacing the question onto one’s ideal self (and the introjects therein), one simply reformulates the question as such: “would this cause my introject pleasure and therefore be “good”? or cause it pain and thereby be “bad”?”

And so we find the rapacious desires of the id checked not only by the ego and its reality principle which seeks to satisfy without bringing harm to the self, but also by the super-ego which exhorts us not to bring harm to others, as not only has the other demonstrated its superiority over the subject through the inevitable frustrations of infancy, it has also proven to be magnanimous when propitiated. Herein lies the key to the pro-social nature of morality, which in fact serves two masters – foremost the gratification one’s internalized objects and the urges of the id by proxy, and only secondly, as a byproduct, the common good. The ideals and idealized others which we seek to live up to are experienced as products or extensions of the self – experienced as one’s own.

Thus conceptualized, we return to a fundamental complication in the psyche: an inherent confusion of self and other, of what has been taken in from the outside and become intimately situated within the heart of the self, the instinctual products of the self that have been projected onto or into the other, and the existential crossroads of the ego where the two meet. Returning for a moment to the principle of the bidirectionality of the psychic process, we are reminded of the two orientations of libido at the disposal of the ego: ego-libido, which cathects one’s internal objects and thereby strengthens the ego itself in what Freud calls “secondary narcissism,” and object-libido, which cathects objects experienced as being apart from the self. In this way, one can view these streams as moving either toward or away from the ego-self and its constituent complexes, but ultimately being tied by its associations back to ideas of the self as a conscious

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point of reference and wholistic subject. In the case of the super-ego, the situation is further muddied due to its unique relationship with the id, from which it draws libido directly in addition to the typical conscious pathway of the ego (Freud, 1923/1960). It is perhaps ironic that the super-ego, the *sanctum sanctorum* of the ego-self, is itself a fifth-columnist in league with the id, pursuing its gratification even while the ego experiences its dictates as an impediment thereto. And although these means of gratifying the id through the propitiation of the super-ego may be convoluted, the imposition of such byzantine machinations proves adaptive in most cases: the moral burden of agency is shifted or displaced entirely by substituting the selfish for the selfless, the self for the other – or rather, the internalized other.

For herein lies the unique power of the super-ego within the psyche: It is able to take the ego as an object, “possessing” it in the same way one “possesses” an object in the external world. The adhesive quality of the ego – or, rather, libido filtered through it - explains the phenomenon in which one feels in possession of that which is cathected. It is this phenomenon to which I ascribe the origins of morality, born in the same fundamental processes which establish and orient the ego-self and identity generally. It is the super-ego whose imprimatur sanctions and directs the activity of the ego-self according to its aims, utilizing libido it has morally laundered to obviate misgivings which would normally attend selfish or harmful actions. If this pattern sounds familiar, it should; for it is replicated externally in the very institutions and traditions that organize and sustain society, much in the same way the super-ego serves this function internally. Freud (1921/1959; 1930/1961), Jung (1954/1991), and Nietzsche (1887/2006) each noted that the development of societies and cultures follow a similar trajectory to that of the individual – from radical to practical self-interest, and finally principled action. In each of these cases, the motivation seems to be much the same: a recognition of the limitations of the subject in an

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objective world surrounded by other subjects, each of whom is also constitutionally predisposed toward self-interest. Whether at the individual or cultural level, it is the deep association with the seat of one's identity that imparts moral valuation its peculiar strength. Our values are in a very real sense what give depth and structure to our lives. This is due to the fact that in a very literal and real way we invest objects and our aims with parts of ourselves through ego involvement, giving value to these things through projection and identification (Freud, 1921/1959; Jung, 1951/1978).

And so here again we find the "dilemma with horns" as the ego is forced to navigate between the demands of id and super-ego, the self and the self's simulacrum of the other, where the prospect of directly satisfying the id offends the super-ego, and pleasing the super-ego often means acting against one's self-interest, delaying or refusing gratification, or even inviting unpleasure. The tragic nature of this struggle lies in the equifinality of outcomes – in either case, it is the self who benefits, the self that is gratified, and the self that suffers the consequences of compromise or lack thereof. It is these myriad dilemmas during the agon that is the life-course that produce the building blocks of character, an arrangement of complexes, an aggregate of possible and partial selves informed by selfish urges, practical realities, and sociocultural moral dictates. In our efforts to maintain a self with which we can ourselves live, one which conforms with the values we have established through nature and nurture, we tend to the self with the care of a horticulturalist, nourishing some complexes while others are left to wither on the vine or, in extreme cases, culled to the best of our abilities. The resulting garden is then measured against what Jung (1951/1978) referred to as the "ideal self" as a means of estimating one's value in light of the contents of the super-ego. However, as the self necessarily and invariably includes not only valued conscious components, but devalued unconscious components which have been

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cast off, this operation seems destined to fail from its outset as the ego-self, bound as it is by consciousness, can never fully encompass the “true self” – a mercurial, transcendental postulate which for Jung represented the sum total of conscious and unconscious contents.

Defense Mechanisms: Repression and Dissociation

“Youme knows what Meyou wants

Meyou knows what Youme wants

And it’s granted.”

Einstürzende Neubauten, “Youme & Meyou”

As the ideal and the actual become more discrepant, a new rift forms within the psyche, this time between the internalized and the innately internal, between what one wants and what is wanted of one, the desires of the self versus the demands of the Other. It is here that morality begins to turn upon itself as competing values create psychic dilemmas that cut to the core of one’s being. The ambivalence thus created precipitates dissonance within the self, a conflict between narcissistic self-interest and internalized prosocial moral dictates, both of which are, superficially, experienced as emanating from within and belonging to the self. The situation is further complicated by influences from without, where idealized objects exert a similar effect from the outside through the ego’s occulted involvement with them. Thus besieged on all sides, the ego-self finds itself under tremendous pressure to bend to the will of the Other, whether these be experienced directly as in the latter case, or indirectly through the former.

To avoid experiencing this disparity we employ a vast array of cognitive and behavioral artifices aimed at reconciling these positions. Although famously elaborated upon by Anna Freud (1936/1966), the coinage and fundamental theoretical underpinnings of these “defense mechanisms” are both present and well-articulated in the oeuvre of her father (Freud,

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1894/1959). Throughout his work, Freud understood these to be “tendentious” distortions of reality adaptive or disruptive according to their context and degree of magnitude. This understanding has been carried through the field of depth psychology across psychodynamic theories irrespective of disagreements on matters of theory or doctrine.

At least as early as his collaboration with Breuer, Freud recognized the distortive tendency of the ego when confronted with conflict and the role this phenomenon plays in the development of psychopathology (Freud & Breuer, 1893/2004). Independently, he began to expand upon these clinical observations, identifying patterns associated with particular symptom presentations (Freud, 1894/1959; 1896/1959). As he continued to develop his theory, the defensive operations of the ego proved to be inextricably tied to the understanding thereof (Freud, 1917/1963; 1923/1960). In *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*, Freud (1926/1959) elaborated on these defenses with greater specificity, expounding on insights gleaned from his case study of the so-called “rat man” (Freud, 1909/1996). It is at this point the role played by individual mechanisms began to come into focus. Although the theoretical importance and practical understanding of these defenses continued to be present in Freud’s work until his death, it was the school of ego psychology that emerged in his wake that devoted particular attention to them, foremost among them his daughter, Anna (Brenner, 1981; Freud, 1938/1989).

In line with the principles set forth by her father, Anna Freud continued to elaborate on the idea of defense mechanisms as discrete tendencies. In her seminal work *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense* (Freud, 1936/1966), Anna Freud enumerated and expanded upon these phenomena in detail, reiterating the equifinality of their aim despite their manifold guises: the avoidance of that which is objectionable to the ego. Given her pioneering work in child analysis, it is unsurprising that Anna Freud also addressed the developmental considerations attendant

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upon these defenses: we are forced to adapt to the changing demands the environment places upon us as we age, within the context of similarly shifting psychophysiological capabilities.

How the increasing demands put upon us as we age by the mounting complexity of life necessitates the application of different strategies in order to adapt to changing circumstances was later taken up by George Vaillant (1977/1998; 1992), who presented a formal conceptual framework of the defensive operations of the ego according to their appropriateness to stages of psychosocial development across the lifespan. These “adaptive mechanisms” (synonymous with the classical psychodynamic defense mechanisms) were conceptualized as behavioral strategies and attendant mentalizations categorized according to the degree to which they distort reality, the underlying assumption being that the more mature one is, the greater dose of unfiltered reality one may endure.

Although qualitatively heterogenous, the underlying mechanism for each of these strategies is understood in classical psychoanalysis to be repression (Freud & Breuer, 1893/2004) – that is to say, an attempt at avoidance of ego-dystonic stimuli by its removal or exclusion from consciousness. Indeed, in conceptualizing the structure and mechanics of the topographical model, Freud credited the peculiar pseudo-conscious quality of repressed contents with playing a crucial role in his development of this theory (Freud, 1938/1989). However, despite the historically privileged place repression has enjoyed in psychodynamic theories of etiology, one could similarly view the core mechanism as being dissociation (Anderson & Gold, 2003; Bornstein, 2013), although this has become a point of contention in psychoanalytic circles (Knafo, 2009). Whatever the case may be, what is not at issue is that Freud himself initially favored a traumatogenic model wherein dissociative processes were integral to understanding the unconscious and its role in symptom formation (Freud, 1925/1952; Freud & Breuer, 1893/2004);

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and although this view was replaced by the repression-centric model in Freudian orthodoxy, we may perhaps see this as a refinement rather than an abrogation of the crucial role of dissociation. Indeed, as he became more interested in the nature of the ego, Freud appears to have acknowledged a need to reinvigorate alternative conceptualizations of symptom formation, stating in *The Ego and the Id*: “Pathological research has directed our interest too exclusively to the repressed.” (Freud, 1923/1960).

To this end it is perhaps more fitting to view repression and dissociation not as rivals contending for pride of place in a quixotic single-factor explanation, but rather as two dimensions of a broad, overarching pattern of active avoidance of unpleasurable or traumatic stimuli. In this way, synthesis of the dissociation and repression models could be described as a cartesian plane whereby the x axis represents the boundary between conscious and unconscious, the y axis between self and other. Through this lens we may interpret the defensive actions of the ego as distorting not only the subjective awareness of ego dystonic stimuli through repression, but also its perceived relationship to the self through dissociation. Which of these qualities predominates is likely to be dependent upon a dynamic interplay between the intensity of the aversive stimuli and the resilience of the ego (Freud, 1937). Consistent with the diathesis-stress model (Zuckerman, 1999), the discrepancy between these two variables is conceptualized as the determining factor in this consideration.

In time and left unchecked by therapeutic intervention or the utilization of more adaptive defenses, it is often the case that the ability of repression to adequately sequester and neutralize incompatible cognitions will be outstripped; for the contents thus relegated to the unconscious are relentless in their demand to be reckoned with: it is their ultimate fate to recur and impinge upon consciousness eternally until adequately addressed – the inevitable “return of the

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repressed” (Freud, 1915/1959). The more frequent and intense this recurrence, the greater the demands placed upon the ego, resulting in a situation in the psyche analogous to that described by general adaptation syndrome (Selye, 1950) – that is, alarm, resistance, and, ultimately, exhaustion. When the ego becomes threatened in this way, more stringent defensive measures are mustered, typically those that we have found to be effective in the past.

If we are to understand the differentiation of self and other as one of if not the earliest of developmental tasks, we may also consider the utilization of dissociation rather than repression to be regressive in nature: when the capacity to repress becomes outstripped by the intensity of the ego dystonic stimulus, the familiar but developmentally atavistic strategy of dissociation reemerges as a more potent but more distortive option, built upon the pattern established in infancy whereupon the traumatic revelation of the existence of the Other results not only in the narcissistic scar, but a realization of the possibility of the Other as an agent – “it belongs to the Other – it is not mine.”

While in some cases it is sufficient only to repress these aspects of the self, some are or become so deeply distressing to the ego that they require another level of distortion, debasing not only their place in consciousness, but their relationship to the self. For all its effectiveness, however, it is not precise, and what is excised is not only the incongruent content but its associations which, taken together, constitute a complex. In this way not only is the incompatible wish or impulse excluded from the ego, but so too the self states associated with it.

It is my contention that, as the object of the distortion is based upon the subjective valuation of the individual utilizing it – that is, a value (i.e., moral) judgment that is by necessity overtly or covertly self-referential - it is implicitly experienced as a function of the self and thus, when vexatious or frustrating (or associated with vexatious or frustrating circumstances), is

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further experienced directly or indirectly as an affront against the self. That is to say, the intensity of the discomfort is directly proportionate to its proximity to the self.

The way in which the self responds to these conflicts can be conceptualized through the framework of structural dissociation (van der Hart, Nijenhuis, & Steele, 2006). Drawing on the theoretical paradigm of Pierre Janet and grounded in neuroscientific findings and trauma research (Auerbach, Mirvis, Stern, & Schwartz, 2009; Wabnitz, Gast, & Catani, 2013; Schlumpf et al., 2014), structural dissociation refers to discontinuities in the experience of selfhood due to a failure to integrate experiences or information, with such incongruities being seen as a response to trauma. Here, I am positing that one can experience moral trauma when the ego is turned against itself: The very values by which we define ourselves and structure our world become our tormentors, creating a crisis between what is and what ought to be, and resulting in a conflict between the omnipotent, narcissistic self and the sublimated, externalized self – the ideal.

Toward a Moral Typology of Psychopathology

It is an oft-repeated criticism of clinical psychology that it historically focuses more on the abnormal than the typical (Phillips, 2005; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). This criticism also holds in the main for its treatment of morality: The vast majority of the field's attention has been paid to extreme ends of the spectrum - sociopathy and scrupulosity, for example. However, people's values and moral judgments play a much wider and more subtle role in psychosocial functioning than they are often given credit for (Haidt, 2001). This being the case, the manner in which we consider the presentation of symptoms clinically may be enhanced by viewing them through the lens of one's values – and furthermore, what these values signify: As our interest in objects is defined by our ego involvement with them, our moral sensibilities

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are inextricably tied to the very core of our self, reflections and analogs of what is most meaningful to us.

It is no wonder, then, that when these are undermined a shockwave is sent through the psyche, prodding at the parts of ourselves that have in some cases become so mutilated by defensive processes, projected and sublimated to the extent they are recognized solely as the exalted Other – a moral ideal. In such cases, this debasement of the self, once adaptive insofar as it palliated the recognition of one's own powerlessness in the face of existence and the Other, now becomes a liability: As its seat within the self is abdicated, so too is one's ability to affectively recognize it as a product and extension of the ego. Furthermore, the onus of externally-imposed moral systems, born of the practical utility of social living rather than onanistic gratification, come to fill this void in the self *ad hoc* as an internalized representation of one's culture and identification with significant others, usurping one's intrinsic emotional connection to its origins in the self.

At its core, this is a problem of dissociation – a psychological shell game in which parts of the self are shuttled to-and-fro across the boundary of self and other, the result of which is the emotional ambiguity that attends moral dilemmas. Grounded in the conflict between selfish and prosocial goals and complicated by defensive distortions that quixotically attempt to reconcile the two, our values play the role of foil in far more cases than are typically clinically defined by moralistic concerns. To address this conceptual shortcoming, I am proposing a framework of four positions to describe a spectrum of moral pathology based upon the degree to which moral demands and attributions are experienced as incompatible with the self, resulting in the utilization of increasingly intense, ultimately dissociative strategies to defend against the reality of one's "badness." As one progresses along this continuum, the intensity of this dissociation

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becomes more acute as a result of the increasing discontinuity in self-states based upon their perceived moral incompatibility.

As inherently selfish creatures, we are fundamentally at odds with the exhortation of most moral codes - that we heed the needs of others before or as we would our own. This fundamental conflict sets the stage for an essential debasement of the self. Consequently, our development as social beings requires that we acknowledge not only our mortal frailties and lack of omnipotence, but our moral frailties as well - that we actively suppress parts of ourselves that are found to be selfish or otherwise morally unacceptable. To accomplish this we employ a number of defensive strategies in service of the ego, aimed first at distorting reality, then, in more extreme circumstances, the repression or outright disavowal of self-states, each with the ultimate goal of creating distance between the ego self and its unacceptable parts.

George Vaillant's typology of defense mechanisms serves as an organizational framework from which to conceptualize these strategies. Couched in the language of both normative development and psychopathology, Vaillant (1992) ultimately delineated four categories: mature, neurotic, immature, and psychotic. Presented here in descending order of adaptive value, these groupings are roughly analogous with the four positions in the model of moral psychopathology I am proposing, serving as a contextual signpost by which to roughly define the quality of the defensive operations most likely to be utilized while psychologically occupying a given position.

I conceptualize these positions as being, respectively, depressive, obsessive-compulsive, dissociative, and psychotic in nature, each defined by the dominant clinical presentations associated with them. As one progresses along this continuum, the mechanisms associated with these positions devolve in quality and increasingly distort objective reality, resulting in more

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intense focus upon and compartmentalization of aspects of the self which are deemed to be morally untenable.

To illustrate this phenomenon, we turn to the structural theory of dissociation (van der Hart, Nijenhuis, & Steele, 2006): As our capacities to cope with emotional stimuli become overtaxed, our ability to integrate these experiences into our personal narratives deteriorates. This results in the splintering off of self states into independent structures which conflict with the existing primary personality structure, disrupting the continuity of self and producing a wide array of symptoms through the mechanism of dissociation.

The role of the theories of the influential early French psychologist Pierre Janet in their conceptualization of structural dissociation are both plainly evident and manifestly acknowledged by van der Hart, Nijenhuis, & Steele (2006). An influence on both Freud and Jung, both of whom similarly acknowledged him in the development of their theories (Freud, 1914b/1966b, 1925/1952; Jung, 1954/1985, 1954/1991, 1966), Janet (1889/2022) also proposed an energetic model of the psychic economy based upon the dynamics between “mental tension” and “mental force.” According to Bühler & Heim (2001): “Tension describes the relation of specific situations and the behavior called for by them. The quantitative complement of this construct ‘tension’ is, according to Janet, ‘force.’ It can be seen as the relationship between requirement and available resources.” Although couched in what would come to be seen as more behavioral terminology and arguably more materialistic than traditional psychoanalytic conceptualizations of the mental apparatus, this formulation of the workings of the psyche is in the main consistent with libidinal theory. The latter, however, describes the specific interactions between hypostatized mental energy and the contents of the mind, whereas Janet’s conceptualization can be said to describe a general framework by which these interactions occur.

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Accordingly, rather than individual defense mechanisms, Janet (1889/2022) describes a hierarchical system of “mental tendencies,” each of which has a place in said hierarchy according to its level of developmental complexity and adaptive value. The mental energy required to engage these tendencies is considered to be directly proportional to this complexity, with more adaptive options requiring greater resources. When mental force and/or tension are insufficient to muster an appropriate response to stressful stimuli, the ability of consciousness to assimilate experience is compromised under the pressure of a state of emotional overwhelm.

