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5-16-2024

## Towards an Ethics of Difference: Constructing a Post-Structuralist Ethics

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**Towards an Ethics of Difference:  
Constructing a Post-Structuralist Ethics**

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Honors Thesis in Philosophy

May 16th, 2024

## Introduction

Traditional philosophical accounts of ethics and morality have so far existed nearly entirely within the language of a metaphysics of being, essences, and categories and a moral epistemology based purely on reason. The most well known of these theories—deontology, consequentialism/utilitarianism, and virtue ethics—each tries to reduce the complexities of ethics to a set of universals: always act according to duty, maximize utility, or embody supposed universal human virtues. While universal principles and formulas can be useful as abstract guides, they should not be taken as circumscribing the entire domain of ethics. Overreliance on rationality, universality, and objectivity has led philosophers to overlook that our desire and present/immanent knowledge is an essential aspect of how people act. Through this, philosophy has been able to ignore<sup>1</sup> that what matters most in ethics is not the rules, not the formulas, and not the characteristics, but the human element that allows one to truly see someone else as human. In this ignorance we have treated ethics too abstractly, as disconnected from interpersonal and social experience. Overly relying on these moral systems prevents the understanding of how ethical experience is an experience of dialogue with another.

The philosophies of Levinas and Deleuze offer alternatives to traditional moral systems. Both thinkers offer an account of ethics that is premised on the ethical encounter, an encounter with another person or thing outside of our current views and values and who makes us feel the insufficiency of our preconceptions. This insufficiency is the presentation that our ideas of how reality or society are meant to work can not explain something that we have interacted with. While this may seem as simple as a learning process, it becomes more and more difficult to change or flip how one views the world and people as one lives in a particular society and gets

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<sup>1</sup> With certain exceptions like Feminist, marginalized, and anti-colonial philosophy that have explored how these systems of thought present dangers to people in other groups.

more invested in a particular way of existence. The ethical encounter is so important because it is not meant to show the insufficiency of such basic ideas of how we feel about what a planet is or what a word means, but goes to the core of how we experience other people and the world. These are changes about who we deem as worthy of our immanent moral consideration and how we feel about entire groups of people. In grounded examples, this is about changing how we are able to experience empathy with views that we are currently incapable of experiencing; many of us have never seriously questioned our gender and body or been under the oppression of a colonial project, but those experiencing these hardships deserve the same love and care that we give to those that fit into our norms. Ethical encounters present us with the reality that our own experience will fall short of understanding the depth of someone else, but they present us with a desire to try.

Emmanuel Levinas and Gilles Deleuze are traditionally seen as opposed within French philosophy. Levinas is the philosopher of transcendence who sees ethics as a relation with something absolutely beyond the self. Deleuze is the philosopher of immanence who denies the need for any metaphysical divisions or hierarchies within reality. Despite these real differences, their respective traditions of ethical phenomenology and post-structuralism/schizoanalysis can be fruitfully combined. This hybrid perspective brings into focus three aspects of ethics that are neglected by traditional moral systems: 1. the societal and unconscious factors that structure and limit our understanding of ourselves and others; 2. the ethical encounters that change how we act and desire; and 3. changing desire to be able to exist differently socially and politically.

A Levinasian-Deleuzian perspective allows us to see the ethical encounter as a facing towards the other whose otherness necessarily expands our horizons<sup>2</sup>. From this perspective, the

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<sup>2</sup> I seek to see ethics in terms of encounters with others that bring about an understanding of human-centric change as the goal of any ethics. Martin Buber gave his account of such an account through an I/You distinction in *I and Thou*, Emmanuel Levinas would further this philosophical thought in multiple works discussing the Same

ethical encounter is a process of looking into two sets of eyes. One is my own eyes where I try to construct a descriptive understanding of the conscious and unconscious structures that change how I see and interact with the world. The other set of eyes is the eyes of the Other, the outsider who does not conform to my expectations or current desires but instead offers something new. Ethics must begin with the exploration of both sets of eyes and the deepness that lies behind them, but also the encounter of these eyes with each other. Levinas and Deleuze suggest a path towards an ethics based in change, not attaining universals, that develops through dialogue, not conformity. The approach of viewing ethics through ethical encounters provides both a site for ethical change to take place and also an explanation for why this change does not always occur without outside influence.

In contrast to ethical encounters, moral systems are the fixed sets of rules or values that guide us through most of our lives. Moral systems, whether they be religious, utilitarian, rationalized duties, or social forces, are the guides which create our understanding of normativity. In this paper, with the philosophies of Deleuze, Guattari, Levinas, and Buber, I will provide further critiques of how we traditionally understand morality as moral systems and the ways in which morality can be reformulated to break away from such structures through the idea of a rupture created through an ethical encounter. My critique is not that these systems aren't useful, but rather they are dangerous to universalize and let them form the full basis for how we treat everything, instead of using them as tools when they are useful. If they are allowed to be universalized within our understanding of reality, they will overpower our ability to directly communicate with others and be transformed by them, in favor of remaining the same.

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versus the Other While both saw that these encounters would be unpleasant meetings that would be opening to how we see ourselves and other people, Levinas, alone, argues for the possibility of this only occurring from the perspective of the I's encounter with the Other.

The main danger of moral systems comes from the fact that they are merely a part of a larger structure of the unconscious called, in this work, the symbolic. When we conceive of morality, it is not abstracted from the other aspects of the mind that are invested into social, cultural, economic, historical, sexual, etc... formations that privilege certain ways of existence and exclude others. With the impossibility of pure moral abstraction, the way we form ideas about who is worthy of moral consideration and moral treatment are therefore decided in tandem with other ideas and structures. While we may not have full conscious control over the formation of such ideas, they limit and direct how we allow ourselves to exist and how we act towards others.

While Deleuze and Levinas are in some ways opposed philosophically, as I've noted, they are both willing to seriously engage with ethics, not just as a historical phenomenon, as with Foucault or Heidegger, but as a reflection on how we ought to live with and act towards other people. Their two philosophies, as I will argue, fill in holes that the other has in their view of ethics: Levinas gives a very detailed focus on how personal encounters can change someone, while Deleuze focuses on how society, politics, and education influence our existence in society. While different continental philosophers can provide their own explanation for how society influences us, what makes Deleuze's answers particularly important and interesting is they introduce, in *Anti-Oedipus*, the idea that most of us are configured to desire our own repression (Deleuze & Guattari p. 39). Desire is the force and energy of the unconscious which is invested into certain aspects of the symbolic based on how we are experiencing outside interactions. This can be simple examples like how commercials make us want a product, but can also go into larger ideas demonstrated by how Deleuze & Guattari argue that even the way desire is processed is affected by a particular society; with their primary critique being that we are made

to desire as if desire demonstrates lack rather than creation. With this more meta-change in how we desire, outside forces, like capitalism, have greater control over directing how people desire and conceive of themselves along group lines. Throughout *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze & Guattari explore how this self-repression came to be but also the possibility that desire, a force and energy which may currently not be our own, can be retaken as revolutionary desire<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, the true quest of this essay is to search for a way in which the face-to-face encounter can change the way in which we desire towards a mode of desiring otherness and outsideness.