This results in a fault in consciousness whereby traumata and associated details are divorced from the typical sphere of experience due to a “loosening of mental synthesis” (van der Hart, Nijenhuis, & Steele, 2006), whereby the contents slip into or never escape the unconscious (or, in Janet’s phrasing, the “subconscious”). Separated from the normal flow of personal narrative, this *idée fixe* – or “fixed idea” - becomes a psychic singularity into which attentional resources are constantly being shunted in a disorganized, impulsive, and ultimately futile attempt to overcome an event that, while functionally and emotionally present, exists actually and temporally only in the past. Like the rock of Sisyphus, the fixed idea presents its bearer with an insurmountable task: an actual revision of the course of one’s lived experience. The enactment – or, rather, reenactment – of the traumatic or otherwise adverse event is ultimately doomed to frustration and failure or, at best, an empty substitutive victory over a tepid experiential analog. It is here that the diminishing returns of this effect are most vividly seen, as the propensity to further overwhelm increases as more and more cognitive resources are required to sustain the fixed idea and contend with the sequalae it leaves in its wake. In the end, this energy drain results in the exhaustion of the mental apparatus, to a greater or lesser extent.

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In their formulation of structural dissociation, van der Hart, Nijenhuis, & Steele (2006) build upon these concepts as put forth by Janet, postulating a formalized theory through which to functionally describe the dissociative process. They begin by defining their understanding of dissociation as “a division of the personality or consciousness.” Of these two concepts, the former is understood as a gestalt, an epiphenomenal byproduct of interwoven and overlapping “systems of ideas and functions.” Of these complex systemic interactions, they contend, is built the “structure” of the personality to which the name of the theory refers. Abnormal subdivisions of this structure are considered as being either “apparently normal parts” (ANPs) or “emotional parts” (EPs) according to the relative adaptive level of the tendencies associated with them: ANPs allow for functional behavioral strategies under most circumstances, but are influenced by marked tendencies toward avoiding situations and experiences that are associated with a traumatic incident; while EPs, on the other hand, are defined by their narrow, circumspect character and the immature, restrictive quality of associated tendencies. In essence, the EP exists as a psychic snapshot, frozen in time, of the psychobiological state at the time of traumatization. The authors describe these “division[s] of personality in terms of dissociative parts” so as to imply that the “dissociative parts of the personality together constitute one whole, yet are self-conscious, have at least a rudimentary sense of self, and are generally more complex than a single psychobiological state.”

Although ANPs and EPs may take turns in their psychic ascendancy – a phenomenon the researchers term the “biphasic” effect – they are mutually exclusive and covetous of the attentional spotlight. Although the reasons for this are varied, the context in which this avoidance occurs and is maintained is the phobic association to one’s inner world due to the occult influence of unconscious parts. It is through this mechanism that the integration of experience

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(especially traumatic experience) becomes more difficult, ultimately resulting in the creation of abnormal parts (ANPs and EPs). In addition, as a result of this disconnect, the abnormal parts themselves form a phobic association to one another, each representing a blind spot in the other due to their common but dissociated origin.

The quality of marked rigidity in common between these states is both a contributory element of as well as a sustaining factor in the failure to integrate negative experiences: as the experience and its associated psychophysiological states are isolated from the rest of the personality structure generally, they are similarly cut off from the specific system of thoughts and behaviors which develops in the void it leaves behind – the “apparently normal part.” In this way a psychic firewall is created, ensuring the pain of traumatic experience remains (mostly) beyond the scope of conscious recollection, though at the cost of its being outside the purview of the corrective power of conscious and experiential revision.

In addition to an overarching quality of rigidity, abnormal parts are said to exhibit two additional characteristics: “emancipation” and “elaboration.” Although particularly prominent in their most intense iterations, these features are present in all aberrant parts. These terms are defined by the researchers (van der Hart, Nijenhuis, & Steele, 2006) as referring to the “actual or perceived separation and autonomy from the influence of other dissociative parts,” and the propensity of such parts to develop discrete idiosyncrasies, respectively.

The psychic situation elaborated under the structural dissociation model was also described by Freud and Jung from the perspective of the psychoanalytic tradition, in the language of the libidinal theory and the topographical model. In Jung’s conceptualization, errant parts of the self are seen as herniated complexes cast out from conscious awareness and consigned to the unconscious, where they continue to remain psychically active from their displaced but

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affectively- (and libidinally-) charged position. In this way they participate in the self without being regularly aligned with the ego-self. The resultant discontinuity, fittingly described as a “fault” in the parlance of structural dissociation, forms a circumscribed pseudo-self which intrudes upon and in severe cases overwhelms the ego-self, to varying degrees or entirely. The content of these “autonomous complexes” (Jung, 1966) – that is, “a split-off portion of the psyche, which leads a life of its own outside the hierarchy of consciousness” – while not invariably ego-dystonic in nature, may be so objectionable to its sensibilities or threatening to its cohesion that it cannot be successfully integrated into the curated persona of the ego-self. For Freud (1917/1959), what would become conceptualized as the super-ego was described in similar terms, as a special case of such an autonomous complex: “It is our suspicion that the critical agency which is here split off from the ego might also show its independence in other circumstances.”

Another marked feature of such complexes noted by Jung is their so-called “feeling-tone” (Jung, 1954/1985; 1954/1991; 1973/1981) – the distinct emotional experience of a particular quality associated and activated in tandem with the complex. As it stems from the occulted autonomous complex, this emotionality is typically in excess of what is reasonably expected as a proportionate response to a given stimulus. This exaggeration is due to the surplus of energy piggybacking along associative lines as the unconscious autonomous complex finds expression through the activation of a related, conscious counterpart to which it is conceptually and/or experientially related. The distorted and pathological character of such reactions results in a maladaptive feedback loop whereby the expectation of negative stimuli in fact precipitates them, as the old schema is rigidly applied to novel situations. In this way one’s emotional experience becomes tinged with a quality of the unknown, difficult to approach and therefore unable to be

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articulated or conceptualized, leading to a state of overwhelm and dysregulation. So long as this psychic tumult persists, the contents of the autonomous complex are unable to be adequately integrated into the ego-self (Jung, 1954/1985) and the raw, abject nature of emotion untethered from its contextual heritage becomes a vector for psychopathology, left to be rediscovered with every new experience that touches upon its web of associations.

Although not as directly discussed as in Janet and structural dissociation, the concept of mental tension is also an integral part of the psychodynamic model – indeed, it is implied in the very title of psychodynamic theory; the very dynamism upon which it rests. Whether the oppositional orientation of instincts as in drive theories or the inevitable relational ambivalence of object relational conceptualizations, conflict sits at the heart of psychodynamic theory, defines the psychic field, and, as the *sine qua non* of consciousness, the mind itself as we know it. The delicacy of this balance cannot be overstated, however, as this system is prone to inefficiency and disruption by virtue of its complex and oppositional nature. Nevertheless, Jung (1959/1990a; 1960/1990b) also highlights the psychic utility of this tension, whereby one is compelled to slip the bonds of quiescence by the goad of desire – not merely for the satisfaction of basic animalistic drives, but to satisfy complex, transcendental needs and achieve enduring goals through sustained effort (Jung et al., 1964/1968).

Often it is our values set against our more basal desires which frame these conflicts, with the clash between ideals and raw desire replacing the narcissistic ambivalence of childhood in which such conflicts are typified by the friction between competing self-interests. This attitudinal shift signifies several significant things, each with broad developmental implications: a recognition of one's own limitations; a burgeoning recognition of the other; and a recognition of the necessity to develop cognitive and behavioral strategies that allow one to exist among others.

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In other words, one begins to develop a set of moral sensibilities out of necessity and self-interest. Additionally, it is the object-libido severed from its object that returns to the ego with news of the Other which forever changes the perspective of the ego, now able to take itself as an object. In this way the ego comes to regulate not only the id, but itself through the interpolation of discrete introjected ego structures cathected by the very “withdrawn” object-libido that once belonged to the beloved object (Bollas, 1987/1989; Freud, 1917/1959).

From this perspective, we may view the theories of Kohlberg and Piaget as not only descriptive of moral development, but simultaneously as a complex, epiphenomenal expression of increasingly nuanced representations of and strategies for interacting with the Other based upon a synthesis of increased cognitive capacities associated with physical maturation and behavioral feedback from interfacing with the environment. In this way and in this context, an individual’s characteristic mode of being – one’s self – is shaped through not only one’s moral choices and their consequences, but one’s capacity for mentalizing and learning from these experiences. It is these experiences which provide empirical bases for and reciprocally inform our values. Our most precious and truly personal possessions, it is in these values that we locate not only what is meaningful to us, but our very selves. When our experiences become discrepant from these values, the continuity of selfhood is threatened. As our values become appended to our experiences, the parts of ourselves which are associated with incongruent – or, more specifically, unacceptable – experiences then become at risk for defensive exclusion from the ego-self. It is in this way that morality becomes a pathological agent through its disruption of self-states – first, by their isolation through the mechanism of repression; then, when containment fails, banishment through the mechanism of dissociation.

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The positional model I am proposing is consistent with Janet's idea of mental exhaustion and the role it plays in the development of psychopathology. The increasing severity of the symptoms associated with each position reflects an assumption that a functional mechanism consistent with the principles of general adaptation syndrome (Selye, 1950) underlies the functional progression of this nosology, driven by the mentalization of these conflicts from a moral perspective, the implications of which in turn reflect upon the self.

A positional model appears to be of greater theoretical value for conceptualizing and functionally describing this phenomenon for several reasons. While the sequential nature of the positions is suggestive of traditional stage theories, the functionally equipotential nature and bidirectionality of these positions necessitates a more fluid conceptual structure. Much as an individual in the Kleinian model is free to move between the paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions (once the latter is attained), in my proposed framework an individual is not seen as being bound to or precluded from any given position by any considerations other than the intensity of the moral conflict, the susceptibility of the self to fragmentation, or complications arising therefrom.

A positional model also allows for freedom of movement among states while retaining the connotation of a hierarchy based upon the adaptive fitness of associated behavioral patterns. In the proposed framework of moral pathology, movement among positions is tied directly to an autonomous complex's energetic state and position relative to the ego-self. If we envision a cartesian plane where the X axis represents the demarcation between conscious and unconscious, and the Y axis the boundary between self and other, one can represent each of the four proposed positions with a quadrant. The first, or depressive position, is represented by quadrant III, where the autonomous complex is recognized as belonging to the self, but only unconsciously. The

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second, or obsessive-compulsive position, is represented by quadrant II, where it is recognized as consciously belonging to the self. In the third, or fragmentary position, the autonomous complex is still recognized consciously, although no longer being seen as part of oneself, having either crossed the boundary to the other via projection, or be re-repressed to be known only by its effects from its place in the unconscious. The fourth, or psychotic position, represents a point at which the associations to the ego self have been so loosened as to have removed the autonomous complex from the constructive control and organizational principles of the conscious sphere.

Fixed ideas. Apparently normal or emotional parts. Autonomous complexes. Each of these terms describe errant and disruptive elements of the self implicated in the formation, maintenance, and exacerbation of psychopathological symptoms. In each of the conceptualizations in which these originate, there is a recognition that when an experience evokes (or threatens to evoke) a sufficiently intense emotional response, an impulse or desire arises which discards not only the experience itself, but the associations which root and contextualize it in consciousness as well. The extent to which these links are effaced down through and along the associative matrix is roughly proportionate to its disruption of the self, as one's self states are similarly reliant upon these experiential tethers to reality. In this way one, like an animal caught in a trap, sacrifices a part of oneself to escape from danger.

And so here we return to the “problem with horns” (Nietzsche, 1872/2003); a “horned problem” (Jung, 1954/1985) in which the ego is kept in a state of moral tension between the demands of self and other. In order to maintain its integrity as it navigates the Scylla and Charybdis (to borrow a metaphor utilized variously by both Freud and Jung) of id and super-ego, the ego is induced to cast off the parts of itself which beleaguer its progress - the narcissistic, the pathetic, the immoral – in order to navigate the narrow chasm of right action and sound thought

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demanding by practical living. These moral straits must be successfully negotiated in order to enter into civil society leave none who pass unscathed, resulting in, at best, a partial mutilation of the self, and at worst, a catastrophic breach which leaves the ego foundering and overwhelmed. It is perhaps ironic, then, that the self is at the height of its power in a wholistic state, but must necessarily be reduced and divided to adapt to living among others. In order to live with oneself, however, a balance must be struck in which unacceptable parts are acknowledged and accepted rather than disregarded and spurned. In this way the true self paradoxically requires an integration of the very parts that are jettisoned into the environment or within to the unconscious. The moral pruning of one's character creates deformations in the ego-self, leading to cascading and compounding discontinuities in one's lived experience as inconsistencies emerge ever more frequently between ideal and actual. The result of these discrepancies, where reality falls short of one's values, is a necessarily maladaptive orientation to the former due to a dislocation of the self – as Jung described it: “A neurosis is a dissociation of personality” (Jung, 1931/1933).

By conceptualizing this phenomenon as a process whereby the failure of emotional containment and the reemergence of repressed, morally objectionable contents and traits results in a fracturing of the self through the mechanism of dissociation, a broad spectrum of pathology related to a gradual erosion of personality – that is, one's characteristic mode and means of interacting with objects be they internal or external, self or other – emerges. As cognitive dissonance increases with the number of disavowed parts – i.e., autonomous complexes – and the degree of libidinal involvement therewith, one's connection with and sense of oneself degrades – and through this one's ability to relate to others and the environment. Considered in this way, certain pathological presentations may be attributable as the byproduct of the tendentious loosening of the associative matrices which anchor us to reality, motivated by moral repulsion

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from unacceptable traits and experiences. I propose that this pattern follows a characteristic course whereby greater dysfunction follows upon greater disruption of self-states, resulting in increasingly severe forms of clinical syndromes.

Part II: The Depressive Position

“In the clinical picture of [depression], dissatisfaction with the ego on moral grounds is the most outstanding feature.” (Freud, 1917/1959)

The process of psychic disintegration, while dramatic in its outcomes, is often subtle at its outset: it is typically presaged by a shift in mood, the result of a shift in one’s orientation toward an object or objects as a result of libidinal fluctuation in one or more self-objects. It is through the subjective value that is afforded these complexes (that is, objects along with their network of associations) that the individual mentalizes and contextualizes them in relation to the self. If we consider morality to be above all a system of valuation, in its most basic form, depression reflects a perception of moral failings - experiences of disappointment and resentment about the disconnect between the ideal and the actual, whether these reflect attributions about the self, the other, or environmental circumstances.

Across theoretical orientations, a robust body of literature attests to the content of depressive thoughts being related to one’s values (Anderson & Leal, 2014; Pearson et al., 2015). Whether these thoughts are inherently negativistic or are made so by the inversion of frustrated positive attributions (i.e., disappointment from the moral failings of the other or the environment), they represent the first disruptions of the psychic substrate of the self visible at the surface. According to the proposed conceptual framework, disruptions at this stage still maintain the boundary between self and other – that is, disruptions are due to a relatively superficial engagement with the conflict, focused instead on the externality of the consequences of moral shortcoming – for instance, as in the case of the failure of a person, organization, idea, or experience to live up to one’s expectation. However, as these consequences become more personal and require that the individual reflect upon their own role in these circumstances, one

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begins to associate with, and ultimately impart negative value attributions directly to, the self, recognizing one's self as the source of immoral or otherwise devalued traits (Freud, 1917/1959; 1921/1959).

The Ego Ideal – Introjection and the Parental Legacy

In *Mourning and Melancholia*, Freud (1917/1959) identifies loss as the functional root of depression – more specifically, the libidinal disruption that occurs when object-oriented libido is severed from its object, akin to the concrete loss related with the experience of mourning and grief. The resultant discontinuity in the regular flow of libido from unconscious to conscious, self to other, precipitates a backflow along the psychic stream, in turn leading to a temporary engorgement of the ego, eclipsed by “the shadow of the object [that] fell upon” it. The tidal pull of this wayward object-trace upsets the typical progression of object-love, instead directing libido that had previously been earmarked for the purpose of engagement with externalities to an introjected simulacrum. This results in a situation in which object-libido regresses to its narcissistic form and the lost object is overcome by the subject's orality, consuming it and establishing it within the self as a shrine to the superimposition of self and other, a testament to the compromise between infantile omnipotence and the practicalities of dependence.

A consequence of this compromise, however, is that the “object-loss is transformed into an ego-loss” (Freud, 1917/1959) by virtue of its new situation in the psyche. The result of the introjection of the object is that “one part of the ego sets itself over against the other, judges it critically, and, as it were, takes it as an object.” This capacity represents the function of a new partition in the psyche, a further differentiation and specialization of the ego – the establishment of the super-ego.

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Born of the influx of libido at the disposal of the ego in the wake of the loss of an external object, a comingling of narcissistic and object-tinged libido produces a “simultaneous object-cathexis and identification,” allowing for a situation “in which the alteration in character [of the lost object] has been able to survive the object-relation and in a certain sense to conserve it” (Freud, 1923/1960), a psychic pastiche of self and other. The independence of this complex from the greater ego structure allows the latter to take itself as an object from the perspective of the former, and sets the stage for the sadomasochistic processes we come to associate with and experience as the bite of conscience. In other words, through this process one is not only able to retain a semblance of the lost object, but simultaneously to make it the target of aggression and reproach. Further elaborating on the nature of the super-ego, Freud recognizes that it is “not simply a residue of the earliest object-choices of the id; it also represents an energetic reaction-formation against those choices” (Freud, 1923/1960). In this way one persecutes both the other in absentia for its faithlessness, but also one’s self for one’s powerlessness and dependence upon the beloved object.

The prototypical experience of this phenomenon may be linked to the narcissistic scar in which each of us inevitably loses one’s real experience of and relationship with omnipotence. Almost invariably this is the result of an all too human shortcoming of one’s caregivers: a missed feeding, an unanswered cry – of these things are built the structure of our object world, erected upon the very foundations of grandiose selfhood these frustrations shook. Both Freud (1923/1960) and Jung (1954/1985) explicitly enumerated the resolution of the parental romance as the most all-consuming and enduring conflict of childhood. Indeed, the very depressive position to which adequately adjusted children aspire is so-called by Klein in reference to the

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hard-won but pyrrhic spoils of this contest – the ability to identify with a complete but flawed rather than a partial but pure object.

For Freud (1909/1960), the establishment of internalized reifications of parental introjects is the foundation upon which the superstructure of morality is erected, the growing ability to self-regulate behavior in a prosocial manner based upon the quality and level of cathexis of these internalized objects. Although this is seen as a reflexive and necessary part of human development, the inevitable result of interfacing with one's environment in the helpless infantile state, Freud noted the particular propensity of this process to generate pathological outcomes due to its inherently disruptive influence on the psyche.

For Jung (1954/1985), the withdrawal of projected “parental imagos” is a developmental achievement necessary for healthy adaptation to contemporary life. Nevertheless, like all archetypal thoughtforms, these fundamental organizing tendencies of the psyche are ultimately ineradicable, lending their subjective potency to new symbols and reintroducing the tyranny and seeming omnipotence of one's earliest caretakers in the concrete guise of new valued others and, more abstractly, as ideals.

Freud and Jung both conceptualized the development of moral sensibilities – or what is commonly called the “conscience” – as the interplay between internal and external factors. At its root, the establishment of an autonomous complex based upon internalized experiences with one's earliest caregivers – what Freud would come to call the super-ego – not only provides a grounding in the external perspective for moral evaluation, it sets the stage for the depressive position: the object is recognized as being more powerful than the subject, and the tragic realization that one is in an inherently subordinate position thereto. This idealized, internalized other becomes a crucial criterion by which the ego-self measures its own value (Freud,

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1921/1959, 1923/1960; Jung, 1951/1978, 1959/1990), where it exerts tremendous sway over psychic processes to the extent it distorts even the primacy of the pleasure principle (Freud, 1920/1961).

The Objects of Repression and Their Fate

In *The Repression and Return of Bad Objects (with special reference to the 'War Neuroses)*, Fairbairn (1943) asserts through his reading of Freud that while the super-ego is the subjective agent by which repression is enacted, that which is repressed – the objects of repression – are “bad objects.” Indeed, it is by virtue of its role as the psychic repository for good objects that the super-ego is able to exert this agency; and what it exerts it against are precisely these bad objects. For Fairbairn, immersed as he was in the Anglo-American tradition of materialism, the use of term object is (unintentionally) misleading, for with it he includes not only the introjected object itself but the attendant sensations, impulses, and memories associated therewith: the full gamut of psychic contents and their attendant associations - in a word, a complex in the sense understood by Janet, Freud, and Jung. While critical of Freud insofar as his initial emphasis laid upon the repression of impulses, Fairbairn himself becomes guilty of the same academic sin albeit with his emphasis on the object – it is neither the impulse, nor the object, but the complete psychic legacy as it is mentalized that becomes the object of repression as symbolized by the thoughtform and its associations.

In this way, Fairbairn’s reading of Freud allows us to conceptualize these excluded complexes as being subjected to the same treatment as Fairbairn’s so-called “bad objects.” What is key is not the choice of noun but the qualifier – badness. These introjects of one’s early and inevitable negative experiences with one’s caregiver and environment persist as psychic

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representations thereof, and are excluded from consciousness and association with the ego through the intervention of the super-ego, banishing them to the unconscious.

These complexes, so near to experience and therefore the self, cannot be consigned to the depths of the deep unconscious, however, and in being accessible to consciousness dwell instead in its shallows, the preconscious, where pressure must be maintained to prevent their reemergence.

The superego's projection upon, or point of contact with, the ego-self, the ideal self, remains an unattainable abstraction of the introjected demands of the other, and one that explicitly excludes some of the earliest and most foundational instinctive drives and experiences, condemning them to live in its shadow. It is perhaps not coincidental that Jung would utilize this term to describe the archetypal representation of these discarded parts of the self.

The Super Ego and the Shadow – Chiaroscuro of the Soul

The interaction of the ego-self and the autonomous complex known as the super-ego is predicated on a subtractive relationship of the former from the latter. Discrepant parts of the self are forced first to the periphery of consciousness and finally below the point of liminality where they adhere to a negative image of the self, an anti-ideal – an autonomous complex Jung (1951/1978) would come to anthropomorphize as the shadow self.

If “good” objects are conceptualized as being collected and finding sanctuary in a further differentiated partition of the ego, we may, according to the principal of enantiodromia, a similar psychic construct to which “bad” objects are consigned. If the super-ego is the Olympian height upon which the gods of childhood reside alongside one's most cherished values, the shadow self is the Stygian depth into which the unacceptable desires and parts of the self are cast, castigated

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and exorcized by the new gods – one’s ideals. It is through the establishment of these internalized ideals that the criterion of value is no longer the exclusive purview of the pleasure principle; it is now revised to consider the demands of the environment through the guise of the internalized desires of the Other. “Good” and “bad” take on nuance beyond what is physically pleasant or unpleasant, while remaining experientially tied thereto after the pattern established by infantile experiences of deprivation, frustration, and discomfort. In this way the “good” is separated from the “bad,” with the ego-self experienced as the subjective agency to which these attributions may apply.

For better or worse, the parts of the self that become associated with these attributions are then regarded and treated differently by the ego-self, becoming ego-syntonic or ego-dystonic depending on their affinity for “goodness” or “badness.” As such, those states which become associated with the latter are at risk for repression or dissociation due to their negative emotional valence.

Badness and Ego Diminishment

Both Freud and Jung note the distortive effects such disruptions of established libidinal pathways have upon the ego (Freud, 1917/1959, 1923/1960; Jung, 1954/1985). As their cathectic charge and therefore psychic relevance is contingent upon these links, ego structures are acutely responsive to any fluctuation in their libidinal allotment. Accordingly, as the quantity of libido at the disposal of the ego varies based upon the ebb and flow of instinctual (i.e., internal) and object-oriented (i.e., external) sources, so too does the quality of the feeling-tone associated with the self. These states of relative enervation or superfluity account for and correspond in theory to depression and mania, respectively, accounting for the characteristic self-loathing and grandiosity that attend these symptom presentations (Freud, 1917/1959).

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In both Freud and Jung's conceptualizations, the psyche is a closed system in which economical relationships conform to the laws of scarcity. What is valued is what is valuable in a practical sense – that is, to what degree it commands a share of the finite pool of psychic energy: an idea or complex is valued relative to its cathectic draw, and this is reflected subjectively in a proportionally concomitant utilization of attentional resources. In depression, this attention is not always conscious – indeed, according to the psychodynamic model of the mind, its origins are necessarily located in the unconscious. The repressed contents and/or compensatory impulses from autochthonic structures – in the form of or through autonomous complexes – exert their influence from below the liminal barrier, causing a drain upon cognitive resources for which the conscious mind cannot immediately account. In depression, the consequence of this is a subjective experience of diminishment.

This experience of diminishment becomes furthermore associated with the attribution of “badness” through its link with the introjects and values contained in the super-ego, which impart a moral value upon the qualities of the ego-self in the form of feeling-tones. The aversive experience of negative affect paired with sensation and memory results in a situation whereby moral judgments become a crucial determinant in labeling behaviors, thoughts, experiences, and parts of self as unacceptable, identifying them for suppression and removal from conscious life through the action of the ego in its role as executor of the super-ego's function as censor.

However, the exclusion of such complexes from the sphere of the ego-self does not come without consequences. Just as the loss of the beloved object provokes an upheaval in the libidinal economy, the removal of undesirable parts of the self similarly upset the psychic equilibrium, albeit in a qualitatively different way.

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Whereas the loss of the object is disruptive until it can be stabilized in the form of an introject, the displaced self-part makes its presence known more subtly. From its exile in the preconscious, the repressed plots its return. Never fully ceding its libidinal allotment, it remains in contact with the ego-self through these associative ties. It is through these psychic ratlines that the repressed applies an insidious but compensatory influence upon conscious life, struggling to reassert itself as a rightful constituent part of the ego-self by claim of lived experience.

The Return of the Repressed and the Beginnings of Structural Dissociation

In describing the return of the repressed, Freud (1899/2005; 1915/1959) notes the upward tendency of such cathected contents as they strive for consciousness. Ostensibly, this phenomenon is linked to an attempt to balance the accounts of the psychic economy in which the discrepancy between the overall reserve of the libidinal reservoir and the amount at the disposal of the ego after the allotment invested in objects is accounted for. This phenomenon can be seen as by Jung (1959/1990) as an attempt to reintegrate discarded parts of the self and reestablish psychic equilibrium – the self seeking its own level in a zeroing out of the libidinal ledger.

From the perspective of structural dissociation, one might conceptualize the disposition of the psyche in this position as experiencing the first effects of mental exhaustion – effects which functionally underlie the slackening of mental tension and loosened associations which may follow and which characterize later positions. Here the mental apparatus has already been provoked into action, withdrawing or otherwise redistributing attention – or energy - in response to an environmental or dispositional change, leaving the psyche to adapt to such circumstances with diminished – or, in some cases, bereft of – higher cognitive faculties on which we typically rely to navigate and process our experiences.

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Subjectively, this situation is experienced as akin to the mood state traditionally described as melancholic: a generally negativistic cast to one's psyche with concomitant effects on affect, behavior, and cognition – a byproduct of the interaction between the ego and repressed content. Whether we view this strictly in the libidinal sense as a diminishment of the ego through a loss of the availability and flexibility of energy at its disposal, or through the lens of Janet and the structural dissociation model as a slackening of mental tension, the result is the same – a pervasive sense of dissatisfaction with one's self, environment, and/or others.

In this way parts of the self and associated experiences that have been found to be unacceptable begin to intrude upon consciousness, though their origin often remains ambiguous at this juncture due to the bidirectional nature and mixed provenance of the psychically disruptive contents – that is to say, the result of the chaotic admixture of internal and external stimuli contained in the autonomous complexes and one's related value attributions in which, in the depressive position, the ego self is caught up in a state of existential limbo. It is the ambiguity of this state which sets the stage for and fuels the anxiety characteristic of the obsessive-compulsive position.

It must be stressed that this stage is conceptualized mainly as a precursor to what would typically be clinically recognized as dissociation. There are yet to be any formally dissociative processes occurring per se; here, it is sufficient that the conflict begins to approach the surface of consciousness and provokes a reflexive value judgment in the subject.

Defenses and Clinical Vignette

Associated with the mature level of Vaillant's (1986/1992) typology of defenses, symptom presentations associated with this position may frequently exist at a subclinical level

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and resolve through healthy means such as sublimation, humor, and acceptance. These “mature” defenses operate with a relatively minimal distortion of reality, allowing an individual to navigate one’s depressive malaise with the least amount of disruption to practical functioning. However, as the repressed contents exert more pressure and move nearer to consciousness, the resultant symptoms become intense enough to warrant clinical intervention and more enduring depressive disorders may develop, representing the increasing psychic buoyancy of the conflict, and thus its burgeoning encroachment upon the core of the self.

Clinical examples of the psychic situation in the depressive position may include world-weary patients who, while ostensibly benefiting from a superficially comfortable life, are unhappy with their circumstances and the world around them, not recognizing that underlying this judgment is a covert indictment against the self.

Take for instance the case of A., a teenage natal female identifying as non-binary and utilizing male pronouns. When A. was seven, his aunt was diagnosed with terminal cancer. Shortly before her death, A.’s father passed away unexpectedly of a heart attack while he and A. were together at a family gathering. Shortly after this, a close family friend passed away in a car accident. In the wake of these traumatic events – all of which took place in the space of three weeks - A. withdrew interpersonally as he grieved, although in time he began to reintegrate socially. While overtly the grieving process resolved itself in terms of societal expectations and A. slowly reintegrated into the typical routines and relationships associated with normative development, the subtle influences of prolonged grief continued to influence his day-to-day life and shape his internal world – the loss of a beloved object under such sudden circumstances is not so quickly or easily resolved. The psychic disruption this series of events constituted

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transcended mourning into melancholia, resulting in more pervasive and subtle symptoms which undercut both inter- and intra-personal functioning.

The losses suffered by A. can be viewed as precipitating a reflexive assumption about himself as an object of morality. Rooted in the sense of infantile omnipotence in which all external occurrences are reflexively related to the agency of the self or as a reflection thereof, A. inferred from the abandonment *en masse* of cathected objects his own insufficiency, unworthiness, and, ultimately, badness. What is more, by becoming a bad object himself he shielded his wayward objects – particularly his beloved father – from the aggression and criticism antithetical to their idealized memory.

To defend against the two-fold pain of loss and badness, A. developed a dark and self-effacing sense of humor through which he could both signal his suffering to others as well as directly address his experience of loss, albeit with the benefit of the emotional buffer humor provides. In this way A. was able to navigate the world in a manner which skirted the boundaries of social acceptability through the language of hyperbolic violence towards himself and others, adopting a façade of jocular hyperbole around a kernel of painful truth.

Regardless of the defenses utilized in an attempt to palliate the effects of autonomous complexes – that is, to maintain some experiential distance between badness and the self - the depressive position from the standpoint of the proposed conceptualization invariably includes the recognition of something being amiss despite appearances as it approaches consciousness, a first sally in what may well prove to be a prolonged siege of the seat of selfhood. As it becomes nearer to the surface, its effects become more pronounced and require a greater exertion of mental energy to contain, resulting in time, whether through mental exhaustion or an influx of libido to the autonomous complex, in a failure of defensive arrangements and the adoption of

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more intense defenses to compensate for the reemergence of unacceptable psychic contents – contents that call into question the moral quality of the subject.

Part III: The Obsessive-Compulsive Position

Understanding obsessional thought through a moral lens requires us to appreciate the specific value of thoughts within the subjective world and their unique influence upon consciousness. Obsessions are, by definition, overvalued thoughts, and value is a moral issue. The obsessive-compulsive position might therefore be conceptualized as one in which the individual is beset by a moral dilemma - or moral dilemmas – phenomenologically manifested as obsessions, with their attendant compulsions being morally driven behaviors.

Obsessive-compulsive symptomatology is well documented as being associated with ritualistic behavior and ruminative thought (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). From the perspective of my proposed conceptualization, this is seen as a result of the acute emergence of a moral conflict into the conscious or preconscious mind, at which point the intensity of the internal conflict (i.e., thoughts and emotions) reaches a fever pitch, to the extent that it becomes experienced as intolerable and requires sudden and immediate release. In other words, the overvalued cognition (obsession) becomes so hypercatheted it precipitates a compensatory behavioral decathexis (compulsion) in order to retain ideational control. This situation is significant in two respects: firstly, the connection between the internal and external aspects of this process is solidified as it comes nearer to consciousness; secondly, the element of agency moves to the fore.

While in the depressive position it is sufficient that one experience a general sense of diminishment and negativity, one may also be focused to a greater or lesser extent upon the badness and injustice of an object, objects, or one's environment generally. One may also be focused upon oneself as the source of the badness precipitating the depressive experience. I conceptualize the latter case as an intensification of the general negativistic disruption that is the

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core of the depressive experience, a byproduct of its being caught in a stream of narcissistic libido suffusing the ego-self. In this way badness is experienced increasingly as a quality of the self, a constituent part of the ego, provoking a greater marshalling of psychic resources to employ more nuanced and distortive defenses to moderate the disruptive and distressing effects of the irruption badness into consciousness. It is at this point one enters the obsessive-compulsive position – a position characterized by a preoccupation with badness, and a subsequent game of high-stakes peekaboo in which this badness is repeatedly recognized and rebuffed, only to return again in a Sisyphean cycle as one is confronted ever again by the reality of badness deferred but undaunted.

Psychodynamic Etiological Models of Obsessive-Compulsive Presentations

In his early essays on the role of defensive operations in psychopathology, Freud (1894/1959; 1896/1959) distinguished neuroses of the obsessional type as qualitatively distinct from hysterical presentations, while sharing the same underlying mechanism – a hypothetical energetic system which would later come to be more formalized as libidinal theory. Freud references his intellectual kinship with Janet in this regard, but differs from him in his greater emphasis on the psychogenic bases of these phenomena.

Like Janet, Freud posits the mind as an energetic system which could be overtaxed by demands and processes that outstrip its resources. In the case of obsessive neuroses, Freud essentially views this as resulting in a failure of repression, with the intensity of the resultant symptoms depending on the extent to which the repressed slips loose of the unconscious.

Freud (1926/1959) recognizes that repression occurs in different forms depending on whether the “undesirable instinctual impulse” is elicited by external or internal stimuli. As the

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ego is generally better equipped to handle the former, the latter are better suited at slipping past the agency of repression. Freud posits that this occurs through internally-based impulses finding a “substitutive impulse” as a means of circumventing the full force of repression. In this way one might imagine the unacceptable parts of the self and related experiences and impulses libidinally hijacking a ride along associative pathways from the unconscious back into consciousness.

As a means of moderating this leakage, a break is imposed between cognition and emotion, and in this way “incompatible ideas” are “robbed of affect” (Freud, 1894/1959) – that is, ideas which have been found to be morally incompatible with the ego-self but have reemerged into consciousness are neutered by their natural libidinal allotment being cut off and shunted away, accruing instead to related, less ego-dystonic contents. In this way the mind’s associative matrix is exploited so as to connect the negative feelings arising from incompatible ideas (or parts) with more tolerable ones, in effect displacing and isolating the unacceptable idea.

This situation, while successful in keeping the intolerable ideation or self-part from consciousness, nevertheless fails to exclude them entirely: “the mental process which has been turned into a symptom owing to repression now maintains its existence outside the organization of the ego and independently of it” (Freud, 1926/1959), resistant to any direct means of conscious revision. In this way we find our way back to the autonomous complexes described by Jung; parts of the self which, inchoate or otherwise found lacking, have been left behind by the developing self, and have through an ironic quirk of defensive maneuvers come back into contact with the ego, regaining access and thereby again able to participate in the ego-self, albeit now indirectly, but perhaps all the more powerful for it. Replaced instead with a substitutive idea through which the displaced affect finds expression in consciousness, it is this *idée fixe* (a term borrowed from Janet by both Freud and Jung) which takes the place of the incompatible idea,

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representing the autonomous complex without exposing it to consciousness, and thereby allowing it to exert the influence of its intense emotional valence without recourse to revision by experience or reasoned argument.

In describing the phenomenological expression of symptoms that are a consequence of this psychopathological process, Freud (1896/1959) distinguishes between obsessional ideas and obsessive actions. While obsessive thoughts take many guises, they are uniform in their privileged place in conscious life, overvalued by virtue of their libidinal yield and concomitant attentional draw. The behavioral correlate of such thoughts, the obsessive action, is the necessary consequence of the over-potentialization of the associative matrices connected to the obsessive idea and the repressed complex for which it serves as a substitute in consciousness. Freud (1926/1959) describes the manifestation of this irruption as having “the quality of a compulsion,” and, if prevented from being discharged externally, visited upon the self in the guise of somatic symptoms or inhibitions of functionality.

Guilt and the Moral Defense

At the heart of the obsessive-compulsive position – and the obsessional neurosis – is the intolerable, incompatible, or otherwise undesirable complex which strives for expression against the wishes of the ego, which strives to engender the ego-ideal at the behest of the super-ego. The reemergence of the repressed brings to the fore the discrepancy between the ego-self and the ego-ideal, resulting in self-reproach when the former is found lacking.

In the normal course of human development it is inevitable that a child will transgress against interpersonal boundaries and sociocultural norms, and that each of us navigates these experiences in a manner befitting that which is most adaptive to our continued functioning – that

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is, typically, to adhere to the dictates and whims of our caregivers so as to assure their goodwill and continued servicing of our needs, to avoid those behaviors and associated ideation which endanger these, and in line with the pleasure principle generally seeking satisfaction and avoiding discomfort.