### ***Jojo Rabbit & the Ethics of Change***

To illustrate the concept of the ethical encounter in concrete detail, I will appeal to a fictional example. The full breadth of the ethical encounter with the Other is vividly displayed in Taika Waititi's 2019 movie *Jojo Rabbit*. The movie details the growth of a young German boy, Jojo Betzler, at the very end of the Second World War. Jojo is so indoctrinated by nazi propaganda and education that he develops an imaginary friend who is Adolf Hitler, played by Waititi. Through the film we learn that, despite this love for nazism, Jojo's own parents are anti-fascist fighters. The central aspect of the movie, and what is important for this present discussion, is the main conflict and growth that Jojo experiences when he is tasked by his mother with helping to hide and protect a Jewish girl, Ella Korr, who was his older sister's school friend. Jojo's moral systems are formed through an indoctrination supporting the hatred of Jewish people, the necessity of preparing to be a soldier, and an absolute love for the fascist leader. The moral system and the greater symbolic systems that Jojo has acquired to see as his reality are

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<sup>3</sup> Revolutionary here does not necessarily mean things to the level of the French Revolution or May 68' but rather opposes reactionary desire. When one desires revolutionarily it means that they desire in such a way that they seek out new ways of desiring and experiencing the world rather than desiring sameness or desiring an empowering of the particular ego.

questioned in the encounter with Elsa as the “Jewish other” which slowly becomes the Other that he feels a desire and responsibility for.

In the opening scene, Jojo is tasked with killing a rabbit, an initiation ritual at the nazi youth training camp that will show his willingness to deny an ethical relation to exist within a fascist military structure. This scene presents us with both the commitment that Jojo sees as necessary to the regime and the military, but also the possibility of an openness that escapes from political power. Unable to commit this murder, Jojo runs off crying, after which an older boy, presumably near military age, kills the rabbit. For his hesitancy, Jojo suffers the mockery of being called “Jojo Rabbit.” The importance of this scene is that it demonstrates at least some of the openness required to experience the ethical encounter, and eventually change how one desires politically and culturally. The Rabbit, unable to advocate for its own need for survival, is defended via the feeling of responsibility for it; through watching it squirm and whimper, Jojo feels an unavoidable responsibility for a living creature that overpowers any desires he has to prove himself. Gary Gutting helps explain part of this phenomenon in Levinasian terms<sup>4</sup>. “As far as Levinas’ account goes, the Other’s “Don’t kill me” has literally the force of “Don’t ignore my presence!” or “Don’t act as if I don’t exist!”. It is just this demand for dialogue that cannot be ignored,” (Gutting 127). In taking on ethical responsibility for the rabbit, Jojo seems to step outside the system for a moment, a momentary realization that he has a greater obligation than merely to the nazi regime. This momentary realization is quickly recaptured into the political system in two scenes: one in which Jojo, speaking to Waititi’s imaginary Hitler, discusses the cowardliness of the Rabbit, and another scene in which Jojo speaks to his friend Yoriki about all

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<sup>4</sup> in his chapter “The Turn to Ethics: Levinas and Deleuze,” within *Thinking the Impossible: French Philosophy Since 1960*



the anti-Semitic features they think that Jewish people have, and the honor they would feel in showing Hitler a decapitated head of one.

Jojo's true change, an uncaptured one, takes place when he is tasked with taking care of Elsa alone; we find out a few scenes later that his mother has been executed for participating in the anti-Nazi activism in Germany. Earlier, the viewer spent time watching Jojo and his mother, played by Scarlet Johansson, argue over Nazism, his mother trying to combat his indoctrination and education through teaching him empathy. His initial confrontation with Elsa, in the walls of the highest floor of his building, is filmed as if it were a horror movie, filled with the quiet screeching of post-modern orchestras; this leads up to the moment Jojo finds Elsa and runs away screaming. Her political otherness is presented as a horror villain, seen through the lens of Jojo's anti-Semitic belief. Their relationship progresses as Jojo tries to get information from her about Jewish people, and she mocks his anti-Semitism and demonstrates that these tropes are lazy and reductive. These scenes of learning are mixed in with Jojo slowly developing a crush on Elsa, which all comes together when Elsa says to Jojo, after he tells her that Nazis and Jews are not supposed to interact, "You're not a Nazi Jojo, you're a ten year old kid who likes swastikas and likes dressing up in a funny uniform and wants to be part of a club; but you are not one of them." Her willingness to treat him as if he is still human eventually pulls Jojo outside of the grips of the political fold; after helping Elsa get clean and have a good meal, Jojo and Elsa are presented with the challenge of hiding her from the Gestapo. Here Jojo finally accepts ethical and thus political responsibility for Elsa's otherness. He hides her and feels just as much pressure about her survival, not merely out of the knowledge that he will be killed too, but his love and desire for her that he has shifted towards. Simple conversations between them have slowly morphed into a willingness and desire to put this political and ethical responsibility to others as a higher priority

than adherence to the state and its principles. The final scene of the movie presents the downfall of the Nazi regime and the beginning of American occupation as a celebratory moment for Jojo, an event which at the beginning of the movie was his life's goal to avoid. In the final scene, Jojo and Elsa dance together after she is free to walk outside without fear of death for the first time in years.

Throughout the movie, Jojo's relationship with his imaginary Hitler slowly deteriorates in contrast to his relation with Elsa, demonstrating Jojo's actual view of Nazi society. An important aspect of constructing an ethics based around a goal of changes in desire and action is that we will always have a former version of ourselves or how we viewed society or our relation to it at the time for reference to our current self. The viewer sees this through Waititi's Hitler becoming meaner and bursting out at Jojo closer and closer to the film's end; Hitler is no longer the character that Jojo saw as his "best-friend" in the opening of the film. Jojo's relationship to society is thus shown to have fundamentally have changed, and therefore his outlook on what this society was the whole time; Waititi's Hitler kept him, originally, within the fold of Nazi values of hyper-masculinity and anti-Semitism, but as Jojo gains a desire for Elsa and the anti-fascism that his mother fought for, Waititi's Hitler turns into an angry disheveled man that wants Jojo to threaten the life of the remaining person he loves. This all culminates in Jojo literally, at least on screen, kicking Waititi's Hitler out of the window after not letting him call Elsa anything other than a girl, cementing Jojo's transformation into someone who has made a total disavowal of Nazi society and what it stood for.

## Dangers of Conventional Moral Systems

It is here where we must return to discussing the well-known moral theories and their focal points: duty, consequence, and virtue. In critique, we must be able to take these systems of morality from their own metaethical schemas and place them under the one established here: morality is centered upon a subject who is not fully rational but instead has a symbolic and desiring unconscious that defines the limits of their own possibility and how they understand and engage with reality. It is here where the description of morality being merely one part, among many, within the symbolic becomes a critique rather than mere observation. The question then must become, “What does it mean to truly believe in these moral theories under this new framework?” We must not look for these answers in their idealism but rather in how each of their frameworks of ethical desire establishes a way in which power can justify its actions.

There are three respective questions that establish the critique of each that I am searching for here. Firstly, for deontology, we must ask who or what truly defines what we see as our duties or responsibilities. Secondly, for consequentialism, we must ask how we come to deciding who is worthy of moral consideration and/or who is worth more/less than others. Finally, for virtue ethics, we must ask what truly is the source of virtue and how it establishes relationships with outsiders. In all three of these questions, I seek a way in which holding these established frameworks can function as apparatuses of capture for most if not all people. We must seek to understand how these systems can blind us or even play a part in our desire for the most horrible of atrocities<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Through exploring these I want to employ the concept of capture that Deleuze and Guattari discuss in the Plateau “Apparatus of Capture” in *A Thousand Plateaus*. This concept of capture functions to explain situations like how Jojo in *Jojo Rabbit*’s need for a sense of masculinity and the need for a group did in the early scenes prevented him from being able to escape nazism despite some moral and emotional attitudes that meant he had some sense of wanting to act differently. Throughout this chapter, capture is broadly discussed as something already present in the system that creates a dependency on it#, thus preventing one’s ability to either exist outside of it, or in extreme cases dream of an outside (Deleuze & Guattari 425-73).