While Freud (1894/1959) notes that the typical manner in which early childhood experiences take on this “incompatible” character is sexual in nature, he also acknowledges other avenues than this can occur, such as the amoral infantile fumbblings of the developing child in the form of aggressive acts and impulses (Freud, 1909/1996; 1926/1959). Jung (1954/1985) elaborates further upon the role of perceived moral failings generally in the development of neurosis through self-reproach, noting that often it is not an infantile experience but the capacity for an immoral desire that is sufficient to provoke the bite of conscience.

As an example of this process let us consider Freud’s (1909/1996) seminal case study of the so-called “Rat Man.” In this case Freud illustrates the mechanisms underlying the multifaceted and confusingly irrational presentation of obsessional neurosis. For the Rat Man, it was a conflict with a superior which served as the conduit between the unconscious and consciousness in the wake of his father’s death, reconnecting repressed oedipal hatred toward his father with his conscious experience where this affect, disconnected from its ideational origin, came into direct conflict with the pain of loss and congruent experience of filial love underlying it. This ambivalence, cast in too stark contrast, became the pathological vector for the Rat Man, resulting in the dysfunction which brought him to seek treatment.

As with any pathological arrangement, however, obsessive-compulsive symptomatology does not come without its adaptive benefits. In addition to being a functional stopgap for the irruption of the repressed into consciousness, the obsessive-compulsive arrangement also

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provides what Fairbairn (1943) refers to as “the moral defence.” Harkening back to Freud’s notion of the super-ego and its function, Fairbairn argues that the guilt and shame associated with one’s perceived moral shortcomings are relative to the perspective of one’s internalized good objects, and by experiencing these emotions one pays homage to the idealized if exacting representations immortalized in the super-ego by holding oneself accountable to their hypothesized desires. In this way one’s relationships, as well as the conceptualization of grounding and important others, are protected through conformity to the sociocultural expectations one became reliant upon for care in one’s earliest experiences.

However, another more primal, reductive purpose is also served. The obsessive-compulsive arrangement and the moral defense invite the individual to participate in the satisfaction of a sadomasochistic impulse to punish and be punished, as aggression which is found to be unacceptable when directed outwards finds instead an outlet turned against the self (Freud, 1930/1961; Jung, 1954/1985). Ironically, it is also this mechanism which contributes in part to one of the most striking features of the obsessional neurosis, the repetition compulsion.

The Eternal Recurrence – The Compulsion to Repeat

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud (1920/1961) recognizes that from the ubiquity of the so-called repetition compulsion we must infer not only that this phenomenon occurs normatively and at all levels of functioning, but also that it does so with an intensity that challenges even the primacy of the pleasure principle. Like actors in an uninspired serial tragicomedy, one episodically enacts the same tired script, captivated nevertheless by the recurring interpersonal drama in which the only the cast of characters changes.

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At its root, we find a desire to seek mastery over our experiences – a tendency which was well established in the literature by the time of Janet. Whether these experiences be rooted in historical fact, our fantastical interpretations of such experiences, or hypothesized possibilities for the future, the patterns of behaviors which find their way into our lives be through parapraxes, effortful design, or synchronistic interpretations of external events conform to this pattern of recurring themes which seem to influence our behavior and our very destiny in ways not always immediately scrutable to consciousness (Freud, 1901/1990; Janet, 1889/2021; Jung, 1959/1990).

To better understand this phenomenon in the context of morality and structural dissociation, we must examine the unique way in which it manifests in obsessive-compulsive symptomology. Although akin to the reexperiencing of traumatic events seen in post-traumatic stress reactions, there is an additional component by which the id is gratified through the release of affect associated with the repressed (Freud, 1926/1959). Again we meet the influence of the autonomous complex of unacceptable ideas and experiences, which from the safety of its isolation in the unconscious nevertheless continues to participate in psychic life. Not only does the repressed exhibit an upward tendency as described by Freud (1899/2005; 1915/1959), but as an authentic but devalued part of the self, it is motivated to strive for expression (Jung, 1951/1978). Having escaped the censor and regained access to the ego, the executor of will and keeper of the way to motor function, the autonomous complex now exerts its influence in secret, libidinally inflating the conscious substitute with affect which is not its due, and thereby evading direct attempts to confront or correct it.

Nevertheless, as nature abhors a vacuum, the psyche strives for wholeness. The state of affairs in which the accounts of the psychic economy are discrepant leaves one ill at ease and

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signals this through a call to action. The painful affect seeks its level, but, being disconnected from the ideation to which it originally belongs, can find only frustration. Like a preacher's call without a response from their congregation, or a transmitter whose signal finds no receiver, one is compelled to repeat these attempts at reconnecting affect and idea so as to become capable of resolving the discrepancy. So long as the autonomous complex remains unconscious and its conscious substitute the scapegoat for intolerable affect, one is doomed to compulsively seek an impossible resolution, to insist to solve a puzzle to which one does not have all the pieces.

This state of affairs is reinforced and maintained by yet another mechanism in which the id is gratified at the expense of the ego – the experience of guilt through self-reproach. Like a flagellant mortifying themselves for their transgressions against their God when in fact they have sinned only against the sensibilities of their forebearers, the obsessive-compulsive individual is able to exult in their wickedness by turning it against the self. In this way the id finds its satisfaction in a substitute, the super-ego is propitiated through the upholding of its principles, and ego-self is left to shoulder the burden of badness. This sadomasochistic arrangement, as elegant as it is insidious, allows for the affect originating with unacceptable (that is, selfish and immoral) desires to be experienced and at the same time to gratify the severe but sacred objects contained in the super-ego. The ego, caught in the middle, suffers under pressure from both sides, but retains the ability to plead innocence, experiencing the bite of conscience as unduly persecutory despite remaining ignorant of the true aim and origin of the desire which seeks to be gratified, as the ideational content of the autonomous complex remains obfuscated in the unconscious. Ultimately, an acceptable if maladaptive balance is achieved in which all three parts of the triune psyche of the topographical model are embroiled in a balancing act in which badness remains present and punished, but rationally unaccounted for.

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Sustaining this situation requires a complex set of defenses through which the build-up of cathexes can be safely discharged regularly and without straying too near the associative matrix leading back along libidinal lines to the unacceptable ideation. As the movement from the depressive to the obsessive-compulsive position is defined by a breach of containment of the repressed autonomous complex, the latter represents a secondary line of defense to mitigate the leakage from the unconscious. What Fairbairn had called the return of bad objects may in fact be better imagined here as a return of the influence of bad objects, and it is through the enactment of compulsive defense that this badness remains contained.

Magical Thinking and Talismanic Action

The literature is quite clear on the propitiatory and/or apotropaic intent of ritualistic compulsions and so-called “magical thinking” (Einstein & Menzies, 2008; Freud, 1896/1959, 1933/1965; Jung, 1959/1990; Jung, Henderson, Jaffé, Jacobi & von Franz, 1964/1968) – one expends the nervous energy generated by the experience of moral anxiety not in a disorganized manner, but in a tendentious and concerted effort to dispel immoral or negative traits or consequences.

Jung (1954/1991, 1989/2011) describes obsessive thinking as stemming from a tendency of humans towards assuming “the omnipotence of thought” – a phenomenon which occurs when the rational ideation of consciousness is buoyed by irrational affect from the unconscious, resulting in an intense experience of meaningfulness as if confronted with an incontrovertible truth, a “psychic fact” which impels to action. It is this effect which comes to the fore in the obsessive-compulsive position due to the isolation of affect described by Freud (1926/1959): the incompatible content remains in the unconscious while its associated affect returns to

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consciousness through its association with a less distressing but related complex accessible to consciousness.

Taken together, these mechanisms account for the “exaggerated” (Freud, 1909/1996) nature of affective responses to obsessional ideas: that is to say, the disconnect between the rational and irrational in which one experiences anxiety due to one’s repressed badness while maintaining the valid rational conviction that one is not wholly (if at all) responsible and, indeed, that the whole situation has a quality of the absurd about it due to its disproportionate intensity and conflicting messages. In the end we are faced with a simultaneous knowing and not-knowing, a sense of responsibility and the desperate abdication thereof, which roils the surface of consciousness and gives it no respite.

As irrational creatures, it is often the experience of anxiety which wins out over rational conviction, however, and the enactment of irrational behaviors which counteract irruptions of the unconscious which threaten to destabilize the delicate balance of the resurgent repressed are a commonplace if not necessary aspect of obsessional neuroses. In order to maintain the holding action against leakage from the unconscious, it becomes necessary to utilize stronger defenses – particularly that of “undoing” (Freud, 1926/1959). As its name suggests, this active counterpart to the isolation of affect involves an attempt to compensate or reverse entirely the thought or deed (real or imagined) which betrays too nearly the true aim of the repressed and thus skirts too closely to the reality of our badness.

Defenses and Clinical Vignette

In the obsessive-compulsive position, defense mechanisms consistent with the neurotic level of Vaillant’s (1986/1992) typology become more characteristic. The reemergence of the

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repressed constitutes a significant shift in the normal functioning of the psyche and necessitates a proportional escalation in the intensity and distortive potential of defensive operations which are better suited to diffusing the sudden and intense negative affect associated with intrusions from the unconscious, but at the cost of impinging upon reliably regular and adaptive inter- and intra-personal functioning.

Undoing and isolation of affect in particular are characterized by Freud (1926/1959) as being the defenses of obsessional neurosis *par excellence*. In both cases, the aim of these defensive maneuvers may be seen as increasingly desperate attempts to ward off negative affects, whether it be intercepted as it enters consciousness through the isolation of affect, or through undoing once it has been experienced or enacted. Regardless of how this leakage of the repressed is dealt with, it signals further encroachment of the autonomous complex as it strives for recognition and reintegration, moral ugliness and all.

Clinical examples of the psychic situation in the obsessive-compulsive position are centered around this theme: the “conflict between two opposing impulses of approximately equal strength” (Freud, 1909/1996) – one acceptable and congruent with the ego-self, the other consigned to the unconscious for its discrepant ego-dystonic content. The moral element of this conflict is plainly evident and, recognized as it was by both Freud and Jung, was seen particularly by the latter as the crux of neurosis generally (Jung, 1931/1933). In this way obsessive-compulsive presentations most plainly demonstrate the internal conflict around discrepancies between the ego-self and the true self, with the reemergence of perceived moral failings the primary pathogenic agent in the production of symptoms.

In the case of A., his movement into the obsessive-compulsive position was demonstrated by his compulsive engagement in unhealthy relationships and affective disconnect from the

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historical truth of his father's death. While at most times he was able to remain in the depressive position through the (mostly) adaptive use of humor, at other times a stark disconnect between the declarative memory and emotional experience of his father's death would become plain as his anxiety increased. Under such circumstances it became evident that the full emotional impact of this experience had become severed from historical fact by the dispassionate way in which he would recount it, humorless and matter-of-fact. A.'s movement into the obsessive-compulsive position was thus signaled by the reemergence of the repressed experience of helplessness and thwarted omnipotence that arose from the series of unexpected losses he suffered in childhood.

Whereas typically his utilization of humor and other more mature defenses would have been sufficient to maintain psychic equilibrium, as his anxiety intensified and the repressed feeling of internalized badness leaked into consciousness, the influence of the autonomous complex – the parts of him which were fixated at the time of the loss of his father – became ascendent; and with it came its attendant beliefs, rooted in the same conclusions inevitably drawn by the omnipotent fantasies of the childish mind still narcissistically engaged in the family romance: the frightful realization that one has caused such a calamity oneself. From this postulate and the badness which reflexively attends it follow both the sense that one bears a moral stigma equivalent to the mark of Cain, doomed to the life of a pariah whereby all relationships are doomed to failure, and furthermore that this punishment is necessary, just, and deserved as proven by the experience of loss.

Both the obsessive as well as the compulsive theme revolved around this logic. The substitutive idea which served as the conduit to consciousness for the autonomous complex, that A. is fundamentally damaged and unlovable, is closely related to the repressed contents of helplessness and anger towards his beloved father who abandoned him without warning. As a

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means of compensating these beliefs, A. would engage in caretaking behavior towards his peers, particularly those who appeared in need of support but who often did not reciprocate. This compulsion to protect, noted by Freud (1909/1996) as one of the behavioral manifestations of the obsessional neurosis, served a both as a repudiation of the aggressive impulses contained in the autonomous complex, as well as a means of counteracting (i.e., undoing) the belief that he was unlovable. This desire to involve the Other in the pattern of reassurance seeking typical of the obsessive-compulsive feedback loop, and which will become more yet more salient in the fragmentary position, also reintroduces an important issue: that of the origin and directionality of badness – that is, whether it is experienced as stemming from an internal or external source.

At this point in the positional model, the direction from which this appears to originate often becomes etiologically and clinically significant as one becomes more firmly seated in the obsessive-compulsive position: what began as a leak of the repressed may in time become a torrent as internalized badness pushes nearer to the surface until it regularly travels back and forth across the liminal boundary, at which time one becomes keenly aware of one's sense of being the source of this badness, coming as it does as a phenomenological product of internal experience. It is precisely this experience and the intensity thereof which precipitates further defensive reactions from the ego as it attempts to retain control of how the self is perceived. As one is unable to rectify the dissonance caused with the ambivalence made conscious, one is faced with a choice: to accommodate and revise the ego-self in light of the existence of less-desirable but nonetheless authentic parts of the self, or to get rid of them. As repression has failed once in this regard, the ego employs a yet more intensive strategy of defense to the latter end.

Part IV: The Fragmentary Position

At the height of the obsessive-compulsive position, the stage is set for a psychic reckoning. The complete failure of the containment of unacceptable parts of the self through repression looms large, and requires action beyond compensatory compulsions. By virtue of the tremendous internal pressure attendant upon the irruption of the unconscious, this situation may serve as an impetus to seek treatment or may promote healthy self-reflection in an attempt to regain a sense of equilibrium. However, if ignored or otherwise mishandled, unacceptable parts of the self reemerging into consciousness begin to fragment, becoming disavowed or projected upon others or into the environment as the intensity of the ideational content of badness outstrips the individual's capacity to contain and modulate the associated affect.

Much like Freud's "return of the repressed," this position might well be called the "return of the self" – here the suppressed and disavowed self-states related to selfish or otherwise unwanted desires and experiences slip loose from the unconscious and demand to be dealt with as their more ego-syntonic counterparts *inter pares*. If the individual has yet to undertake the necessary working through to properly integrate these "parts" into the greater personality structure, the result of this reemergence and reassertion of the autonomous complex is invariably a marked disruption in the ability of the ego to maintain its function in a cohesive manner.

At this stage in the conceptualization, attempts at containment have manifestly failed and the adequacy of repression as a defensive maneuver is stripped away from the individual. If we consider the obsessive-compulsive position as the resistance phase of the general adaptation syndrome (Selye, 1950), the fragmentary position represents the beginning of the exhaustion phase. The result of this is the emergence of symptom presentations characterized by derealization, depersonalization, and the beginnings of clinically significant distortions of reality.

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Dissolution of the Self - Theoretical Conceptualizations of Dissociation

“It wasn’t me.”

-Shaggy, “It Wasn’t Me”

Central to any theory of dissociation is the concept of the self. As noted by Van der Hart, Nijenhuis & Steele (2006), “dissociation originally referred to a division of the personality or of consciousness” - a notion derived from and explored extensively by the French school of the late 19th century. Among the hallmarks of this tradition were a focus upon the role of trauma and emotion as etiological forces (Heim & Bühler, 2006; Walusinski & Bogousslavsky, 2020).

Both Freud (1909/1960) and Jung (1954/1985) were deeply influenced by their time studying at Salpêtrière, particularly by the focus of the French school upon the breakdown in psychological processes underlying various symptom presentations – a phenomenon which would eventually give way from the traditionally mechanistic view of a neurologically determined subconscious to the notion of the dynamic unconscious key to psychodynamic theory and conceptualization.

As early as his work with Breuer, Freud (1909/1960; 1925/1952) recognized the role of intense emotion and its peculiar effects upon the functioning of the psyche, and began to develop what would come to be known as psychoanalysis through his clinical experiences with such phenomena. In describing the situation of the psyche in these contexts, Freud (1894/1959) recognized that in such cases emotion often had the subjective feel of being “dislocated” or “transposed” – an artifact of the “isolation of affect” from the ideation and experience with which it originally arose. Freud (1923/1960) recognizes the purpose of this distortion, in the parlance of what he would develop as his topographical model, as being due to the ego-dystonic

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nature of the material, and the ego's motive in excluding it from consciousness as being to protect the ego-self from the moral imprecations of the super-ego as it attempts to approximate the ego-ideal.

While Jung would come to adopt (and adapt) the topographical model of Freud, he would also contribute his own theoretical conceptualizations in the area of dissociative processes. The phenomenon of *abaissment du niveau mental* – a term coined by Janet to describe “a lowering of the mental level” related to “the weakening of mental force and tension [which] reduces the ability to synthesize” information and experience (Bühler & Heim, 2001) – was referenced by Jung (1954/1985, 1954/1991) to refer to the breakdown in associative matrices constituent to the experience of consciousness.

Jung (1960/1990) described the mechanism of this phenomenon as a byproduct of the separation of the psychic functions – conscious from unconscious, rational from irrational, thinking from feeling. While Jung considered these partitions a natural part of psychic functioning – and, indeed, integral to the function of consciousness reliant as it is upon contrast – he also recognized in them an apt breeding ground for pathological processes when out of balance. As one experiences a shift in one's sensorium due to a change in the relative ascendancy of these functions in one's psychic life, one experiences a sense of disorientation concomitant with the degree of this discrepancy relative to baseline.

Repressed experiences and impulses along with autochthonic and archetypal products of the deep unconscious come to affect consciousness by virtue of their libidinal ties to associated conscious content – the “substitutive” ideas which share associations with the “incompatible” material, while remaining tolerable to the ego (Freud, 1926/1959). In this way the autonomous complexes comprised of material in the unconscious come to exert their insidious influence upon

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conscious life and motor function, as irrational emotional states disconnected from their native ideational ground intrude upon the (usually) rational functioning of the ego under the reality principle.

This intrinsic liability related to the duality between consciousness and the unconscious comes full circle in the theory of structural dissociation (Van der Hart, Nijenhuis & Steele, 2006), which, like the work of Janet upon which it is based, finds significant overlap with classical psychodynamic theory. Like the autonomous complexes described by Jung, “apparently normal” and “emotional parts” of the self exist in the preconscious, where they have been repressed due to the painful, unacceptable, or otherwise ego-dystonic nature of their contents and association with unpleasant experiences. When the psyche becomes overtaxed by stressors and is no longer able to contain and isolate these parts, these inchoate selves reemerge as they resonate with the “substitutive” ideas (Freud, 1926/1959) left as placeholders in consciousness, products of an associative compromise. When this occurs, the “normal,” cultivated ego-self is diluted as the ego defensively retreats and is forced to include these stunted, archaic, and otherwise maladaptive self parts.