## Duty & Society

We may experience duty and responsibility as something greater than ourselves, or greater than anyone/everyone, but I wish to shift that focus towards understanding that moral responsibility has a real, but societal, source. A sense of duty can be a powerful force to feel; if the particular actions that we feel morally compelled to do are captured by greater structures, then it can lead to self-oppression rather than a contribution to society and the people around us. Universalizing responsibility to where individual actions have to be rational at a societal level means that our moral imagination is limited to the confines of how we are able to see a person's position in society to be; in contrast, the ethical encounter offers the ability to see how other modes of existing could work rather than confining ourselves.

Duty, unlike the other systems I will analyze, has the theoretical position that it is not meant to be done for anything concerning the outside world; however, this does not mean that these senses of responsibility have no effect on the outside world. This means that it is meant to be done without any account for one's own desires or, in most cases, anything peculiar to the situation; rather we must act in accordance with reasonable principles at all times that are meant to create a reasonable society at all times. In Kant's own words in the *The Groundwork to the Metaphysics of Morals*, "Since I have robbed the will of every inducement that might arise for it as a consequence of obeying any particular law, nothing is left but the conformity of actions to universal law as such, and this alone must serve as its principle" (Kant 70). While the tired critique about the need for some swaying of principles in certain situations may work for many ethicists, I, first, seek to understand how such devotion to morality can be used against the person holding the values.

Kant's ethical dream, under these terms, is that of a self-regulated society, each member holding themselves individually accountable for universal principles; the difficulty with this is that I and Kant are under different metaphysical and epistemological grounding. Kant believes in the human ability to reason despite one's desires and in an ultimate truth hidden beyond the senses. In contrast, a Deleuzian-Levinasian perspective understands reason as a justification for what one already has been made to desire and truth as something that is overall helpful, but ultimately relative at the level of experience<sup>6</sup>. The feeling of duty still must be explained under these latter terms, or at the very least why people feel such a feeling, and therefore duty must be understood almost like the basis of any moral feeling stripped to its absolute bare minimum. Kant doesn't give anyone any particular rules, like you might find in virtue ethics, but merely that our understanding of action must derive from a universal that we can justify and must not treat others like means to an end. One just has to feel compelled to act out of a pure desire to do what is right. Practically, the limits of our immanent knowledge take the place of where moral sense and action comes from, instead of face-to-face interaction.

While I wish to expand my critiques of Deontology in future works, the primary one that will suffice for now is how the universalization of immanent knowledge can lead one to reinforce either oppression or repression. Work seems to be a primary example here, not only because it is Deleuze & Guattari's primary example in "Apparatus of Capture," but also because it functions as a site where our ability to escape its current form is hindered in many facets. If a Kantian were to wake up on a random Monday and question their need to go into work, they would first ask how the world would be if no one went into work. They would obviously quickly imagine a

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<sup>6</sup> While there may be differences between Kant, Mill, and Aristotle's other views, their views on reason and truth usually fall on the same side of such a debate: humanity can reach an understanding of at least some universals through the use of experience and reason. Because of this I will not repeat these differences in the two latter sections.

world in crisis which could not support itself or at the very least fall majorly behind. Because of this, they would pick up their coat and head into the office, the factory, the store, or wherever they worked, regardless of how much they hate it or how much their environment could improve under different circumstances. The thoughts about what is possible are all captured by the idea that society would slow down or stop without people working. Work as it exists, being rational to our current society, becomes a necessitated moral action. My critique, here, is therefore that ethical imagination is subjected to perceived immanent necessity. How would our understanding change if we met and had a real dialogue with an empathetic union organizer or a co-worker who is a new parent and overworked? These dialogues may be prevented by the return to the thought, over and over again, that nothing else is possible without causing total collapse.

### **Calculation & Humanity**

While consequentialism may be able to avoid deontology's problems of particularity, it itself is open to the critique of the lack of imagination and the possibility for difference. This however is through its principle of indifference that it expresses as the central necessity of making a moral calculation. This indifference finds a necessity to rely upon other concepts in the unconscious whenever it is actually practiced, the most important of these other concepts is how the other parts of our unconscious are able to construct a view of humanity that can be given or taken away. The importance of such a critique is the fact that while Deontology may make prescriptions for society, it ultimately is at the level of individual action, but Consequentialism makes principles for all levels of action, whether that be the individual or the government as a whole: the problem then is that such calculations, in their inevitability of avoiding human desires, may be captured by pro-eugenic attitudes. The limiting of perspective no longer serves

as a self-repressor but an active support for oppression as restricted options towards how we should treat others become defined by how we let power influence our sense of reality and the personhood of others.

This is not a calculation like that provided in the infamous Trolley Problem about whether one would rather do nothing and let five people die or act to reduce that to a singular death; this is rather about how does society use this drive to calculate the best decision rationally to make one believe that it is necessary to actively harm more people than other options would have. While I will discuss the treatment of the other when they are objectified more in the section of Virtue ethics, the critique here must concern the division between how we conceive of the interests of the whole versus the actual lived experience of particular groups. Disability is a main site of discourse that will provide a meaningful difference between how Utilitarianism and Virtue Ethics inevitably lead towards rationalization of oppression. Disability, to the modern mind, is infantilized rather than seen as something viceful: personhood is stripped away on the basis of lack of agency rather than on the basis that that agency has been used in ways that aren't moral or virtuous. I find that Peter Singer usually brings out the worst in Utilitarianism, being that he usually is a hard-line believer in it. In particular on this issue, his and Jeff McMahan's New York Times opinion piece defending Anna Stubblefield's sexual assault of a disabled person she was a teacher of shall demonstrate how actively denying the personhood of others leads towards the complete rejection of the possibility of a face-to-face interaction and changing how one can desire.

The two begin by agreeing with the defendant that she was not able to present enough evidence on her side about the cognitive abilities of the 30-year old victim with cerebral palsy; however, instead of arguing that his physical disability merely hid his intellectual abilities, like

the defendant wanted to, they argue that at a certain point a disabled person no longer has the ability to understand concepts like consent (Singer & McMahan). For this particular use of utilitarianism, which I think any calculative principle in ethics could fall into if not careful enough, moral agency and personhood are only to be given to those with a certain level of cognitive ability, in Singer's case this is that at some point one doesn't even deserve to be advocated for or considered at all. The obvious danger of such stark decisions on moral agency is that it can lead to worse treatment for people that may fall into such a mold or be near it; the principle or drive at its basis is that there is a line where a human no longer counts as actually experiencing their own life, therefore my decision-making no longer has to concern them.

For a group that can not always advocate for itself through language, this becomes a life and death danger where legal systems and possibly even policing or military operations are conducted or decided on the basis of being able to advocate for agency. For disabled persons, utilitarianism makes their ability to garner moral worth something that must be done outside of themselves. When morality is seen in such a light, a useful tool for power structures is an act of disabling a group in which they are opposing; beyond disabled persons we can see this in imperialism and neo-imperialism, which John Stuart Mill himself outwardly supported despite this being in contrast to older philosophers of liberalism and consequentialism. According to Eileen Sullivan's "Liberalism and Imperialism: J. S. Mill's Defense of the British Empire," Mill saw British Imperialism as a moral good as long as it allowed for the self-government on most matters to the white colonists on the "same stage of civilization" as the people of Britain; outside of white colonists, which excluded Irish people, colonies were meant to be made on the moral basis that they were unable to self-govern. Mill's position on these groups was that "The peoples of Asia and Africa, on the other hand, were barbarous and uncivilized and could not govern



themselves. In these cases, England must provide a benevolent despotism,” (Sullivan 606). The moral schema of utilitarianism can be made to support a political schema that ultimately leads to death, oppression, and repression; even if Mill honestly believed that each person deserves equal consideration when it came to a moral calculation, he did not see that every person deserves to be a part of the conversation on what a moral political organization looks like.