The result of these defensive maneuvers is as disruptive as it is effective, as the inclusion in consciousness of unacceptable self-states and associated experiences which offend our narcissistic pride and moral sensibilities affect the subjective experience of the self: the dubious provenance of unconscious material, internal and yet unaligned with the self, causes a debasement of the ego-self, a sense of inauthenticity and alienation from one’s lived experience – depersonalization in the literal sense. It may also occur that these irruptions of the unconscious may be projected onto an other or into the environment to be experienced as if externally in an attempt to mediate the disruption to psychological functioning by locating them further from the

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self. However, in jettisoning the unwanted self-parts from the discrete sphere of the self and into the expansive purview of the Other, a sense of derealization ensues due to the uncanniness stemming from the unconscious recognition of products of the self out of place in the environment.

Both situations – depersonalization and derealization – share the quality of an erosion of entitative experience. Freud (1909/1996) and Jung (1931/1933, 1954/1985) both acknowledge the central role of such dislocations of the self in the etiology of neurosis, while Lacan (2009) describes this alienation as a fundamental sense of being out of place. In both situations a loosening of one’s associations to experience is evident. Whether this is viewed as a purposeful defensive attempt to protect the ego or a result of an exhaustion of mental tension from maintaining the repression necessary to exclude certain mental contents from consciousness, the central issue remains the same: unacceptable, unwanted, and otherwise devalued material breaches consciousness through a failure of repression, outstrips one’s capacity to keep it in stasis through the enactment of propitiatory compulsions, and requires a tactical retreat from the unequivocal reality of badness.

Trauma and Moral Provenance – Internal versus External

At the heart of our reaction to the reality of incompatible and uncomfortable truths about ourselves and our environments are the moral valuations which we attribute to them. The caching effect of emotion in the realm of memory serves to denote the salience of important events and experiences. However, when this process goes awry – that is, the intensity of the affect outstrips the capacity of the individual to successfully contain or moderate it and accommodate/synthesize the experience – such events are experienced as traumatic (Van der Hart, Nijenhuis & Steele, 2006). Due to the intense amount of displeasure (rooted in the

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narcissistic affront of helplessness) that follows upon such experiences, and under typical circumstances paired with prevailing moral narratives from one's culture and community, an individual appends to these experiences the distinction of "badness;" and, as the possessor of this "badness," reflexively attributes this quality as belonging to the self (Cooper, 2010; Shaver & Drown, 2013).

As we have seen, the existence of such material in the psyche provides an enduring problem for the ego-self, precipitating internal conflicts which facilitate pathological outcomes. Further complicating the matter is the nebulous provenance of this badness, the ambiguity of which makes it difficult to locate and rationally apprehend.

Freud's conceptualization of the Pcpt.-Cs. system and its relationship to the ego recognized the bidirectionality of libidinal flow, noting that it "receives excitations not only from outside but from within" (Freud, 1926/1959). It falls then to the ego, situated as it is at the center of conscious life, to identify and interpret this material regardless of its source. Under normal circumstances, the ego is generally able to parse stimuli in a way so as to discern whether they arise from internal or external origins. However, the usual heuristics utilized for this process are prone to subversion by material that has been distorted by its relationship to traumatic experiences and/or the contents of autonomous complexes – that is, that which has been repressed or forbidden to enter consciousness due to its "badness."

In excluding these morally incompatible contents from being experienced in relation to the self, three general situations arise which may be considered in terms of negative and positive symptoms of fragmentation.

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The most basic form of fragmentation is the exclusion of material which would otherwise be accessible to declarative memory. In this way gaps in narrative experience lead to an experience of lapses in the self, often the source of confusion and distress. Whether these gaps reflect an intensification of the repressive processes which result in the isolation of affect from lived experience as in the depressive or obsessive-compulsive position or a direct attack on the associative links that tie the autonomous complexes to consciousness presaging the psychotic position, the result is the same: something is experienced as lacking in the self, a piece of context vital to self-understanding and wholeness.

On the other hand, the presence of incompatible material, be it from the unconscious or through one's sensory experience of the external world, triggers a dissociative process as consciousness encounters something for which it cannot account for as it is not recognized by the ego. This state of tendentious non-relation provokes, when contained internally, an experience of depersonalization: as primordial images or introjects intrude upon consciousness, the subjective experience of their originating internally – the direction of the self - but nevertheless containing an air of the uncanny is responsible for a sense of self-alienation. In the case of primordial images, this is due to their collective, archetypal origins rather than their basis in the personal self (Jung, 1959/1990); in the case of the return of repressed introjects, which by necessity include an assimilation of the Other, one similarly encounters the problem of a confusing presence within the domain of the ego-self.

Yet another possibility is that, rather than remaining contained within the sphere of the ego-self, this incongruent material is projected over the self-other boundary, displacing it into the environment or attributing it to an other. When this occurs, it is the environment or one's interpersonal relations which take on the quality of the surreal, resulting in the experience of

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derealization: as the unconscious intrudes upon consciousness, the incompatible material is not only disavowed by the ego but transported elsewhere, farther from the self to which it naturally belongs and originates. The result is a strained relationship with reality in which one experiences oneself out of place in an alien environment, though the situation might be more accurately described as stemming from the confusion attendant upon the unconscious recognition of the self outside of the self.

In each of these three general situations, the disruption of cognitive functioning is related to an erosion of the self, itself the result of secondary defenses being employed against the irruption of the unconscious further distort the cohesion of the subject, which seeks desperately to avoid real or perceived association with badness. In the end, two symptom presentations tend to present themselves, individually or in concert: the projection of incongruent material onto objects, or the enactment of behavior under the sway of the autonomous complexes.

Possession and Projection

*“It is easier to see evil as entity
Not as condition inside you and me.”
-Gogol Bordello, Zina-Marina*

It is the conceit of the ego that it comprises the whole of the self. The result of this is that the ego in its aspect of ego-self will fail to recognize the parts of the self that exist in its blind spots – those which have been cast off through the normal course of development, trauma, and moral pruning. Under normal circumstances, this separation and compartmentalization of the self is adaptive insofar as it facilitates smooth functioning psychologically and interpersonally (Van der Hart, Nijenhuis & Steele, 2006); when strained by circumstantial stressors and the usual level of “mental tension” (Janet, 1889/2021) which maintains this separation is loosened, self-parts

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sequestered in the autonomous complexes are able to infiltrate consciousness, provoking a more draconian defensive situation more akin to psychological apartheid. When this situation, as seen in the obsessive-compulsive position, becomes insufficient to contain these irruptions, autonomous complexes emerge unrestrained and begin to influence and, in extreme circumstances, supplant the ego-self entirely.

This phenomenon, documented across cultures and throughout history, has been recognized in myriad contexts and ideological lenses, but may ultimately be condensed under the common heading of “possession.” As befits its ubiquity, this concept did not escape the notice of theorists from the earliest days of the psychoanalytic movement. Going beyond the compelling demonstrations they had witnessed under the tutelage of Charcot, both Freud (1925/1952) and Jung (1954/1985) theorized about the underlying psychogenic causes of such abrupt and pronounced shifts in personality and functioning.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, both Freud and Jung approached the phenomenon of possession in a similar way: through the unconscious. For both, the “daemonic” quality of intrusive material from the unconscious is attributed to the failure to recognize products of the self as one’s own, be they rooted in repressed desires (Freud, 1913/1950) or compensatory archetypal images (Jung, 1959/1990). The ascendancy of these unfamiliar, unwanted, and unbidden self-objects provoke conflict and disruption in the psyche as defenses are marshalled to mitigate their impact; but by the time one enters the fragmentary position, the reality of these discrepant parts can no longer be forestalled. The presence and immediacy of these irruptive contents then provokes a state in which the autonomous complexes are manifested behaviorally and characterologically, but neither experienced as nor attributed to the self.

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Possession, then, may be conceptualized as a spectrum of experiences and/or behaviors which are perceived by oneself and/or others as incongruent with an individual's established mode of being. These discrepancies may also be distinguished by a restriction of the attentional field, regressive or rigid characteristics, and/or a "numinous," uncanny quality (Jung, 1951/1978; Van der Hart, Nijenhuis & Steele, 2006). Regardless of the lens through which one views such shifts in personality, the most enduring and reflexive description of this phenomenon throughout history has been that it is as if one has been affected by a daemonic influence or supplanted by an alien entity, acting at the behest of an agency outside one's own.

To functionally and mechanically understand this phenomenon, we turn again to an intersection in the theories of Janet, Freud, and Jung. In his conceptualization of the psyche, Freud (1923/1960) identified the Pcpt.Cs. system as performing a gatekeeping function in relation to the purview of one's sensorium and motor function. Innervated bidirectionally as it is by inward- and outward-flowing streams of libido, its role as censor is complicated by the unceasing stream of stimuli which it must parse. This mechanism is not infallible, however, and is prone to disfunction when demand exceeds capacity – or, as Janet would describe it, the "force" of emotionally-laden stimuli exceeds the filtering capacities of an individual's "mental tension" (Bühler & Heim, 2001). In such an exhausted or overtaxed state, the ego is forced to perform psychological triage, orienting itself and its limited resources toward practical needs of survival rather than sustaining psychic equilibrium. In this way its focus is turned outwards, in the direction from which threats to (as well as guarantees of) safety traditionally originate, in the Other and the environment. So preoccupied and with its attention thus diverted, its back is turned to the inner world – a cruel irony considering that it is often precisely the anxiety generated by the maintenance and subsequent failure of repression which triggers this cascading failure of

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defenses in the first place – and the way is thus left unbarred to the influence of autonomous complexes.

In this way libidinal infusions from the unconscious which have in previous positions only been able to reach consciousness through their association with substitute ideas (Freud, 1926/1959) reenter it in earnest, bringing with them contents which, due to their morally unacceptable, ego-dystonic nature, had been sequestered in the unconscious by repression. Autonomous complexes now become able to disrupt functioning by intruding upon - or, in extreme cases, hijacking - the ego, having gained access to motor function through the Pcpt.Cs. It is this process that allows for the possession of – or at least a lien upon – the ego by the returning repressed. Possession may thus take the guise of a sense of being in possession of something one does not want and/or recognize, a lapse in memory or self-awareness, or, in the most extreme cases, the wholesale displacement of the ego-self by an autonomous complex. The reemergence of these unwanted or “bad” objects (Fairbairn, 1943) serve not only to underline the inescapability of facing the unpleasant parts of our selves and our experiences, but as a stark reminder that we not only possess our objects, but are possessed by them as well.

Semantically, the concept of “possession” is a notably potent metaphor due to its varied connotations. It is intrinsically bound with the concept of ownership and what is one’s own. In the fields of both psychology and philosophy, the “mere” effect of ownership upon the perception of value is as deeply ingrained in the human psyche as it is distortive (Beggan, 1992; Stirner, 1844/2014). Consistent with our narcissistic origins, what is recognized as one’s own forever benefits from its relationship to the self, drawing preferentially of the rich libidinal cathexes due such an association, magnifying its subjective value. This arrangement comes with

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a cost, however: when these objects are deemed to be “bad,” this relationship becomes a liability, undermining the whole of the self through its association (Freud, 1913/1950; Fairbairn, 1943).

In the context of infantile experience, the omnipotence-shattering reality of the shortcomings of the self and superiority of the Other present not only a dilemma, but an opportunity in the form of projection. By abdicating one’s responsibility as the source of the undesirable content, projection generally allows for greater individual functionality and experience of agency, insofar as the badness is still conscious and able to be directly confronted while not being seen as one’s own. This also signifies the reconsolidation of the psyche’s position as the ego again mounts an active defense against badness: rather than disavowing - or better yet integrating - the unacceptable material, imparts it upon the Other.

This defensive arrangement also has its drawbacks, however, as this distortion of objective reality signifies a sharp intensification of defenses and a breakdown in the ego as guarantor of the reality principle – a significant concession to the sway of the autonomous complexes and the unwanted, unfulfilled desires and slights against the ego-self that compose them.

Regardless of whether one finds oneself disavowing, becoming possessed by, or projecting the unwanted contents of one’s autonomous complexes, the defensive operations of the fragmentary position reflect an increasing sense of desperation to distance the ego-self from badness, and by so doing significantly undermining the cohesion of the self.

Defenses and Clinical Vignette

In the fragmentary position, defenses categorized by Vaillant (1992) as immature are generally most likely to be encountered. Denial, disavowal, and projection are particularly well-

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suited for this purpose as they allow incompatible attributions or self-states to be disregarded, discounted, or jettisoned into the environment, where they append to other, external objects that allow the individual to both recognize it as belonging to the Other, as well as to gratify one's own sadomasochistic desires by vilifying it therein. This may also manifest as reaction formation in which one retains consciousness of one's unwanted parts, albeit through an inversion and representation by opposite – a well-documented trick of the unconscious in its attempt to communicate with its counterpart (Freud, 1899/2005; Jung, 1954/1985) – thereby allowing the libido from the autonomous complexes to reach consciousness while retaining one's sense of moral integrity.

Underlying many of the positive manifestations of ego defense in the fragmentary position is the tendency toward splitting or black-and-white thinking, with more pronounced and well-entrenched forms of projection and reaction formation being sustained by the high contrast, high distortion, all-or-nothing assessment of responsibility for moral shortcomings – a concretization of the self/other distinction which serves to further distance the ego-self from “badness” by eroding one's capacity to appreciate the nuanced gradations attendant upon and required for higher level moral and ethical decision-making.

In a clinical setting, individuals in the fragmentary position may appear presenting with extreme and borderline types of avoidance, with lapses in attention or focus around certain emotionally-laden topics and their associations, or marked shifts in personality reflected in their mannerisms, conduct, and/or cognitive style. In the most extreme cases, alternate personalities consistent with diagnoses of dissociative identity disorder may occur. Another presentation associated with this position are its more externalized presentations, involving dubious projections of the incompatible material upon available but unrelated or tangentially related

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objects in the environment. In some cases one may find the individual engaging in projective identification – an elegant but dysfunctional reflection of the still-intertwined nature of the self and other as they share in the still ambiguous provenance of the projected “badness.”

In the case of A., several symptoms related to the fragmentary position became evident during the course of his illness. Beyond the affective disconnect present in the obsessive-compulsive position, A. would at times become disconnected experientially from himself and/or his environment, particularly when cued by the possibility of failure or an acknowledgment of personal shortcomings – situations the likes of which invite cathexis by libido from the autonomous complexes with which they resonate, associated as they are with A.’s fear of loss and his internalized sense of badness. When feeling overwhelmed by academic pressures, interpersonal conflict, or self-critical rumination, and without any recourse to sufficient compensatory compulsions, A. would report feelings of depersonalization or derealization - the effect of an effort to cope with and integrate stressful experiences which, impinging upon a libidinal situation already strained in its attempt to maintain the repression of incompatible material, instead created a compromise where the unacceptable is experienced through a buffer of surrealness. In this way the anxiety elicited by stressful situations became bolstered by cathexes from autonomous complexes, which could both then be defended against by dissociative processes: experienced, but without the onus of fully belonging to A. Negative symptoms would also be expressed around such moments, whereby these lapses would be difficult for A. to recall or relate in detail without considerable effort.

At other times, when the practical reality of his anger and resentment was unavoidable, A. would quiet his torment through focusing on the badness of others, expressing to those who wronged him in unhealthy friendships disproportionate anger as a means of releasing his

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“badness” in a form allowing him to find solace in a misguided sense of righteousness. In this way he was able to temporarily discharge the powerful resentment-laden cathexes emanating from the unconscious, albeit only by piggybacking on interpersonal conflicts whose needless escalation only served to put A. more in mind of his “badness” when cooler heads prevailed, confirming his suspicions about his own moral standing and triggering fears of relational loss.

A perennial and particularly complicated target for this resentment was his mother – a figure for whom he held a prodigious degree of ambivalence by virtue of the role he assumed in the wake of his father’s death. As the most conscientious of his siblings, A. fell into the role of caretaker of the home and confidant of his mother who, traumatized herself by the sudden loss of her husband, struggled to transition from stay-at-home mother to sole bread-winner. In this way A. would come to know the intimate workings of the household, finances, and the work stresses of his mother – burdens beyond his tender years. In this way the relationship most important to A. also became the most onerous, his most cherished source of comfort and connection also one of stress and frustration. Given the nature of the foundational premise of his pathology – that the loss of his father was due to A.’s own badness, a reflexive assumption based in infantile grandiosity – the negative emotions experienced towards his mother were subject to particularly harsh repression which, upon their inevitable return, resulted in their displacement upon others or regressive, childlike outbursts of frustration and undirected anger.

These lapses, projections, and dissociative episodes served as poignant signs of the deleterious effects of the ascendant autonomous complexes upon the cohesion of his personality and ego-self. No longer adequately or reliably able to be contained by the neurotic but functional defenses of the obsessive-compulsive position, unacceptable self-parts would reemerge and displace the ego-self. In session, A. would often relate the disorienting feeling that he was at

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once both older and younger than his years, the inevitable result of being stuck between two partial selves – one fixated in a childhood denied him by his father’s death, the other an aspirational aping of an adult he could not yet be. Further complicating the matter was the intrusion of aggressive impulses which, no longer held in check or compensated for by secondary defenses, found expression in piecemeal and disorganized ways, directed anywhere but the objects toward which they originated.

In this way we find that in the fragmentary position one’s understanding and experience of both the self and Other are in a state of disarray, a result of the situation in which the psyche finds itself: Overtaxed and at the nadir of its power, it is confronted by contradictory content of roughly equivalent cathectic value in the absence of its ability to contain, parse, and/or integrate such information. Given this state of affairs, we might consider the situation as one enters the fragmentary position as unique in that it signifies not a failure of defenses per se, but the absence thereof due to insufficient cognitive resources. In response, the ego confronts seemingly irreconcilable opposites as best it can, navigating the delicate question of value – *moral* value – by simply obviating the necessary precondition for all considerations of this type: that of agency. In a way the stage has been set from the beginning for a susceptibility to such a solution, as our moral sense rests upon the fundament provided by our earliest introjects, themselves the product of a peculiar and potent melding of self and other. As the mental tension which allows these dissimilar pieces to be experienced as a unified whole abates, so too their reflexive acceptance as such, instead undermining the core values upon which our ego-self is curated. Instead one experiences both individually, and thus becomes able to attribute the bad to the Other or what is alien in oneself while retaining the good as one’s own, a natural quality of the true self.

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It is inevitable that such blatant disregard for rationality will run up against the function of the ego in its role as one's interface with reality, provoking once more a crisis in which one must confront the discarded, immoral parts of the self, either integrating them or suffering further dissolution; and despite the comprehensive array of stratagems thus far discussed, there are times when not even the most well-crafted sophistry can disentangle one's connection from one's values – and thereby, oneself. When the experience of morally dissonant self-states or attributions becomes too intense even for these, one employs the most extreme measure of psychic defense available.