While the perversion of the other which takes place under a schema of virtue and vice may be a part of an actual persons decision making skills, especially for someone in 19th-century England, what is important to focus on here is that these Utilitarians have given three rungs of moral consideration, two of which can be used as a way of disabling someone, at the very least, morally. We first find the people considered normal or civilized by the one making the moral choice, whether they be able-bodied, allistic, the right kind of white, or from the right country. Secondly, we find a person who utilitarianism believes has not advanced to the point of being able to understand social concepts, someone so fully morally-disabled that the calculation should treat them as less than an equal. Finally, we find something in-between: the people seen as hindered by a cultural environment rather than by their body; while more explicit in older times, this support for forms of colonialism and patronization of groups that supposedly “can’t help themselves.” These latter two groups are seen as insufficient or inferior because they are unable to meet the norm that deserves both full moral consideration and the ability to make moral-political decisions for themselves. With the ethical encounter, one must be able to break away from such discriminatory categorization; the breakdown of norms must occur in facing the other as the way we structure optimal good is, more often than not, fundamentally flawed.

## Virtue & Exclusivity

Where consequentialism gains power over other groups through disabling, a system of virtue ethics gains power against a group by defining them as perverse. While Aristotle's account of this version of ethics focuses primarily on happiness being something that involves the entirety of one's life, rather than hedonism or political honor, the actual practice of such principles usually fall within attaching political honor to virtuous living. While this association may seem to be intellectually dishonest, in some regards, to Aristotle, what I seek as critique is morality as it exists as a social function; therefore, the partially individualized ideal virtue ethics of Aristotle is not fully what will be critiqued, though this does not mean that the exclusionary sentiments of moralities built on public virtue don't share a basis for their exclusion with Aristotle's ethics.

This exclusion comes from the mix of two primary concepts to virtue ethics: firstly, that there are lower and higher activities, and, secondly, that morality is something habitual or natural. Even if political life is not the highest of all possible activities for Aristotle, there is still a opposition to hedonistic forms of living; so, regardless of how a society would pick what the vices are, there is a foundation that those that possess such vices have gained a nature of doing them<sup>7</sup>. Discussing both the people who enjoy base desires and those who enjoy life through virtue, Aristotle states in book 1, chapter 8, of the *Nicomachean Ethics*:

Now for most men their pleasures are in conflict with one another because these are not by nature pleasant, but the lovers of what is noble find pleasant the things that are by nature pleasant; and virtuous actions are such, so that these are pleasant for such men as

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<sup>7</sup> At least in Aristotle's version that is based on habit formation; other forms of virtue ethics throughout history may go on to see that certain groups or types of people are just inherently more virtuous

well as in their own nature. Their life, therefore, has no further need of pleasure as a sort of adventitious charm, but has pleasure in itself (Aristotle 945).

To clarify, it is not the denial of any pleasure that is seen as virtuous, as one may find in ascetic moralities, but rather a focus on moderately practicing experiencing the proper pleasures of life. We may be able to see a stark dichotomy that uses virtue to demonize groups in intersocietal dealings whether that be Heroditus' discussion of other peoples in his *Histories* or how the examples in Edward Said's *Orientalism* of 18th and 19th-century British and French writers discussing the hedonism or perverted cultural differences in Africa and Asia. This sort of virtuous versus perverted/viceful dichotomy can be found as a way to stratify people within or between societies.

Foucault discusses in *The Use of Pleasure* how Greek writers spoke of a sexual morality based on regulation and virtue, which excluded people either from society as a whole or just from political life based on dysregulation or perversion. For this society, the regulation of pleasures was seen as a primary way to demonstrate your worthiness as a leader (Foucault 171-3), which is not necessarily a problem on its own, but this was not only regulation over the amount one dealt with hedonistic pleasures but an exclusion of those did it outside of the norms that men and women were supposed to adhere to. For women, this would be a greater demonization of seducers and affairs committed by wives than for sexual assault (146); for men, this would be a demonization of not following the social codes surrounding homosexuality, this would be either entering into a lifelong relationship with a man or by being "passive" within the sexual relationship (215-25). These virtues are shown to be much less flexible for women and other outside groups than they are for men and almost always for a greater social demonstration than the mere lifelong collection of acts itself.

Virtue, as a social tool, is a way of communicating your commitment to and assimilation into a community; Vice, as a social tool, is a way to exclude an outside group or to be able to weed out those that do not assimilate enough. In the formation of ethical principles throughout a life, and thus the ability to see certain groups and people as human, vice is a tool which can be used to justify mistreatment against a group, such as the above examples have shown, but also many which we can even see in today's politics or how we discuss history. People are able to minimize atrocities done against those that are deemed perverse or not as virtuous, as one may find online right-wing defenses of the Spanish, and other European nations, conquest of the Americas, where they discuss the ritual sacrifices that certain groups committed as a part of their economy and society. In shifting to this focus we end up discussing the morality of the millions of victims of European colonialism rather than the fact that European conquest upset and destroyed multiple societies across two continents. By basing how one views the moral worth of a group by merely their internal practices, one would let powers direct a narrative that supports how it interacts with outside groups that can not advocate for themselves, either because they no longer exist as a group or are not in a position to garner empathy from those that can affect power and its institutions.

## **From Deleuze to Levinas:**

### **Difference and Creation**

The ethical encounter and the view of the Other is not enough to fully describe the depth that an ethics focused on change has: through Deleuze one can more fully articulate that these changes must be experimental and focused on difference. Todd May in his work *Gilles Deleuze: An Introduction* gives the language to properly begin to separate morality into a structure and a

movement of change; separated in this work as moral systems and ethical encounters. Early into this work, May separates the history of philosophy into three questions: “How should one live?” defines the ancient era of philosophy that connects personal life to social roles, “How should one act?” shifts the focus towards the individual as disconnected from social roles in the modern era, and finally “How might one live?” defines the new philosophy that post-structuralism primarily sought to answer (May 3-8). It is this final question that Deleuze and other philosophers, of his time and of his influences, began to ask, intentionally or not. Philosophy, according to this question, is no longer a problem of discovering an abstract structure or ideal to base one’s life on. Instead, philosophy begins with a descriptive understanding of what systems or structures limit us within our own immanent experience and then proceeds by finding out the possibilities that we are capable of outside of this structure.

Seeking to answer “How might one live?” within the context of morality leads to the concepts primarily focused on ethical encounters and changes in desire because the focus is no longer on what is right, but rather on how one understands what is possible. Here, May details that Deleuze “suggests that it is possible to move in the opposite direction (of transcendent systems), to create an ontology that answers to the question of how one might live rather than dictating the limits,” (May p. 17). Extrapolating on this change, there is a change of focus taking place within Deleuze’s understanding of the field of Ontology as two interconnected shifts: the first is a shift away from identity towards difference; the second is a shift away from discovery towards creation (pp. 16-19). To shift away from identity and towards difference means seeking that which extends beyond such or any limits rather than desiring knowledge that presents definite answers to the questions we seek within identity; this extends our experience no further than the limits that we already understood as possible. Identity is typically associated with

metaphysics and ontologies of essences, being, and categories, where the goal of metaphysics is to describe through sameness. The ethical questions that would result from a metaphysics of Identity are merely attempts to attain the proper sameness, as what is good is a definable category, doing good is also a definable act whether that be achieving virtue, sinlessness, duty, or utility. Difference, on the other side of ontology, seeks primarily that which breaks away from such sameness, it establishes particularity as the main importance in metaphysics. Deleuze exemplifies difference while discussing the related concept of repetition early in *Difference and Repetition* within his mention of Monet painting the water lilies. Here Monet's painted lilies are not special because they confine themselves to pure replicas but their particularity, each flower's ability to break past any law, is what makes them special and makes the painting as a whole art (Deleuze 2).