Part V: The Psychotic Position

As one's ultimate defense against the unacceptable, one's relationship with reality itself is sacrificed in a desperate attempt to create distance between the ego-self and discrepant self-parts contained in one's autonomous complexes. In this position, having outstripped all other attempts at mitigation or simply being too intense to palliate otherwise, the irruption of unacceptable attributions and self states becomes imminent. What begins in the fragmentary position as a division of objects once experienced as whole is now intensified, accelerating the failure of associations that began with the process of repression (Freud, 1923/1960), further loosening associative links with related psychic content (Jung, 1959/1990), and ultimately mounting direct "attacks" upon these links (Bion, 1959). No longer is it sufficient to distance oneself from and construct defenses around the overwhelming affect associated with being bad; one seeks to shatter these bonds entirely. Of course, such a feat is a matter of literal impossibility; as this can be achieved only functionally, an intense, characteristic loosening of associations is what is practically achieved, and this at the cost of a healthy connection to one's environment and peers.

The most extreme iteration of dissociative processes, the individual not only represses, disavows, or projects such badness, but endeavors to burn the liminal bridges which might in some way identify such content as originating in the self. In this way, a veritable minefield of layered abstractions and tendentious distortions occults the overvalued, qualitatively negative content, which, rather than being identified as a product of the self, is experienced as shadowy, malevolent, hypostatized force of nature with which the self is forced to contend – a recapitulation of the infantile situation of the narcissistic scar, whereby the demands of the Other are forced upon the id-self, shattering its fantasies of omnipotence.

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However, it is not sufficient that external circumstances be such to incite such a predicament – to paraphrase Newton, everything which reaches out is met halfway. Internal circumstances have their play, as the individual must navigate not only the large-scale object loss associated with withdrawal from external reality, but so too the quanta of the libido that had been invested in it (Freud, 1917/1959;1933/1965). Paradoxically, one is left isolated, alone to contend with the darker, selfish parts of the self which assert themselves in such delicate times in the form of dissonant reminders of one’s moral agency: memories of inevitable human failings, their consequences, and the disavowed emotional states that attend these.

Individuals in the psychotic position thus find themselves beset by intense symptom presentations which severely strain or shatter entirely this grip on reality: delusions, hallucinations, the presences of objectively inscrutable behaviors or an intense disruption or absence of normal ones - we encounter such individuals in their most dire moment of need. To most these would seem poor substitutes for objective reality, but this only speaks to the desperation and pain the patient experiences therein as they struggle to cope.

Psychodynamic Conceptualizations of Psychosis

The phenomenon of psychosis has long been a focus of philosophical and psychological inquiry by dint of its bizarre and often dramatic manifestations. It may be said that the legitimacy of psychology as an independent scientific discipline grew at least in part from its inquiries into such presentations (Bürky, 2008). As we have seen, Freud and Jung were both exposed to and impacted by the theatrical case presentations of Charcot while at Salpêtrière, leading both to theorize about such symptom presentations while in clinical practice.

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Due in part to this mutual experience, and along with the fruitful correspondence of their collaborative period (Freud & Jung, 1988), Freud (1911/1996) and Jung (1954/1985) shared largely similar conceptualizations of the origins and mechanisms of psychosis, disagreeing mainly on the doctrinal place and etiological role of sexuality.

Generally speaking, they theorized psychotic phenomena as stemming from wishes and desires rooted in the narcissism of infancy which, through the course of development and socialization, are set aside due to their practical and moral untenability. These complexes, fixated at the developmental level at which they were abandoned and repressed, come to impinge upon consciousness so forcefully it provokes a reckoning in the psyche so dire it requires a regressive renunciation of one's objects – and thus connection to the objective world - to adequately resolve.

To this end, psychosis is a “solution of the conflict” through a compromise formation unconstrained by reality (Freud, 1911/1996) – this conflict being the moral dilemma engendered by the emotional ambivalence toward amoral desires which are the inheritors of the oedipal legacy and the narcissistic id-self that precedes it. In this way, the introjects of one's caregivers come to exert their outsized influence on psychic life (Freud, 1923/1960; Jung, 1954/1991), provoking narcissistic resentment which is experienced by the ego-self as unacceptably “bad.”

In response, Freud (1894/1959) identified a particularly spirited and thorough application of the defense of repudiation – a wholesale removal from, or the *non arrivé* of ideational content to consciousness – related to the defensive process underlying obsessional neuroses. In this case, rather than isolating idea from affect, “the ego rejects the unbearable idea altogether with its associated affect and behaves as if the idea had never occurred to the person at all.” In this way

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“the ego has averted the unbearable idea by a flight into psychosis” before the “process through which this result is obtained again withdraws itself out of range of self perception.”

Jung (1954/1985) identified such secrecy as pathogenic in itself, redolent of the obfuscations by which children are shielded from concepts and experiences beyond their tender years by the circumlocutions of their well-meaning caregivers (Freud, 1918/1996; Jung, 1954/1991) – an association which is not lost upon opportunistic, libidinally hyper-catheted elements of autonomous complexes seeking a path to consciousness. When allowed by a relaxation of the censor (or a slackening of “mental tension”) in response to stress and/or trauma to make such inroads, the intensity with which they affect consciousness provokes a constellation of symptoms which, while following the general etiological developmental process outlined in classical analytical theory, differs in a crucial way: while the distortions of pathological compromise formations of neuroses attempt to conform to the reality principle, those of the psychotic are under no such apprehension.

An unfortunate byproduct of the brutally effective defense of psychotic repudiation is the void left by the exclusion of suitable ideational content to which to connect one’s overwhelming experience of badness. As a result, the psyche fills this gulf with images, ideas, and themes supplied by intruding autonomous complexes. However, unlike in the obsessive-compulsive position where these are able to append to “substitutive ideas” which allow a tangible albeit strained connection to reality, the psyche now finds no acceptable anchor points and instead begins to falsify or fabricate them entirely. The result is a state of intensely interwoven conviction and confusion as one seeks to navigate an environment the veracity of which one can no longer rely upon, the contrasts through which one typically orients oneself - reality and

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fantasy, truth and fiction, self and other – no longer under the rule of reason, but the irrational influence of the unconscious.

Coming Undone – Psychotic Defenses and Attacks on Linking

While repudiation begins in the fragmentary position, its intense and thorough utilization distinguishes it qualitatively from its counterpart in the psychotic position. Its scouring of consciousness for unacceptable content is so successful that one is left at a loss to apprehend not only what has transpired, but to explain the curious holes left behind. However, the fields of consciousness, loathe to lay fallow, are sown instead with the seeds contained in the irrupting autonomous complexes. As a result, the compromise formations underlying psychotic symptoms are formulated according to the strange logic of the unconscious. The result is the application of highly idiosyncratic organizing principles which, often inscrutable to the casual observer, possess much in common with the inchoate reasoning of childhood or the peculiar machinations of the dreamwork (Freud, 1899/2005; Jung, 1959/1990).

In addition to – or, perhaps, as a byproduct of - the process of psychotic repudiation, one also often evinces an attempt to maintain and extend these associative erasures through what Bion (1959) termed “attacks on linking.” In this way not only are self-parts and objects the subject of defensive operations, but the very relationships mediating them become targets for banishment or obviation in service of a more complete exclusion from consciousness. Unlike the fragmentary position, then, the psychotic position is not only a failure of integration, but an enforcement of this state of affairs through these attacks on linking and active participation in the dissociative process.

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Another of the many remarkable qualities associated with symptom presentations in this position is the juxtaposition of one's delusional conviction against an underlying nebulosity of one's psychotic ideation. This "characteristic vagueness and obscurity" (Freud, 1911/1996) of psychotic complaints may be understood as being indicative of the power of the defenses levied by delusional processes, but also a sign of the struggle between one's desire for wholeness and one's moral aversion to the undesirable parts of the self this necessarily includes (Freud, 1911/1996; Jung, 1951/1978, 1954/1985).

This paradoxical phenomenon may be explained by the simultaneous experience of the autochthonic certitude and immediacy which appends all reflexive products of the unconscious (Jung, 1959/1990) alongside the uncanny quality of the Other which adheres to the introjects reemerging into consciousness. In light of the slackened "mental tension" which under normal circumstances allows for a fused, wholistic experience of self-parts and a distinct boundary between self and other (Van der Hart, Nijenhuis & Steele, 2006), an individual in the psychotic position instead experiences these separately but simultaneously, a "decomposition" of the self into constituent parts (Freud, 1911/1996); and whereas in the fragmentary position these boundaries become semi-permeable, in the psychotic position this permeability becomes complete, allowing the possibility to split these disconnected self-states and shuttle them freely between self and other, thus inviting the opportunity for paranoid infringements upon the self such as thought insertion or possession by outside entities, or its opposite, psychotic projection.

In either case the underlying susceptibility to symptoms in the psychotic position lays with one's difficulty properly attributing the provenance of one's experiences: the admixture of self and other that began in the compromise engendered at the birth of the ego by the introjection of the Other now becomes a pathological agent in earnest, as the reemerging content of the

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autonomous complexes resonates with one's experience and forces a state of confusion whereby an individual is ill-equipped to disentangle what is one's own from what forced upon one – what is desired versus what is demanded. Freud (1911/1996) recognized that “it was incorrect of us to say that the perception which was suppressed internally was projected outwards; the truth is rather, as we now see, that what was abolished internally returns from without,” and by so doing returns us to the root of the issue – the reassertion of the infantile fantasy of omnipotence in the guise of probity.

Moral Conflict and Grandiosity

At the core of the psychotic experience we see a glimpse of the infantile omnipotence ceded to the reality principle when one first experiences the limits of one's agency and the overwhelming superiority of the Other. Its return from the unconscious, heralded by a progression through the syndrome of moral pathology so far described in the previous positions, now manifests in the form of grandiose delusions as the initial point of friction between self and Other is recapitulated in a form more befitting one's developmental capacity and experiential base.

The relaxation of mental tension and the fragmentation of the ego-self allows the fixated, regressed, infantile, and immoral self-states to reemerge. Circumstances have changed significantly from the time of the initial narcissistic scar and subsequent shaping of the ego-self through the coercive influence of the super-ego, however - internally, the situation of the discarded parts in the unconscious not only allow them to operate autonomously, but with an inherent ambiguity in relation to the ego-self; externally, one's experience of the Other and the moral rules inferred by and imparted upon the ego-self in this context have grown well beyond the constraints of the family romance. These expansions of the ways in which self and Other can

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be parsed and interact, when further considered in the context of being subjected to the irrational organizational processes of the irruptive unconscious, result in functionally limitless relational configurations.

As is its wont, the ego uses this to its benefit... at a price. While it takes advantage of the ambiguity afforded by these circumstances to strike a decisive blow against badness, it does so at the cost of the veracity of its relationship to the external world. This allows the contents to retain their psychic importance by replacing their original, unacceptable, experienced meaning with a psychotic one – one which goes beyond the distortive effects of neurotic defenses, intensified instead to the point of a break with reality - the subjective narrative of the symptoms making them meaningful, displacing the historically experienced narcissistic trauma that precipitated the series of psychic machinations which led to the creation of the autonomous complexes in actuality.

Hypercathected and inflated by an influx of libido from both sides - from the irrupting contents of the autonomous complexes within and object-libido withdrawn from the environment which has been disavowed from without - the ego-self becomes the subject of megalomaniacal delusions by which the individual is placed at the center of a psychodrama, aggrandized by its becoming the object and focus of the omnipotent Other (Freud, 1911/1996; Jung, 1954/1991). The potent libidinal admixture of self and other at the ego's disposal in this arrangement also allows the potential for psychotic identification with objects, with which the ego-self may become fused. In this way the tendency of delusions to follow sociocultural themes tied to mythological, religious, and historical tropes come to the fore (Freud, 1911/1996; Jung, 1959/1990) which populate and bolster the content of one's delusional narrative by their tendentious associations.

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In addition, in the confusion of self/other boundaries resulting from the uncontrolled mixture of narcissistic and object libido badness now becomes diffuse and ubiquitous, unable to be precisely or accurately located within the self or Other, resulting in a paranoid preoccupation with maintaining control of badness in this volatile state of stasis. In this way badness is controlled no longer through repression, but by diffusion between self and Other, the moral buck being passed endlessly between them. Unfortunately, the problem thus engendered remains undefined, and is consequently unsolvable in this form, condemning the individual in the psychotic position to a state of perpetual anxious vigilance against badness. All that is known is that the fate of badness is inextricably tied to that of the self – an aspect of psychosis which often plays out in the eschatological nature of one's delusions, in which the fate of one's loved objects, the world, or even the universe itself is inextricably tied to and contingent upon the moral quality and agency of the ego-self (Freud, 1911/1996; Jung, 1951/1978).

Herein lies the power of the psychotic position: it succeeds where all previous positions have failed. Whereas previous positions have represented a cascading series of failures – a failure of repression, a failure of containment, and a failure of integration - in the psychotic position, presented with an untenable reality that has bested one's abilities to defend against, one is given no choice but to confront the moral conflict underlying one's symptoms and force an outcome. In this way the severity of psychosis serves not only as a palliative to one's moral suffering by providing a grandiose meaning to justify it while obscuring and distracting from the reality of one's own shortcomings and moral imperfections; it also contains within the labyrinthine convolutions of its irrational formulation the path to a solution (Freud, 1911/1996; Jung, 1951/1978, 1954/1985). For underlying the symptoms of psychosis is the natural tendency of the self to strive for wholeness and the psyche's desire for equilibrium (Freud, 1920/1961;

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Jung, 1951/1978), and by orienting itself in the psychotic position, reframes one's moral conflict to create a dilemma in which one must either follow these inclinations towards health and functionality along the circuitous routes of psychosis, or resign oneself to possessing an ego which in whole or part is no longer tethered to reality.

In such an arrangement, at the center of the epic but strained narrative one has woven around one's moral struggle, the ego-self takes on one of two typical aspects: that of the persecuted, or that of the redeemer.

Persecution and Redemption

The moral salience of persecution and redemption is an integral part of belief systems worldwide (Moore Jr., 2000) and is often plainly evident in the symptom presentations of individuals in the psychotic position (Lingiardi & McWilliams, 2017). For Jung (1959/1990), this tendency is a reflection not only of prevailing forms of sociocultural storytelling, but of the archetypes canalized in the unconscious of every individual underlying these narratives, applied as idiosyncratic but ultimately thematically orthodox templates to suitable experiences in an effort to organize, make meaning of, and ultimately integrate them.

Freud (1911/1996) recognized these manifestations of psychosis as being rooted in compunctions related to the intrusive experience of repressed fantasies, describing the situation of the persecutory delusion as ultimately stemming from "quite a simple formula": the persecutor is the inverted representation of or substitute for an object for which one's love relationship has become spoiled. The target of this reversal – a friend, family member, lover, or even oneself – may be present in the environment or exist only in memory, a real object or the introjected

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representation thereof; but ultimately, by eliciting immoral desires in the subject, it becomes a boogeyman rather than a source of comfort, disruptive to the psychic equilibrium.

In addition to this inversion, the persecutor may be transformed or displaced through processes familiar to us from the dreamwork (Freud, 1899/2005, 1911/1996). By so doing, an individual succeeds in shifting their self-reproach for harboring badness to the reproach of the Other. It is not necessary that the individual be consciously aware of or accepting of their badness; what is pivotal is only that the real origin and true cause of self-reproach are obscured – it is sufficient that the blurring of boundaries is exploited to diffuse the provenance of and responsibility for badness. By attributing the origins of one's moral pain to concrete or hypostatized others in the form of persecutory delusions, one surrenders the bite of conscience for the cold comfort of the nobility of suffering at the hands of the Other.

This shift in one's locus of control is beneficial insofar as it lessens one's guilt by distancing the self from moral responsibility; but, by activating schema associated with the original intrusion of the Other into the autistic world of the infant, one is again faced with the reality of one's imperfection through the experience of helplessness. To accept this is to accept one's badness – and in some particularly masochistic persecutory arrangements this is done defensively as a means of protecting a loved other. Fairbairn (1952) described this process as being rooted in an attempt to retain a sense of stability and control over one's fate in the face of inevitable disappointment at the hands of one's caregivers. Depending upon the frequency and intensity of these lapses – and, in time, how they are resolved – the child internalizes the negative affect states related to these shortcomings and attributes their origin to the self rather than accept the reality of an uncertain and uncaring environment. By so doing one subsumes the badness of the Other, containing it within the self where one can experience the cold illusory

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comfort of control for the price of assuming responsibility – ownership – of the badness. One's experience of moral pain thus becomes a just punishment for faithlessness toward one's loved object (Fairbairn, 1943). If one is deserving of one's pain, one succeeds both in making meaning of and upholding one's sense of righteousness in the world, while continuing to obscure the unconscious motives for this psychic dissonance.

In a sense, the persecutory arrangement of the psychotic position *is* an accurate interpretation of reality: one *is* being persecuted, albeit not by a mysterious or maligning other, but by one's symptoms and their author, the self. From this abject position one remains on some level aware of the extent of one's role in the origin and maintenance of this state of affairs, resulting in a psychic landscape ravaged under an unending onslaught of moral conflict. Having set the stage for a reckoning through diminishing returns in the efficacy of defensive operations relative to the energy required to sustain them as one progresses through the positions, the need for a resolution becomes ever more pressing. Ironically, the solution to the moral struggle which has shattered the cohesion of one's ego-self and thereby one's attachment to one's environment is contained within the autonomous complexes the reemergence of which precipitated the conflict in the first place - the tension generated by the intensifying moral conflict which originally outstripped the capacity of the psyche to integrate, now supplies the very tension it had exploited a lack of.

In response, an individual may experience their symptoms in the characteristic arrangement of a redemptive – or, in religious terms, messianic – delusion. Here it occurs to one that there is a solution to one's conflict and, buoyed by the grandiosity again accessible through the psychotic position, the depleted ego-self is reinflated through an identification with the archetypal image of the hero or god (Freud, 1911/1996, 1921/1959; Jung, 1951/1978,

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1959/1990). The identification with the redeemer figure allows for a morally acceptable leveraging of selfishness as the narcissistic libido has been laundered through the crucible of altruism or divine revelation (i.e., the sanction of the Other). One's own moral struggles are cast into an epic and often apocalyptic narrative that models and projects externally the scale and stakes of the drama unfolding within, but often misrepresents this struggle as one in which the adversary is an evil to be destroyed rather than its true purpose – a reconciliation of the cast-off parts of the self with the ego-self in hopes of creating a more holistic self conducive to reestablishing psychic equilibrium (Jung, 1951/1978).

Freud (1911/1996) also recognized in the “redeemer delusion” an extension of the compulsion to protect found in obsessional neurosis. Particularly salient to individuals whose symptoms are related to an experience of unacceptable feelings of aggression or disdain for a once loved object, the redemptive arrangement has an additional benefit in that one does not have to accept one's own badness, but can instead be the savior of the beloved other. However, by so doing, one instead opts for a more distortive and ultimately more difficult pathological knot to untangle.