The second shift, from discovery towards creation, highlights our ability to create novel ways of interacting with others and the world without the appeal to objectivity and universality, something we usually reject in favor of familiarity and comfort. No longer must we seek to find a correct but possibly hidden normativity; instead ethics can become a creative process of seeking to no longer be limited within or by language, politics, or culture. In this shift, we are no longer measured alongside a perfect standard, whether that be based on the normative or objective, but we are seeking to understand a newness that has not yet been expressed, whether that is, in May's case, the whole field of philosophy or, in this case, within understanding an Ethics that no longer appeals to objectivity or transcendence. Creation therefore is a process of openness towards experiences of difference, where the confrontation with what is not of our own sameness pushes us to think in ways beyond what was. Creativity, therefore, is not the creation of newness out of nothingness but rather an expansion that seeks to encounter what is outside without

destroying its differences and particularity. The two shifts towards difference and creativity mean that philosophy can no longer continue to look for what is but must rather seek to go beyond what we see as the limits to the possibilities of how we live.

Rather than attempt to look at a centralized model for morality, our current mission is changed by this perspective to an opposing method. For Deleuze difference is a decentralized movement where “the voice of difference arises from a place that is at once distant and intimate, that is both of us and not of us,” (May 20).

The concept of the ethical encounters has difference and creation as its main metaphysical grounding: it is only through someone or something else which acts outside the bounds of our own understanding of existence and possibility that we can see or become what we couldn't even conceive when we were alone. In these encounters, we gain something beyond the limits that we have had placed for ourselves. This project therefore begins here with partly taking up what May offers as Deleuze's philosophy of experimentation and applying it to morality:

“If (Deleuze's) ontology is concerned with difference, then the future must be concerned with experimentation. We can discover our possibilities - my possibilities, but also the possibilities of my hand, my relationships, the groups in which I participate, the style of an artistic movement - by probing difference, seeing what new foldings, unfoldings, and refoldings it is capable of” (May 25).

No longer must morality be concerned with the right or the good rather we must enter a mode of experimentation suggested here, to step towards understanding both ourselves and all that there can be as an inexpressible multitude that can only be seen through new eyes that seek experimentation over limits. This experimentation can not be done alone, if ethics still has some political, social, and cultural normativity it is from the desires we gain from perspectives outside

of our own current immanence; this includes interactions with groups experience society from other perspectives, particularly the most marginalized, which turns the changes happening in the encounter into directed normativity for the future.

### **Transcendence, Immanence, and the Outside**

To be able to properly bridge between the thoughts of post-structuralists Deleuze & Guattari on one end and the ethical phenomenologists Buber & Levinas, I first need to be able to distinguish a metaphysical view of the experience of ethics upon which both can be discussed in the same breath. The difficulty of doing such a task without this bridge being built is that the ethics of Buber & Levinas are still bound in discussions of Transcendence while Deleuze & Guattari discuss primarily the immanent experience of ethics. In this section I hope to distinguish a way to see that while their terminologies are different, there is an overlapping set of ideas upon which a view of ethics can be brought up both understanding the post-structural immoralism and phenomenological ethics. Here I must posit the existence of something that exists beyond our immanent experience but is completely separate from universal transcendence; this shall be called the Outside for my purposes here.

The Outside is where the Other exists for our experience in Levinas and Buber's philosophy but it is also where other possibilities exist from Deleuze & Guattari's. To understand the Outside, one must first understand where immanence and transcendence are. Immanence is a withinness or presentness contrasted to transcendence's beyondness, but this is a fairly simplified understanding of both as both can be experienced though very differently. Immanence, for my purposes here, is all of that already within conscious knowledge and the unconscious, it is the laws and knowledge that shape our experience of reality and affect how we act. Immanence is



our present confines upon which we understand the possibilities of ourselves and the world as a whole. Transcendence, on the other hand, is understood by its tendency towards both the beyond and universalization; typically, it is seen as made basing itself in A Priori concepts, but I primarily deal with an experience of that which feels beyond or above our experience. Both of these are limiting, and regarded as so in both of the philosophies that I am taking from: Levinas discusses the totalities of the self (universalization and totalization of our own ego) and the totalities of order (universalization and totalization of a particular view of transcendence), Deleuze & Guattari discuss a similar two-way difficulty for limits in that possibility can be limited by staying to ourselves but the self can also be oppressed at the same time by larger structures (capital, morality, religion, and so on).

The mistake I seek to avoid is to go into a pure immanence, where there is no outside reference for ourselves; I still seek to get away from transcendence as Deleuze saw Spinoza and Nietzsche working towards when he divides Ethics from Morality in *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*: “Ethics, which is to say, a typology of immanent modes of existence, replaces Morality, which always refers existence to transcendent values. Morality is the judgment of God, the system of judgment,” (Deleuze 23). Breaking from transcendence must be seen only as a half-step towards actually approaching the ethics I seek to define here; despite it being our only mode of experience and knowledge, immanence must also be understood as a limit we must seek to go beyond.

The Outside is that which disrupts the limits we experience within, the ethical encounter will be understood as the process of that which is Outside breaking into our immanence to change our experience and desires. Martin Buber provides some outline for this in *I and Thou* where he discusses the requirements of an “Ethical meeting” between two persons:

“The relation to the Thou is direct. No system of ideas, no foreknowledge, and no fancy intervention between I and Thou. The memory itself is transformed as it plunges out of its isolation into the unity of the whole. No aim, no lust, and no anticipation intervene between I and Thou. Desire itself is transformed as it plunges out of its dream into the appearance. Every means is an obstacle. Only when every means has collapsed does the meeting come about,” (Buber 11-12).

Through this, one may see that our immanent understandings of reality may be too limited to interact with another; while Buber may see this in terms of the Other as infinitely incomprehensible, this can also be understood in reference to the categories and facts we understand reality through, whether these be social, historical, moral, cultural, etc... The changing of desires that Buber mentions may be the greatest overlap between the two traditions I am primarily calling upon: not only do we gain a greater understanding of the Other by getting rid of the linguistic, cultural, political, or other barriers that prevent us from understanding someone’s existence as they themselves experience it, but we also gain an new mode of possibility by breaking down these barriers. The encounter between the Outside and ourselves is the way in which difference presents itself to us.

In his chapter “The Turn to Ethics: Levinas and Deleuze,”<sup>8</sup> Gary Guttings adds his position on how far apart Levinas and Deleuze truly are, believing that differences in terminology may account for the majority of this divide:

“What Deleuze rejects as transcendence corresponds to what Levinas rejects as totality, which locates the meaning of temporal realities in the eternal objectives such as Plato’s Forms or Hegel’s Absolute. In Deleuzian language, Levinas is asserting that the Other is immanent to (in the same world as) the I and rejecting the subordination of temporal

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<sup>8</sup> In *Thinking the Impossible: French Philosophy Since 1960*

exists to a transcendent objectivity—both claims that Deleuze accepts,” (Gutting p. 129).