Whether persecutory or redemptive in nature, both arrangements of the psychotic position are an attempt to reconnect to a world from which one has withdrawn, with one's fantasies – which, in the psychotic position, are hypostatized in the form of delusions - being an attempt to make meaning of the discontinuities in one's self (Freud, 1911/1996; Jung, 1954/1991). Precipitated by and attended by moral conflict, the ultimate reemergence of the repressed parts of the self and related experiences held within one's autonomous complexes will at this stage no longer be suppressed, instead forcing the issue to a point at which one must

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confront what one is and is not, else suffer the consequences of disunity – a shattered relationship to reality.

Defenses and Vignette

Consistent with Vaillant's (1986, 1992) pathological level of defenses, this position includes the psychotic versions of tried-and-true defenses utilized in its predecessors: projection, denial, and disavowal prominent among them. The intensification of these defenses, which sets them apart from their neurotic counterparts, results in symptom presentations almost invariably causing gross disruptions in socioemotional functioning, as the manner in which one relates to oneself as well as others is compromised by significant shortcomings in reality testing. The intolerable is replaced in form but not in content, resulting in a paradoxical embodiment of one's conflict: rather than accept what is morally unacceptable, one must live with what is functionally unlivable – a life removed from authentic interactions with oneself and/or one's environment, robbed of accurate internal or external context by attacks on linking. Mounting such a defense inevitably results in a pyrrhic victory: the ego-self retains a sense of righteousness by being mutilated beyond recognition, losing its connection both to one's true self and one's environment in the process.

The psychotic versions of repudiation and projection are the most prevalent forms of defense in the psychotic position of my current conceptualization, levied to redefine the very rules by which the self, Other, and the relationship between them is understood and experienced. However, these defenses and the expression of symptoms proceeding from them signals not only the desperation of the individual to distance the ego-self from intruding reminders of one's badness and insufficiency, but a desire to force the issue to a resolution by creating an untenable state of affairs – an autistic withdrawal which, while inducing one to turn one's attention toward

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the self, does so at the expense of one's ability to function practically in the external world. In this way, despite their debilitating effects, among the symptoms of psychosis one can find signposts to a cure, as the peculiar idiosyncrasies expressed in them offer subtle insights into the context that has been stripped from the unacceptable content of one's autonomous complexes.

In the case of A., both the persecutory and redemptive arrangement of the psychotic position became evident through the course of his illness. As he navigated his struggle to contend with the loss of his father - for which he reflexively assumed responsibility in line with the grandiose suppositions of childhood fantasies of omnipotence - the badness which would inevitably follow his relational breaks with unhealthy friendships would become so overwhelming he would project his self-reproach upon others as agents of vengeance rather than face himself as its originator. To this end he would imagine the sound of sirens signaled that the father of one of these friends, an emergency services worker, was coming to kill him, or that a branch moving outside of his window was in fact another friend come to harm him, triggering anxious meltdowns which would take hours to quell. In this way he was able to explain his experience of badness as being due to his mistreatment of his peers, their imagined retaliation a just punishment for his turpitude, rather than facing the feared reality this substitution was fabricated to obscure: that his faithlessness towards his father had caused his death, and his resentment towards his mother put her at risk of a similar fate.

While these persecutors became an excruciating but convenient dodge for his inner turmoil, both apt targets for his anger as well as plausible sources on which to displace his self-reproach, this state of affairs was ultimately untenable for A. who, at his core motivated by a desire to build and maintain stable relationships, found himself repeating a maladaptive pattern of interpersonal boom-and-bust by choosing unhealthy relationships. Out of this persecutory

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arrangement thus came a redemptive solution – a solution which, while no less a manifestation of psychosis, constituted an important step toward insight, reintegration, and ultimately, health.

In the moral psychodrama of the psychotic position, auditory hallucinations – particularly of voices – often play an important role. As anthropomorphized expressions of the content of the autonomous complexes or the echoes of one's formative objects from their place in the super-ego, one's experience of these voices carries heavy sway in the functioning of the psyche and the construction of one's personal narrative.

However, like all irruptive products of the unconscious, these voices are laden with peril in their dual-aspect. Typically appearing in consciousness in an ominous, intrusive sense in the persecutory arrangement and an oracular, inspirational guise in the redemptive, these also may contain an important warning or insight which, due to its distortion and characteristic vagueness, is often prone to misinterpretation. Nevertheless, these voices and the messages they contain, however distorted, ultimately point the way to health.

For A., these voices emerged first as characters he created for a roleplaying game. In therapy, he would speak about and explore themes of loss, self-exploration, resilience, and growth through a series of for whom he would create elaborate and often interconnected backstories. Over time he lost interest in the game, but would still speak about his characters and depict them in his art. Eventually he began to speak of them as if they were real, existing independently with lives of their own inside his head – first two, then three, and ultimately seven, each with their own unique personality and role. While most of these voices were strictly and consistently benign and benevolent, offering words of comfort, helpful advice, and reminders throughout his day and during times of stress, two would occasionally express darker or more problematic opinions, suggesting disruptive or even violent behavior.

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Throughout his experience of these voices, A. was clear and unequivocal that while they “were as real as” he was, they “shared the space in [his] head” and only offered perspective and insights, never commands; and while occasionally he felt they would desire to control him directly, he always remained “in the driver’s seat.” In time he came to recognize his relationship to the voices as well as their relationship among themselves mirrored a family unit, reflecting that he had created for himself the family unit he felt had been taken from him. In this way A. shielded not only parts of himself but the introjects of his beloved objects, providing for himself the care and comfort he felt he was lacking in their practical absence.

Overall, A.’s voices offered a reliable and stable source of comfort and relatedness, protecting parts of himself he feared experiencing directly or in concert with one another. In such an arrangement, these fractured parts of his ego-self were able to cooperate and learn to coexist without A. feeling overwhelmed by affect and the enormity of being, allowing him to avoid dissociating as a means of escaping this fate. In time, even those parts of himself which offered darker insights were understood in the context of childish and mischievous parts of himself striving for recognition through cathartic but hyperbolic expressions of anger. By welcoming these voices as guests within his psychic space, A. was able to experience these parts of himself and come to understand them in isolation before working to reintegrate them, ultimately redeeming both himself and his relationship to his lost or ambivalent objects.

In this way one learns from the psychotic complaint its origins in the deformation of the self. However, the extremity of the symptom is itself a function of its ripeness for resolution, a signpost to sanity. Freud (1911/1996) cautioned therapists “not to confuse the world of the unconscious with the world of reality” - sound advice in both everyday life as well as clinical practice. In working with psychosis it is nevertheless more imperative than ever to follow the

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dictum that we meet a patient where they are; and this requires in the psychotic position that we accept what is presented to us as clinicians at face value, on an “as if” basis as what Jung (1954/1985, 1954/1991) referred to as a “psychic truth.” From the psychotic premise follows the peculiar logic of the unconscious, no less potent for its irrationality; and by following the psychotic syllogism despite its convolutions and distortions, we are able to arrive at the core of the conflict, the horned dilemma itself: a struggle to reify a moral identity between the demands of the self and the desires of the Other.

Part VI: Discussion

*“We are bound by desire
Can you govern your soul?”
KMFDM, “Vogue”*

The realization of a self that can adequately navigate the demands of practical existence while allowing the id a maximal degree of freedom is not only a necessary condition of sentience, it is the fundamental starting point of consciousness, reflexively underlying all experience as the subject to which it appends. It is a *causa sui*, an awareness of which is awakened by necessity in the wake of one’s encounter with the Other, a counterpoint to and distinction therefrom.

As one comes to appreciate the causal interactions between self and Other and the practical repercussions which attend upon certain desires, one learns to moderate one’s internal experiences and behavior to conform to expectations and avoid first the disapproval of one’s caregivers, and later the internal bite of conscience. This compartmentalization of the self is a normative process, with layered levels of functionality split between conscious and unconscious as one strives to strike an optimal balance between selfish and pro-social attitudes. In this way an ego-self is cultivated at the expense of authenticity. What motivates this renunciation is a deep-seated aversion to “badness” – the remonstrance of the Other internalized as moral values.

The “horned problem,” a concept borrowed by Jung (1954/1985) from Nietzsche (1872/2003), is given as an apt description of man’s perilous undertaking to understand himself, both as an individual and through the gaze of the Other. For in so doing one must surrender one’s

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infantile pretension to omnipotence as well as embrace – or, at the very least, acknowledge – uncomfortable truths about the self and the nature of being.

The horned dilemma thus refers to the problem of being; of the ego-self's attempts to navigate between the desires of the self and the demands of the Other, negotiating a course according to the moral dictates which serve as a protocol for the interface between them. Our desires are the wind in our sails, the demands the sails themselves. In this way the practicalities of living harness our desire towards our goals with the ego-self at the helm - the constrictions defining our experience becoming guiding forces in the chaos and uncertainty of being. The great paradox of this arrangement however, as Nietzsche (1878/1996; 1901/1968) eloquently elocutes, is that while such fetters allow for the "illusion of ease" when experienced as self-imposed, they serve as "brake-shoes" upon personal (and societal) development when experienced as being imposed upon the self. In either case, the self is subjected to a set of rules that openly defy and manifestly disconfirm one's fantasies of omnipotence, requiring a significant and sustained application of mental effort to create and maintain a curated ego-self at the expense of a wholistic but morally dubious true self.

As we have seen, a breakdown in the construct of the self is accompanied by an erosion of consciousness. As discrepancies arise in the ego-self, laid bare by internal pressures and/or external stressors, the state of mental tension which sustains repression and maintains the cohesion of the subject becomes overtaxed, leading to a slackening and eventually exhaustion of the psychic apparatus. The libidinal cathexes binding the complexes forming the ego-self fray and gradually loosen, resulting first in a sense of detachment from objects, and ultimately from oneself.

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At the center of this process is our relationship with the concept of badness. Rooted in the biological aversion to displeasure and cemented by the messages imparted by and inferred from the Other, our earliest experiences are dominated by our reliance upon our caregivers and discerning the rules by which to comport ourselves to win their attention and good favor. We learn from this the stark lesson that it is not for us to be true and whole selves – something must be given up, parts surrendered, compromises made, if we are to survive.

In this way we calibrate our moral compasses, our caregivers giving way to internalized representations of themselves. To these the panoply of the childhood fantasies append in all their splendor and horror, usurping the Other whose influence we are no longer physically dependent upon, but whose superiority we are forced to acknowledge, whose sanction we nonetheless seek.

The residue of helplessness, persevering in the form of the conscience, takes up the mantle of moral executive and holds itself to the standard of the ego-ideal. In this way the ego-self becomes the agent of the Other, defining the limits of the self and desire as the Other defines the boundaries of behavior. Inextricably bound together, the castrated self thus benefits from its association and identification with the superior Other, cold comfort to be found in experiencing one's own place in the mythological psychodrama of being.

Nevertheless, the blurring of self and other occurring naturally in the course of human development not only bolsters one's ability to survive, but to attain pleasure in the course of the practical obstacles of mortality through the creation of the ego-self. Unfortunately, this also becomes a liability as this ego-self becomes farther distorted from the true self in a quixotic attempt to attain the unattainable ego-ideal. In time, it becomes difficult to properly ascertain the provenance of a given moral directive, and whether one is conforming to a coercive societal directive internalized from the Other, or a selfish, hedonistic drive rooted in the boundless

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narcissism of the id-self. It is in this confusion and the dissonance it causes within the psyche where we enter the realm of morality as a pathological agent, the progenitor of a broad range of symptoms ranging from depression, to anxiety, and ultimately to a state of exhaustion and gradual dissolution of cognitive cohesion resulting in dissociation and, in extreme cases, psychosis. It is the role of the ego to avoid this state of affairs by offering a third option, an elegant admixture of self and other whereby one may have one's cake and be able to eat it too – to gratify the self while performing obeisance to the Other in oneself, and thereby succeed in navigating the horned dilemma.

Theoretical Overview

In *Notes Upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis*, Freud (1909/1996) recounts the following conversation with his patient who suffered under intense self-recriminations:

“He had said to himself, he went on, that a self-reproach could only arise from a breach of a person's own inner moral principles and not from that of any external ones. – I agreed, and said that the man who merely breaks an external law often regards himself as a hero. – Such an occurrence, he continued, was thus only possible where a *disintegration of the personality* was already present.”

In this Freud and Jung are in agreement: influenced by their experiences at Salpêtrière, both came to appreciate the dissociative phenomena underlying mental illness. In understanding these, before their notorious split, both utilized the topographical model of the mind to contextualize the behavior of complexes - discrete constellations of internal states, experiences, and their associations – as a means of explaining the deterioration of one's sense and cohesion of self and the symptoms that accompany it.

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If we contextualize this disorganization as a defensive attempt to remove ego-dystonic complexes from consciousness and subsequently to avoid the intrusion of the repressed contents contained therein, we enter into the sphere of morality - what is valuable, meaningful, and worthwhile to us. As we have seen, these attributions are the product of a dynamic interaction between the subject, its environment, and the other putative subjects which inhabit it.

The interplay between selfish and prosocial motives thus comes to the fore, the latter bolstered against the former by their association with the overwhelming external world and the all-powerful others encountered in childhood. However, no matter how well-ingrained or internalized, they forever retain an alien quality which betrays their external origins. It is ultimately this discrepancy which creates such problems for the subject when conflicts arise.

As highlighted by Freud's patient mentioned above, whether one experiences a moral directive as stemming from an internal or an external source is crucial to how the ego receives it; whether it bears the onus as a product of personal principle or bristles with "masculine protest" (Adler, 1925/2011) is dependent upon its directionality: what is one's own (i.e., successfully introjected and assimilated into the ego-self or ego-ideal) versus what is experienced as being imposed by the Other. This distinction is not always cut and dry, however, as the very processes which underly the premises upon which morality is structured require a blurring of distinctions between self and other, between what originates with the self and what has become a part of the self.

It is in the latter case, the prosocial and traditionally moral impulses and values which, while not innately inborn, become reflexive by necessity in the normal course of development, that a dilemma arises as they come into conflict with the native drives of the self – impulses based upon narcissistic desires. In this way one is presented not with a struggle that is

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experienced as the self versus the Other, but of the self versus the self – an internecine struggle between selfishness and one’s own values. It is this situation that provokes the bite of conscious and ultimately the pathogenic effects described in the typology presented here.

At this point it must be reiterated that while each of the positions in this theoretical model share a name with a particular classification of mental illness, they are not intended to describe or explain the etiology of all manifestations expressed in clinical presentations of their eponymous disorders, but rather to describe a potential functional course by which a psychopathological syndrome may develop from the dissociative pressure of experiencing one’s own moral inadequacy.

Conceptualizing this process psychodynamically, the progression of this syndrome may be described by attending to what is happening to the immoral and unwanted material as one progresses through the positions: some content of the psyche – “complexes” of thoughts, feelings, experiences, and their associations – is identified as being unacceptable by the ego, violating the prescriptions of the super-ego and failing to adequately approximate the ego-ideal. In an effort to protect the ego from the ignominy of badness, such complexes are removed from their association with (and inclusion in) the ego-self through the mechanism of repression. While in many cases this amounts to a routine streamlining of consciousness whereby ego-dystonic experiences and parts of the self are devalued and tendentiously forgotten, this policy of salutary neglect opens the door to dissociative processes through the disruption of the continuity of the self.

In the depressive position, the violence done to the self-structure in service of the ego begins to have a pathogenic effect. This begins as a vague awareness that something is amiss or out of place, whether phenomenologically located in oneself or one’s circumstances, is a signal

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that a repressed complex is conspicuous by its absence. Regardless of whether an individual attributes these shortcomings to internal or external factors, melancholic diffidence or dysthymic helplessness, the root cause of this reproach remains the same: a sense of incompleteness, things being other than they should, a pervasive sense of wrongness – each an artifact of the incompleteness of the self.

The psyche, forever seeking an elusive state of equilibrium, seeks to redress this state of affairs, and, by so seeking, eventually finds its answer – an answer that takes the form of the return of the repressed. The conflict which was forestalled through the initial act of repression demands its day in court, the unacceptable content impinging upon consciousness as it is reasserts its claim upon reality. At this point, the obsessive-compulsive position is reached, a holding action against the eroding efficacy of repression. One now shifts to a strategy of containment, allowing a compromise whereby one experiences the anxiety related to badness while the actual precipitant remains obscured from consciousness.

This state of affairs comes at a heavy cost, requiring a constant state of vigilance whereby the apparatus of consciousness expends a tremendous amount of energy. Unless an ideal balance of obsessive-compulsive symptoms can be reached in which a ritualized life, functional if difficult, can be arranged, or one is again able to *re*-repress and thus re-contain the unacceptable content, exhaustion of the psyche is inevitable. As this exhaustion builds, the mental tension necessary for consciousness begins to slacken, loosening the associative connections which constitute a smooth and contiguous sensorium. In this state, the fragmentary position is entered, a slackening of mental cohesion which is precipitated indirectly by the defensive operations of the ego, a byproduct of the sustained attempt to repress or contain unacceptable psychic contents.

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In time, however, this situation begins to be exploited for defensive purposes, allowing one to repudiate ownership of badness while allowing it to remain in consciousness – or, more accurately, because one is no longer able to exclude it therefrom.

In this way the discrepancies and faults in the self which initially precipitated this process of dissolution become magnified, spreading to contents in other complexes and parts of the self which have hitherto remained stable in the ego-self. There is no denying the effectiveness of this strategy of creating distance between badness and the self while still keeping it in view of consciousness – in fact, it is precisely this ruthless efficiency which creates a situation by which to further exploit the exhausted state of the psyche for defensive purposes. No longer content to leave this to a chance byproduct of mental fatigue, energy is actively invested in unravelling and dissolving the links of associative chains not only upon complexes proximal to unacceptable content, but farther afield to the fundamental cognitive schema that populate the Pcpt.-Cs. system and constitute the subject itself.

What begins as disunity from exhaustion is gradually exacerbated by active attacks on linking as the ego's defenses, having reawakened, intensify, shifting from the fragmentary position to the psychotic. The ego secures its position against badness, but in so doing grossly undermines – and in some cases surrenders entirely - its role as guarantor of the reality principle. Unacceptable content is now free to be manipulated outside the confines of reason, beholden only to the idiosyncrasies and archetypal themes of the unconscious.

This progression, while presented here sequentially, is not necessarily one which happens gradually or with subtle shifts between positions: it is possible for one position to constitute the entirety of an individual case, as well as for a given individual to shift between positions through the course of illness – even back and forth between them. What is theorized as determining

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which position one finds an individual in is dependent entirely upon the confluence of factors described in the diathesis-stress model: the intensity of the stress one experiences between environmental stressors and one's internalized badness, and the capabilities of the individual to diffuse the negative affect stemming from these associations. In clinical practice, therefore, it is important to consider an individual's symptom presentation in the context of the assumptions underlying each position as presented in this typology.

Clinical Implications

While moral demands are generally evenly distributed – that is, similar basic moral proscriptions and social mores are expected to be observed by most people most of the time – the subjective difficulty of and ability to meet these demands is not.