What I hope is that with the term of “the Outside,” one is able to articulate the actual overlaps in these two philosophies, mostly divided by terms more than meaning. The Outside is therefore that which is not an ontological transcendental or a totality, but that which exists within reality that is beyond our current conceptions; it is a possibility for immanence that is not currently a part of our immanence. Gutting also draws a lot upon Deleuze’s *The Logic of Sense* in the appendix chapter where he deals most directly with an “Other”<sup>9</sup>. In this chapter, Deleuze discusses the function of the structure of the Other as that which “is the expression of the possible,” (308) or, in other terms he uses, the Other presents that which is beyond our current field of view. While this doesn’t contain the infinite responsibility that is central to Levinas, which Deleuze denies on his opposition to transcendence (Gutting 128)

Deleuze and Guattari mention on multiple occasions that changing our modes of existing and desiring is fairly dangerous if we attempt to do it too harshly (with the primary example being experimenting with drugs); their answer that allows for changing how we exist and desire is rather to find those reference points that break us out of larger systems but not so much that it is a total change of how we experience and act in the world. In this way there is more direction in how these desires change rather than just desiring nothing-at-all and hoping for the best. Guattari discusses this in his work *Chaosmosis* where his theory of how we experience change of desires:

“does not oscillate mechanically between zero and infinity, being and nothingness, order and disorder: it rebounds and irrupts on states of things, bodies and the autopoietic nuclei

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<sup>9</sup> Deleuze mostly means this term in Lacanian ways rather than the way in which Levinas uses the term, but the overlap is present through how it is used.

it uses as a support for deterritorialization; it is relative chaosisation in the confrontation with heterogeneous states of complexity,” (Guattari 112).

Our goal therefore is to experience that which is outside of our understanding; there is no point upon which our immanence could satisfy itself as ethical, but instead it is the changing of the bound of our own immanence to accept difference from the Outside, which is not transcendent rules or oppressing ourselves to fit something greater but a way of existing with others and expanding our own view of ourselves. I now seek to understand how we use the Other presents the Outside and Difference to us.

### **The Other and Difference**

Before I discuss these concepts in more detail, I wish to establish an example to aid with context going forwards. I wish to show that this process of ethical encounters is not necessarily some esoteric phenomenon that only happens in some magical, super intellectual, rare way, nor some super serious shift against a society built upon the direct encounter with the horrors of oppression like *Jojo Rabbit* set in nazi Germany, but can be a process demonstrated in the everyday. In this example, I want to imagine a coffee shop. In the line waiting to order his before-work coffee. is an older conservative man. His whole life has been built around gender norms: his parents played them, his teacher taught them, and he has, thus far, excelled at the system created by them. At the counter of this coffeeshop, there is a barista who identifies as non-binary and expresses themselves in such a way as to outwardly not conform as male or female – maybe they even have the black, purple, white, and yellow pin on their apron. Initially, this man may not like the experience of interacting with this barista as they clearly don't fit within this man's worldview about gender and sex. We can imagine the initial interaction of

passive-aggressive small talk while ordering or possibly even outward aggression toward the barista because they don't fit the man's concepts; this is the usual case when such reinforced static values reproduce their means of existence through essentializing reality, making the consequences of such beliefs and values less immanent and therefore less important, to the person holding them.

In a scenario where an ethical encounter would take place, we could imagine another less likely circumstance: one where our desire for other persons overtakes the desires maintaining the beliefs that separate ourselves from them. In this case, the same man is going through the same line over and over again, but as the weeks and months go on a change is beginning to take place. In the beginning, there may be some anger in his actions and his pleasantries, but over time, by talking to the barista, he may see something deeper: their hopes and ambition, their life story and their tragedies, and, most importantly to thinkers like Buber and Levinas, their unexplainable infinity. Overhearing conversations at the coffee bar about the baristas' hardships and maybe advancing to conversations between the two may become revolutionary acts in terms of the unconscious. If this man were to become friends with the barista, would the conservative news channels he is used to watching on tv not become a little more disgusting to him? What was once a desecration of an outside group has become insults and lies about someone he knows and cares about.

In this way, we have changed an objectifying relation into one where at least one recognizes their once incompleteness. While the once business small talk may have turned into full conversations after he becomes a regular at said coffee shop, the ethical transformation is marked by a series of moments where this barista, through the mere act of existing openly as themselves, demonstrates to the businessman that his own beliefs are insufficient for the reality

he is confronted with. No longer is the barista an object of scorn, but a person the man seeks to understand. In the same movement of learning to care about this person, the man learns that his own beliefs are just as insufficient for himself as they are for understanding other people. So far, he has been perfectly fine with playing the role of the patriarchal man, but he may now understand that he didn't choose to play this role; his horizons of what is possible and his relationship to the possible has changed. He may still perform the same gender roles in general, but hopefully his interactions have taught him that these behaviors and attitudes are choices rather than necessary conformities. If therefore the goal of these ethical encounters is to be able to step beyond what we once thought possible, or what we once valued, then it is not only within changing how we can understand others, though this may be a primary driver in causing such moments, but it is also an expanse at what we ourselves can become.

How we desire and structure our symbolic systems is to some degree always in a state of change, but, with the encounter with the Other, we can direct this change towards expansion and inclusion rather than letting our desires and views be shaped entirely by exclusive politics, cultures, or moralities. Crystallized systems of values and desires are not ones that don't change merely ones that only build off of themselves, or at least only add that which already conforms to their own terms. In the above examples this would've been the conservative man continuing his conservative positions; political experience shows us that the conservative media and parties may shift their focus, but it is always with a focus that already conforms to the previous thoughts and desires and what underpinned them. The goal of making the Other so important in the ethical encounter is not merely to change the content that one desires or recognizes as reality, but also to change the frame and structures that define how new desires and ideas enter into the subject's mind.

Deleuze and his primary philosophical partner Felix Guattari discuss the dangers of changes in how one desires, called processes of *deterritorialization* (movements away from sameness) and *reterritorialization* (movement towards newness), particularly in the dangers of such movements being captured by greater powers such as political and economic systems (Deleuze & Guattari *A Thousand Plateaus* 149-166). Therefore this project is not merely to do or believe anything different than what we already were nor is it, as moral systems are grounded in, to conform to any standard. Rather an ethics based in the concept of difference and the encounter seeks a minor becoming, a head on confrontation with something un- or under-recognized beforehand that results in an expansion in our conception of ourselves rather than a limiting. Vernon Cisney in his work *Deleuze and Derrida* discusses the relationship that difference has to any form of identity, in that it is primarily opposed to any totalizing centralized identity rather than any individual center to base an identity: “The philosophy of difference seeks to destabilize notions of identity and rethink the very concept of the foundation on a differential ground, or an ungrounding, or a decentred centre, but a centre nonetheless,” (Cisney 59). This decentering does not mean that an ethics of difference has no frame of reference to exist on; on the contrary, the Other provides the ground upon which we can conceive of becoming without a permanent centralized identity that we are attempting to achieve through morality.

This view of the Other, from the philosophy of Levinas and Buber, is not a simple relationship but rather a moment, an encounter, or a relationship that is able to go beyond mere objective existence. Levinas’ “Other” and the similar concept of Buber’s “Thou<sup>10</sup>” is broadly summarized by Levinas in *Totality and Infinity* as “The absolute other is the Other... The stranger who disturbs the being at home with oneself,” (Levinas 39). The Other is that which escapes the two totalities Levinas so despised: the totality of Order and the totality of the Self.

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<sup>10</sup> Translates to “Tu” in French and “Du” in German; this indicates a personal rather than formal “You.”

These two totalities speak to a view of difference as directly opposed to philosophies of Identity: both Order and the Self are ways to engage with something while only truly dealing with abstract ideas, thus ignoring that which is directly present, or that which is already known to us, thus ignoring that which is different.

Difference, therefore, is made immanent and present to us by such an encounter with an Other and it is in such an encounter that we will find our previous boundaries and limits unfulfilling. While Levinas and Buber are traditionally thought of as philosophers of transcendence, I read two separate readings: transcendence in Deleuze's use is closer to how these totalities justify their existence and actions; the Other is not transcendent in the same way as the Word of God or A Priori reasoning might be, in our context the Other becomes that which expands immanent experience. The Other is that allows for a becoming immanent of something new, while it itself remains something separate from any totality. Levinas' interview "The Solitude of Being" in the collection *Ethics and Infinity* discusses this facet of the Other through opposing Knowledge to Sociality (Levinas 55-62). Here Levinas discusses knowledge as limiting and that solitude is the condition one is subject to if they are only able to exist through knowledge: "In what concerns knowledge: it is by essence a relation with what one equals and includes, with that whose alterity one suspends, with what becomes immanent because it is to my measure and to my scale" (60). Levinas' addition to this work, therefore, is that something being immanent to us through knowledge is not enough to make it into an ethical relation. Knowledge justifies itself, it does not possess an internal sense of progress to match the outside world. We must therefore be able to face the Other that challenges our knowledge and our world views. But before I can fully ground how this change may come about, I must demonstrate the concepts that govern and structure individuals. In the unconscious that I will discuss there are both structures



that act like barriers to and processes that allow for change to happen to our fundamental sense of self.

Following the framework set out by the thinkers I've discussed, I seek to go beyond the primary discussion of morality that has thus far focused too heavily on universal normative systems. Whether this be the focus on right action in deontology, good consequences in utilitarianism, proper habits in virtue ethics, or avoiding sin in religious moralities, one sees to varying degrees a focus on objective normative truths. Because of these focuses, morality has often been given a privileged position where it can only be judged by its ideality rather than its reality. Instead, morality should never be given a higher level of respect than we give to societal ideologies. As has been discussed above and will be discussed more below, systems of values are not isolatable, how we exist within a moral system also contains aspects of how we view other groups, how we view ourselves, and how we are connected to greater societal systems.

### **The Unconscious & Morality**

To understand the subject fully I want to schematize the unconscious into two forces that exist through the inputs taken on by consciousness and produce actions done by our conscious self on the other end. The Symbolic is a structure of the mind more expensive than similar structures like Freud's preconscious and may not fully be one to one with Lacan's terminology of the same name. I only use it here as the overall structure of the mind, invested concepts, and framings that dictates how one can interact with the world. But from Deleuze and Guattari's *Capitalism & Schizophrenia* I get that this structure is a by-product of non-natural forces, produced through experiences that have slowly become embedded deeper into the mind. Desire is the energy of the mind that has no aim of its own but must go somewhere. As the structure of

the symbolic grows, the investments of this energy get more specific and differentiated but can lose their possibility of changing and reinvesting. For an ethics based in concepts of immanence and difference it is paramount for one to understand how something becomes truly immanent enough to us to change how we encounter the other. The goal of the ethical encounter should be to counter this

### **Moral Systems & The Symbolic**

Moral systems, as part of the symbolic, have the function of filtering reality and interactions with others. The symbolic, as a whole, is the structure that possesses our historical, political, linguistic, moral, cultural, and social values; through these, it limits our experience of reality through totalizing the means of interaction with it. When I speak of the Symbolic I wish to preface it with four qualities that make it necessary for this discussion: its unconsciousness, its normative power, its overlapping parts, and its function as the baseline for any discussion of reason.

The Symbolic is made up of a bunch of interconnected but sometimes contrasting drives and desires that don't always harmonize with each other; their only commonality is that they exist within the unconscious. The Symbolic, as best I can describe it, is the structure that gives shapes to the drives and their aims; these are still individual parts, but the Symbolic at any given time privileges certain modes of desiring over others. The importance of this for my project is that this creates a sense of causality separate from free will that has defined the primary way of doing ethics thus far. Our freedom of thought and action is no longer predisposed, but the ideas of those like Deleuze & Guattari lead one to see that there is no clear separation between the actor and their acts within ethics, whether such actions be reactively deemed good or evil is a

distortion of this fact (Smith 131). The unconscious directs us in certain ways because at that given moment it is predisposed to those currents and thoughts. The unconscious is not merely that which happens below our state of consciousness, but this structure is being constantly defined by an outside set of relations. Daniel W. Smith describes Deleuze and Guattari's understanding of unconscious structures in his essay "Deleuze and the Question of Desire: Towards an Immanent Theory of Ethics;" this description will be helpful here, as it describes how this structure overlaps with the outside and comes before our conscious understanding of our self/ego:

Like Nietzsche, Deleuze and Guattari insist that the drives never exist in a free and unbound state, nor are they ever merely individual; they are always arranged and assembled by the social formation in which we find ourselves and one of the aims of *Anti-Oedipus* is to construct a typology of social formation (Smith 132).

Without careful considerations, therefore, of how we desire, our "default settings" of desiring will kick in, which is that of the ways in which dominant societal norms push us.

Beyond its ability to form how we act, the power of the Symbolic is also in the fact that it creates the normative structures which we live by. This creates more confusion about the barrier between what is objective and what is normative for a human; the question merely shifts from "what is?" to "what should be?" but both find their basis in the idea that the unconscious, by being the basis for our sense of self and reality, gives us our perspective towards answering these questions at any given time. Smith specifically gives a related example by discussing shopping for toothpaste, he is already ingrained within normative structures that see a particular brand as clean, cavity free, and tooth whitening; the objectivity of such facts is a separate matter but these

unconscious drives/beliefs create the conditions for acting/buying in a certain way: buying the same brand everytime (Smith 137).

The crossing of all parts of the Symbolic is one of its most important aspects going forward in this project. The metaphysical is being flooded by the political, the moral by the economic, the historical by the social, and both vice versa and so on. None of these particular aspects of the Symbolic can be completely divorced from other parts connected to it. Within reason and academic discussion we may be able to find concepts which we can isolate within a particular category, but as part of the unconscious, as part of actions done in reality, they are all mixed with each other; using their drives to support each other's particular symbolic structures.

Finally, the basis of reality may already be predisposed in certain aspects of the three above qualities, but this part forms the basis for why the consciousness may not be able to reflexively understand the problems within the unconscious. As the basis for objective and normative knowledge, the unconscious and the Symbolic form an imminent totality within which we are able to interact with reality through certain perspectives. Deleuze expresses this in *Desert Islands and Other Texts*: "Underneath all reason lies delirium and drift. Everything about capitalism is rational, except capital... It's just like theology: everything about it is quite rational—*If* you accept sin, the immaculate conception, and the incarnation, which are themselves irrational elements," (Deleuze 262). Thus while conscious reality may be reasonable and make sense, our perspective and normative judgements about it are founded upon an irrational basis which is used to justify everything built on top of such concepts.

When I talk about the Symbolic, maybe a good example would be to attempt to understand the baseline expectations for how one interacts and believes in American society merely on the basis of work. Jason Read's work *The Double Shift: Spinoza and Marx on the*

*Politics of Work* opens quickly with this unconscious and societal structure that connects feelings about one issue, work, to all other aspects of life:

To have a job, to contribute to society and pay taxes, is taken as fundamental to one's standing in society as well as a necessary condition for one's own self-regard. To be unemployed, without work, or to engage in an activity that is not valued in terms of wage labor, is to be held in contempt and disregard. Work is at the center of economic, political, and ethical life. (Read 1)

Here we get a quick summary of both sides of the issue of work: what does it mean to be within the bounds of the normative system? What does it mean to be outside of it? Unconscious and irrational structures may form the basis for how we view ourselves and others through their relation to work in America: the homeless are responsible for their own poor situation and don't need or deserve our help, while we view ourselves in terms of our ability to produce surplus value for others, at least within the wage labor system which leads one to privilege a certain mode of labor over others. Dominant societal norms make their ways into individual actions and beliefs, there is a particular way we are going to treat ourselves and others based on this central relation; This is why Smith notes the particular way in which Deleuze and Guattari synthesize Freud and Marx in *Anti-Oedipus*, "They argue that political economy (Marx), on the one hand, and Libidinal Economy (Freud) on the other, are in fact *one and the same thing*," (Smith 132). These ideas may be societal wide and abstract when we consider them as notions, whether anti-homelessness or the value of working more, but they get into our unconscious and make us desire them not only as the way things are but the way in which things should continue to be and we should act in such a way to reproduce their conditions. The danger of this structure remaining

unchanged necessitates a search into ways in which a particular symbolic structure may be changed or overthrown, which may first necessitate ways of getting beyond walls of immanence.