At the confluence of dispositional considerations and the effects of socialization, the degree to which one experiences moral conflict is dependent upon a number of factors. Many of these, such as opportunities for moral instruction, are beyond our constructive control as individuals at precisely the time when we are most well-suited to learning such lessons, as in the critical or sensitive periods of childhood. It is through our interactions with significant others and our environment, and how one comes to understand and navigate the outcomes of these situations, that one learns to temper one's desires and inclinations first with the real or inferred threat of displeasure through practical loss or punishment, and later with a mentalized perspective of the other as a subject.

However, as the opportunities for moral learning are not equally accessible, the relative strengths of amoral desires are unequal, our abilities to inhibit or sublimate these drives, and the cognitive and structural capacity to connect experiences and create a theory of mind vary. The

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degree to which moral expectations and directives are experienced or even considered has ample opportunity to go awry. For some, this socioemotional balancing act comes more easily and indeed may produce a salubrious compromise between gratification and pro-social connectivity. For others, such considerations may not prove convincing or worthwhile, resulting in a disinterest in morality as an individual is constitutionally or experientially unmotivated by moral expectations. Still others – most of us, perhaps - struggle to form a balance between these two positions, and thereby find themselves between the horns of a dilemma.

This is the catch-22 of morality: if one conforms to moral dictates, it is done at the expense of the freedom of the self; if one conforms to one's own desires, it is at the expense of one's relationship to the Other, the perennial frenemy towards whom our ambivalence compels us to both desire and resent. Regardless of which master the individual chooses to serve, it results in a sense of alienation, either from the self or from the Other.

In the depressive position, it is theorized that this sense of alienation is at the root of the depressive experience, a sense of disconnection that is left ineluctable due to its repressed state. Like the autonomous complexes which harbor the particulars of one's badness, the individual in the depressive position becomes isolated, experiencing this sense of emptiness as a diminution of the self. Like Freud's (1917/1959) comparison and contrast of mourning and melancholia, we might think of this sense of loss as mournful in the sense of damage done to one's relationship with the Other, and melancholic in the sense that one has lost a part of one's ego-self.

As the first and most subtly presenting position of my proposed model, the mechanisms underlying the depressive experience set the stage for the downstream repercussions seen in subsequent positions arising from the intensification of these dissociative processes. Although these positions present differently symptomatically, their common etiological mechanisms

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support the rationale that the practitioner make a concerted effort to keep in mind three guiding therapeutic principles - acceptance, equanimity, and reintegration.

To these ends one must endeavor to separate the wheat from the chaff among one's values: what is one's own versus what has been imparted upon one; what one is versus what one desires to be; what one is willing to surrender of the self out of its desire for, rather than one's deference to, the Other. It is this last point, one which suggests a willful renunciation rather than a coercive imposition as the basis for change and moral development, that the therapeutic process under this model focuses: one must give willingly with knowledge of what one is giving, rather than being motivated by aversion into embracing the tendentious ignorance of repression.

It is a particularly cruel condition of human development that we are constitutionally incapable of knowing or willing when first we encounter such conflicts, and thus our first experiences leave us only the path of repression and not-knowing, experiencing the practical demands of reality as an imposition without reason or purpose. In time, however, we become capable of making informed decisions and undertaking willful action, of understanding ourselves and our motives beyond the context of the reflexive infantile aversion to displeasure. It is the therapeutic task to offer an alternative, a willful engagement with one's moral failings rather than a summary dismissal thereof, a process of discovery and reclamation of what has been cast aside and a letting go of what has been taken upon oneself.

As the sense of disconnectedness associated with one's badness for possessing what are inevitable and universally experienced desires and drives stems from the repression which strives to keep them from consciousness, finding words and a meaningful narrative to reconnect to and experience ownership of one's repressed or devalued parts is the overarching goal towards which therapy is directed; for by providing context for the parts upon which aspersions are cast and

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adding dimensionality to the self which, once one gets past the initial shock of confronting one's mortal frailties, a more robust and grounded ego.

The knowledge that one is not alone in this experience, that the imperfections and morally questionable parts of the self are not a scarlet letter one must bear in shame and isolation, but a universal constant of the human condition, serves not only to lessen this burden but to encourage and reinvigorate one's sense of connection to and participation in the external and intersubjective world. By targeting these negative moral attributions about the self – which, while more or less prominent in a given position are always suspected of being present to some extent – one undercuts the feeling of isolation that impels the individual to bear their insecurities and shortcomings alone.

Related to these feelings of alienation are often subtle or overt tendencies toward perfectionism, the result of the ego-self's fetishization of the ego-ideal, an unattainable abstraction of the self created by inferred or explicitly imparted expectations from the Other immortalized in the super-ego. These proclamations carry all the authority of a god toward its supplicant – or, more accurately, the caregiver toward the infant, upon which the religious tendency is later modeled – and coercively steer the individual with admonitions of “should” and “ought.” In the therapeutic context, such rigid thoughts should be attended to, examined, and ultimately challenged as one seeks to loosen the paralytic grasp of one's introjects and temper them with self-derived values which, while they may ultimately be congruent with the influence of one's introjects, will be more meaningful for their having arisen as spontaneous products of the superordinate self rather than an imposition of the Other's desire.

The interplay between self and Other which has the potential to wreak havoc on the psyche as one progresses through the positions can also be exploited for therapeutic benefit. An

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excellent example of this, as well as of the maddening enantiodromia of the mind, the obsessive-compulsive position often benefits from the very process which threatens its cohesion.

Employing an accelerated but controlled disintegration of the self, transforming the parts of oneself sustaining obsessive-compulsive thoughts and behaviors into a reified, persecutory “other,” an individual may then leverage the naturally antagonistic tendency towards the imposition of the Other’s will to combat one’s symptoms through exposure and refutation before returning to the overarching principle of reintegration, a détente and recapitulation of the self with one’s autonomous complexes.

Similarly, the technique of cognitive defusion – separating one’s self from one’s thoughts and one’s thoughts from one’s feelings – requires varying degrees of disintegration in order to affect a cure. While in a pathological state the hypercathected products of one’s inner world are taken reflexively to be true, encountering little resistance and identified as being one’s “own” due to their overwhelming affect and cognitive insistence, the stabilizing and supportive influence of the therapist can aid in cultivating conscious distinctions between these contents and the ego-self. In the depressive and obsessive-compulsive positions, these interventions may take a more straightforward guise according to the patient’s degree of ego strength, utilizing Socratic questioning and highlighting the internal discrepancies which inevitably arise in one’s anamnesis. As one enters the fragmentary or psychotic position, however, one’s ego strength as well as one’s ability to consciously apprehend these inconsistencies can no longer be counted upon or even assumed. Thus, the delicacy with which these inquiries are made must be adjusted utilizing one’s best clinical judgment. In such cases it is often sufficient simply to listen, to learn the lexicon of patient’s malady, its idioms, euphemisms, circumlocutions, omissions, and half-truths before delivering one’s message in its own peculiar tongue.

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In creating these discrepancies in a supportive environment, not only is the ego bolstered and encouraged to mend and develop through the support of the therapist, but a state of mental tension is able to be reestablished in which an individual can bear to mentalize the conflict which must be faced to be resolved. Once the autonomous complexes can begin to be approached and their disagreeable content accessed, it becomes a matter of processing the raw emotionality contained therein - the feared badness, one's greatest adversary, is at last laid bare. In this endeavor it is no longer a matter of veracity but of verisimilitude, the creation of a narrative through which the patient may, through their own participation, regain agency and reestablish a meaningful connection to themselves and the Other. It is the pairing of this narrative along with the phenomenological experience of working through that ultimately leads to acceptance and reintegration which constitutes the therapy itself.

In the case of A., the creation of this narrative was a crucial piece of his growth in therapy. Although slow and indirect, this process nevertheless culminated in his ability to release the expectations he placed upon himself through the influence of his super-ego and accept the uncomfortable emotions his experience with loss had justifiably provoked within him. Rediscovering through his roleplaying characters the parts of himself he had repudiated, A. was able to circumvent the repression of negative affect and expand upon his emotional repertoire. By first exploring these suppressed complexes on an "as if" basis through the introduction of the material into the therapeutic discourse, A. was eventually able to recognize these as a part of his inner world, albeit by defensively attributing them to his othered "goblin brain." Thusly still cordoned off from the explicit sphere of the self, these inchoate self-parts became hypostatized as voices as they continued to impinge with ever-increasing urgency upon consciousness, granted provisional personhood as A. continued to struggle with the task of integration. In time,

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his sense of confusion and fear at these voices was replaced by a sense of familiarity and, eventually, intimacy. In this way A. was able to recognize first the presence, then the pertinence, and finally the provenance of these “voices” as authentic products of the self. This journey of self-realization, facilitated by the therapeutic process, ultimately led A. to accept the parts of himself he had cast off in a desperate attempt to develop a sense of stability and safety in an uncertain and amoral world.

Future Directions

The theory as presented above is an attempt to introduce a model of psychopathology based upon the potentially self-destructive effects of morality. It is by no means exhaustive in its examination of the phenomena at issue and makes no pretense to explain pathological presentations outside its scope, nor does it answer here all the questions it raises. To expand upon this, refine, and enrich the theory, several lines of inquiry present themselves.

The four positions delineated in the model are by no means internally homogenous. Each position can be seen to occur along a gradient which itself mirrors the overall degradation of the psyche under the strain of moral pressure. While these four positions appear to strike a serviceable balance between specificity and practicality, a certain degree of license is required that results in artificial distinctions in the interest of comprehensibility. One future direction would therefore be greater clarity on the transitional areas between positions, where they bleed into one another, as well as the identification of further theoretically useful distinctions within each position.

Particularly ripe for further explication are the fragmentary position and mental exhaustion, as well as the distinction between repression and repudiation as the primary

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defensive strategies depending on whether or not mental tension has been depleted. Although the fragmentary position in which symptomatology conventionally recognized as dissociative comes to the forefront of the clinical presentation, it is theorized that this is the result of a process of instability in the self which begins in the depressive and builds throughout the obsessive-compulsive position. Whether the state of mental exhaustion which signals the failure of repression and one's attempts at the containment of irrupting material is properly thought of occurring at the end of the obsessive-compulsive position, the beginning of the fragmentary position, or as a separate period of latency between them would benefit from greater theoretical clarity. In any case, this state of slackened mental tension appears to create a fundamental shift in the way the ego defends itself against unacceptable content: the disorganization of the psyche functionally replaces the defenses of the exhausted ego, the slackening of mental tension creating a precedent by which the disorientation related to the loosening of associations becomes the primary means of handling one's unacceptable parts and related experiences. As the psyche recovers and the ego regains the ability to direct its defenses against these contents, it utilizes this template first through repudiation in the fragmentary position, and later through formal attacks on linking in the psychotic. Like the increasing insistence of the reemerging repressed from the depressive into the obsessive-compulsive position, on the other side of the state of mental exhaustion one contends with the degree of intensity and pervasiveness of repudiation. Whether such strategies are sufficient to defend against badness through fragmentation or a gradual slide into psychosis arises is, as in the mechanism of repression in the depressive and obsessive-compulsive positions, a matter of intensity.

Another area which deserves further attention is the dual nature of dissociation, the homeopathic application of which is shown to be curative in certain therapeutic approaches –

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such as cognitive defusion - despite its pathological origins. It appears that the work of reintegration does not require the creation of adaptive complexes or schema *ex nihilo*, but from existing experiences and contents. To this end, the disassembly of maladaptive complexes which must be reassembled along with corrective emotional experiences in a more adaptive manner is an indispensable part of the therapeutic process – one which benefits from an adaptive utilization of dissociation. It would thus be beneficial to better understand this phenomenon as to optimize its therapeutic potential.

In speaking about defense mechanisms typical of each position, it is clear that Vaillant's (1999) typology, while useful in defining quartile distinctions between levels of adaptation, is not in full agreement where certain defenses fall in certain positions as presented here. Further development of the model I am presenting could benefit from a deeper analysis of these discrepancies. By so doing, it is possible more light may be shed on the nuanced differences within and between these positions, allowing for a greater understanding of particular syndromes associated with certain positions and an increase in diagnostic specificity.

Another phenomenon deserving of further exploration in the context of my proposed model is that of individuals who do not fit within or adhere to the normative moral structure. These include those who are amoral, unwilling or incapable of engaging in moral decision-making, and those who are immoral, actively cultivating a persona aligned with badness. It is possible that, particularly in the latter case, these strategies may be related to abusive or neglectful parenting, an identification with the aggressor in response to insufficient exposure to prosocial environments and relationships in early childhood, a reaction formation against over-moralizing caregivers, or some other artifact of early childhood experience with badness that fails to adequately meet the social needs of the developing ego. In any case, the result of

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embracing one's badness allows one to effectively subvert the potential for the pathological process described in the model at issue: one's turpitude becomes a virtue to be embraced, cultivated, and wielded as a weapon, and one's compassion a vice experienced as a decadent luxury and sign of weakness. Whereas in the case of the amoral individual the question of morality is obviated, for the immoral individual an alternative model of moral psychopathology should be delineated according to the theories presented above.

Conclusion

Morality as a construct is a crowning achievement of humanity, a testament to its adaptability and capacity to structure experience, transmit learning, and foster the cooperation which has made us so successful as a species. However, it is rooted in a traumatic reaction to our narcissistic and mortal limitations, our infantile helplessness an affront to the initial orientation of the id-self toward the fantasy of omnipotence. As we learn to conform to the expectations of our caregivers and the practicalities of reality as a condition of having our needs met and preserving a sense of agency, our egos develop with their various departments – the ego-self, the super-ego, and the ego ideal – tasked with creating a livable balance between selfish desire, sociality, and practicality. While this instrumental view of moral behavior describes rudimentary and naïve understandings of moral behavior, we nevertheless find the inveterate tendency toward narcissism underlying even our most morally noble behaviors, harnessed by the ego and transformed into prosocial values through the libidinal investment of one's good objects, in the external world or internalized in the super-ego, with something of the self.

With all this talk of selfishness, one might quite reasonably remark upon the conspicuous absence of empathy and earnest affinity, questioning their place or sincerity in such a view of moral development. This is not a matter of oversight, but of fundamentally construing these

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concepts, central to the construct of morality and intersubjectivity generally, through a radically different lens.

Selfishness is understood in common parlance as being an antonym of altruism, a hallmark of moral insufficiency. Stripped of such moralistic pretenses, however, we find that it is precisely this trait which is the *sine qua non* of relatedness. As Freud (1917/1989) reminds us in his *Introductory Lectures*:

“Children love themselves first, and it is only later that they learn to love others and to sacrifice something of their own ego to others. Even those people whom a child seems to love from the beginning are loved by him at first because he needs them and cannot do without them - once again from egoistic motives. Not until later does the impulse to love make itself independent of egoism. It is literally true that *his egoism has taught him to love!*”

In this way we find that love is not somehow antithetical to, but is the ultimate and sublime distillate of egoism. This being the case, we might do better to shift from the notion of egoism as being synonymous with selfishness and more toward the idea of it being a matter of self-centeredness. This shift is not purely a matter of semantics: it sheds many of the negative connotations associated with the former term and replaces them with a more accurate description of the situation as it is, giving the self its due as the origin and center of all relatedness, the font from which all value flows. To undercut this connection to the self – or, worse yet, the very cohesion of the self – through moral imprecations is to paradoxically undermine the very ability to engage in moral behavior.

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In light of this, I am suggesting a more sympathetic view towards egoism and the role of the self in all systems of value as a palliative if not curative intervention. By understanding ourselves and others in a more authentic way, we allow ourselves and one another the freedom to err in instructive ways without the imposition of undue judgment, explicit or implicit. Indeed, to legitimize that this erring exists only insofar as one is constitutionally unable to exert one's will without restriction against the environment and the force of the Other, and that the only fundamental experiential truth available to us is seeking the expansion and gratification of the self, can be seen as both a treatment goal as well as an entrée into both the historical and sustaining factors contributing to the presenting concerns of individuals appearing for treatment. As clinicians, the theoretical framework I propose here may also aid in our ability to understand and treat populations traditionally excluded from many practices due to their traditional moral failings – drug addicts, criminals, sex offenders, all may be viewed in a more empathic way through an acknowledgment of what are, at base, motivations and needs no different from our own. It is precisely the visceral response the preceding statement evokes, that we ourselves in fact share our basic drivers in common with the vilified other, that makes this reevaluation so necessary.

To this point, I offer Nietzsche's (1883/1995) parable of the red judge and the pale criminal. In this allegory, Nietzsche evokes the situation and imagery of a criminal proceeding – however the indictment he levies is not against the criminal, but the court and what it represents. The pale criminal has transgressed in deed, but the judge, prosecutor, and gallery have similarly done so many times in their fantasies. Their indignation and judgment are ideologically hypocritical, with the criminal being guilty only of lacking the prosocial experiences and capacity for behavioral inhibition to maintain the separation between thought and deed. In this

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way, we have all been liars, cheaters, thieves, murderers, even rapists, separated from those who have acted upon these impulses only by the whims of environment, physiology, and circumstance.

Love of one's neighbor, agape, universal love – these are the traditional moral values to which we aspire, but which we are constitutionally unable to fully realize in their romanticized sense. Our selfish and narcissistic natures prohibit this, allowing us only approximations thereof with the aid of complex psychological contortions and contrivances. But perhaps we have been going about this all wrong – perhaps it is not the denigration nor exaltation of selfishness that will solve this problem, but the acceptance of its universality. In essence we may become more prosocial through embracing our self-centeredness, recognizing the Other in ourselves and ourselves in the Other, rather than creating dualistic abstractions and unattainable ideals that invite conflict, othering, and alienation.

The therapist is in a unique position to subvert these maladaptive moral narratives and relieve the ego from the pressure of onerous attributions and hyper-responsibility which overwhelm the psyche and undermine one's relationship with oneself and, by extension, others. This is achieved not only through the use of corrective technical interventions, but through the power of the therapeutic relationship itself, which allows one to revise the traumatic interactions and misunderstandings of childhood (Ferenczi, 1949). In this way the exhortations of the super-ego are revised through a process which, while redolent of the parental relationship, benefits from the mutuality of the real relationship between patient and therapist. In this way the patient regains a sense of agency, the therapist their psychological sherpa on a journey to rediscover oneself and reject, replace, revise, or reinvigorate one's values as one sees fit - to make them one's own.

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In summation, it is fitting that we end with the words of Freud to Jung with whom, in some of their earliest correspondence, he had cause to discuss therapeutic technique. In speaking of the transference phenomenon, Freud expressed his conviction that at base, in treatment “the cure is effected by love” (Freud & Jung, 1988). It is this very love, an emotion so liberally extended to others, but parsimoniously withheld from the self under the dictates of morality, which the individual who suffers under its strictures requires. While successful in restraining our baser impulses as we develop, the internalization and maintenance of such a lopsided philosophy results in a paradoxical situation whereby the very subject required as the moral agent is undermined through the impoverishment and dissolution of the self. It is thus the fate of all moral subjects to solve the horned dilemma – the narrow path between fantasy and reality, desire and duty, self and Other.

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