### **Ethical Encounters & Desire**

Ethical encounters are experienced but are not a part of a structure. One does not try to be Ethical but is rather swept away by it. It is a process that can change how we desire, in turn changing how we think and believe, which changes how we interact with the world. The difficulty is that these are not changes at the level of conscious reason, the brute force of mere facts will not change how one desires, and the freedom we so seek is only possible by a movement started from outside of ourselves that emotionally and unconsciously affects us so that we no longer even have the choice to continue as we once were.

The barriers of certain configurations of the symbolic are the greatest obstacle to the encounter, configurations that are based in in-group politics and out-group hatred provide both a physical and mental barrier toward actually coming face-to-face with the Other. In these mental systems the encounter is avoided and exclusion is desired; the exclusive knowledge systems create a real barrier through action: a racist avoids the races they hate, and when they may encounter such groups they act in anger and resentment first and foremost. In this way the reactionary unconscious can maintain itself by creating the very grounds upon which a true ethical encounter becomes impossible. The encounter, then, must break this sense of exclusion; whether through a quick traumatic event that changes everything immediately or the slow process of change that can come from common exposure to other groups, the end goal of getting to the possibility of an ethical encounter is an expansion in what we consider worthy of humanity and value.

The encounter relies heavily on the opposition of sociality to knowledge, in other terms expansion versus immanence, and represents the moments where sociality is able to overtake knowledge for how we guide ourselves. Sociality privileges that which takes us outside of ourselves; the idea that our immanent knowledge, or what we presently know, is enough becomes essentially questioned in sociality. This relation for Levinas<sup>11</sup> is primarily for us, though it is experienced within an encounter between two or more people; it is our own realization that there is more to a person than what we are able to observe and describe which is stressed in his ethical phenomenology, and will continue to remain important here. Ethical encounters are made easier by a sense of openness, but, as the example of the cafe goer explains, this is still possible for those that want to be exclusive towards certain groups, and thus certain becomings. The encounter therefore occasionally happens to ourselves, though this may be a rarer occurrence, this is the occurrence of the encounter more important at a political level. Political others will not always be able to advocate for themselves or be given the empathy that people who fit within norms get, encountering these groups, accidentally or not, are fundamental to understanding the most necessary ways we need to change how we act individually and as a society.

The accidental ethical encounter is theoretical and practically more interesting, it is more difficult to summarize but offers an exploration into how small personal experiences are more important to ethics than we grant. Throughout the above examples we may be able to find these accidental encounters in Jojo Betzler developing feelings for Elsa in *Jojo Rabbit*, or the conservative businessman overhearing conversations of the barista he used to dislike for their identity. This becomes almost like cognitive dissonance: for Jojo his commitment to the ideological commitments of Nazi society are challenged by the love he feels for Elsa and his

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<sup>11</sup> Explained in “Solitude of Being” in *Ethics and Infinity*

mother. It may be a slow process, one that takes a few days, months, or years, but such an encounter has made questioning ourselves unavoidable.

### **Revolutionary Desire: Is the Ethical task to bear witness or to be affected?**

As discussed in the above section, the unconscious must come before any action; the Symbolic determines what we understand as possible and thus determines all that we believe we can do. But as also discussed the economy of desire is all that keeps any part of the Symbolic as a piece of the psyche. Any virtue, any action, and thus any consequences would be mere effects of its forces; any freedom and thus any sense of an ethical process, rather than the crystalized moral systems, would have to be at the level of desire or the Symbolic, but this requires us to build new focal points for Ethics as well: are we to bear witness or to be affected?

*Anti-Oedipus* ends with a discussion by dividing the way that desire can be directed into two poles: “The paranoid, reactionary, and fascisizing pole, and the schizoid revolutionary pole,” (Deleuze & Guattari 366). This admits that the way we invest our desires is not merely about the changing of content but of a deeper change that will have a fundamental change in the way we create new desires and connections at the level of the symbolic. We can fall into the direction of reactionary desire where I and my group, whether racial, sexual, or national, and how it exacts power must be desired or the revolutionary way of desiring which seeks to create connections beyond our current immanence. It is the latter of these two that I wish to finally tackle in this final section, the ethical encounter must lead towards a desiring revolutionarily, or else it can still be recaptured by our other symbolic forces, like Jojo Betzler’s desire to be masculine and part of a group recaptured his desire after the rabbit made him encounter the true effects of his beliefs. The encounter must be able to present enough energy for change to create a



reinvesting to seemingly unrelated parts of the unconscious; Jojo ultimately doesn't only need to reconsider his position on Jewish personhood but also the basis upon which personhood must be defended for any and every person, the way in which he sees his self-worth, and the way in which he lets society dominate how he views his own gender roles. But in this encounter he learns to humanize, learns that he doesn't need to be in the army to be fulfilled, and he definitely doesn't need to be a soldier.

To return to the question of bearing witness or to being affected, the difference between these two options becomes clear when the ethical task is to encounter that which is outside. It is not enough, although it is necessary, to bear witness to the horrors committed against other groups; apathy is something that the masses can easily fall into and when life and death are at hand, we can not allow for it to be a question of whether we even care. The task of being affected is therefore the task which provides for the ethical encounter to mean anything, it represents a real escape from the systems and concepts holding us back from understanding the Other. Being affected means that the way one acts or even something to the scale of society does not have to be the way that it is; the way we exist is changeable and it is an ethical task to seek a newness that will allow us to live differently, living according to the Other.

To found being affected and revolutionary desire on the idea that things do not have to be the same turns ethics into a true social and political project. No longer is it about trying to find the best way to live based on a pre-existing society like Virtue Ethics does explicitly and Deontology less so, but rather about seeking a new way in which society could exist, possibly from the ground up. As we change our positions through the ethical encounter or afterwards, our relationship to the society we exist in will change with it: understanding the horrors experienced by native peoples during western expansion will change how we are able to view the history of

the United States, listening to arrested peaceful protesters will change how we are able to view policing, and listening to sexual assault survivors will change how we are able to view gender roles and relations as well as how we perceive ourselves in gendered situations. Mark Fisher discusses the necessity of a reestablishing contingency of how society exists within his discussion of how Neoliberalism has positioned itself as non-ideological and a historical necessity in *Capitalist Realism*, “An ideological position can never be really successful until it is naturalized, and it cannot be naturalized while it is still thought of as a value rather than a fact... emancipatory politics must always destroy the appearance of a ‘natural order’, must reveal what is presented as necessary and inevitable to be a mere contingency,” (Fisher 16-7). Society could change us to accept it as natural, it could want to make us into racist, sexist, ableist, or imperialists, what the ethical encounter makes clear to us is that we must reassert that this is not the way “I” have to believe and act and it is not the way society has to be. If we are truly affected by the experiences that break past our immanence then we will come to not be able to desire without taking into account the forgotten, the marginalized, the oppressed; while we may not be able to feel the same pain, the encounter has made their existence and unexplainable humanity present and impossible to ignore.

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