An Account of Oneself

> The value of thought is measured by its distance from the continuity of the familiar.
>
> —Adorno, *Minima Moralia*

I would like to begin by considering how it might be possible to pose the question of moral philosophy, a question that has to do with conduct and, hence, with doing, within a contemporary social frame. To pose this question in this way is already to admit to a prior thesis, namely, that moral questions not only emerge in the context of social relations, but that the form these questions take changes according to context, and even that context, in some sense, inheres in the form of the question. In *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, a set of lectures given in the summer of 1963, Adorno writes, "We can probably say that moral questions have always arisen when moral norms of behaviour have ceased to be self-evident and unquestioned in the life of a community."[1] In a way, this claim seems to give an account of the conditions under which moral questions arise, but Adorno further specifies the account. There he offers a brief critique of Max Scheler, who laments the *Zersetzung* of ethical ideas, by which he means the destruction of a common and collective ethical ethos.

Adorno refuses to mourn this loss, worrying that the collective ethos is invariably a conservative one, which postulates a false unity that attempts to suppress the difficulty and discontinuity existing within any contemporary ethos. It is not that there was once a unity that subsequently has come apart, only that there was once an idealization, indeed, a nationalism, that is no longer credible, and ought not to be. As a result, Adorno cautions against the recourse to ethics as a certain kind of repression and violence. He writes:

> nothing is more degenerate than the kind of ethics or morality that survives in the shape of collective ideas even after the World Spirit has ceased to inhabit them—to use the Hegelian expression as a kind of shorthand. Once the state of human consciousness and the state of social forces of production have abandoned these collective ideas, these ideas acquire repressive and violent qualities. And what forces philosophy into the kind of reflections that we are expressing here is the element of compulsion which is to be found in traditional customs; it is this violence and evil that brings these customs [*Sitten*] into conflict with morality [*Sittlichkeit*]—and not the decline of morals of the kind lamented by the theoreticians of decadence. (*PMP*, 17)

In the first instance, Adorno makes the claim that moral questions arise only when the collective ethos has ceased to hold sway. This implies that moral questions do not have to arise on the basis of a commonly accepted ethos to qualify as such; indeed, there seems to be a tension between ethos and morality, such that a waning of the former is the condition for the waxing of the latter. In the second instance, he makes clear that although the collective ethos is no longer shared—indeed, precisely because the collective ethos, which must now be herded by quotation marks, is not commonly shared—it can impose its claim to commonality only through violent means. In this sense, the collective ethos instrumentalizes violence to maintain the appearance of its collectivity. Moreover, this ethos be-

comes violence only once it has become an anachronism. What is strange historically—and temporally—about this form of ethical violence is that although the collective ethos has become anachronistic, it has not become past; it insists itself into the present as an anachronism. The ethos refuses to become past, and violence is the way in which it imposes itself upon the present. Indeed, it not only imposes itself upon the present, but also seeks to eclipse the present—and this is precisely one of its violent effects.

Adorno uses the term *violence* in relation to ethics in the context of claims about universality. He offers yet another formulation of the emergence of morality, which is always the emergence of certain kinds of moral inquiry, of moral questioning: "the social problem of the divergence between the universal interest and the particular interest, the interests of particular individuals, is what goes to make up the problem of morality" (*PMP*, 19). What are the conditions under which this divergence takes place? He refers to a situation in which "the universal" fails to agree with or include the individual and the claim of universality itself ignores the "rights" of the individual. We can imagine, for instance, the imposition of governments on foreign countries in the name of universal principles of democracy, where the imposition of the government effectively denies the rights of the population at issue to elect its own officials. We might, along these lines, think about President Bush's proposal for the Palestinian Authority or his efforts to replace the government in Iraq. In these instances, to use Adorno's words, "the universal . . . appears as something violent and extraneous and has no substantial reality for human beings" (*PMP*, 19). Although Adorno sometimes moves abruptly between ethics and morality, he prefers the term *morality*, echoed later in *Minima Moralia*, for his project and insists that any set of maxims or rules must be appropriable by individuals "in a living way" (*PMP*, 15). Whereas one might reserve *ethics* for the broad contours of these rules and maxims, or for the relation between selves that is implied by such rules, Adorno insists that an ethical norm that fails to offer

a way to live or that turns out, within existing social conditions, to be impossible to appropriate has to become subject to critical revision (*PMP*, 19). If it ignores the existing social conditions, which are also the conditions under which any ethics might be appropriated, that ethos becomes violent.

In this first chapter of what follows, I want to indicate what I take to be important about Adorno's conception of ethical violence, although I will postpone a more systematic consideration until Chapter Three. In my introductory section, I want simply to point out the importance of his formulation for contemporary debates about moral nihilism and to show how changes in his theoretical framework are necessitated by the shifting historical character of moral inquiry itself. In a sense, this shift beyond Adorno is one he might have condoned, given his commitment to considering morality within the changing social contexts in which the need for moral inquiry emerges. The context is not exterior to the question; it conditions the form that the question will take. In this sense, the questions that characterize moral inquiry are formulated or stylized by the historical conditions that prompt them.

I take it that Adorno's critique of abstract universality as violent can be read in relation to Hegel's critique of the kind of abstract universality characteristic of The Terror. I have written about that elsewhere,[2] and wish only to remark here that the problem is not with universality as such but with an operation of universality that fails to be responsive to cultural particularity and fails to undergo a reformulation of itself in response to the social and cultural conditions it includes within its scope of applicability. When a universal precept cannot, for social reasons, be appropriated or when—indeed, for social reasons—it must be refused, the universal precept itself becomes a site of contest, a theme and an object of democratic debate. That is to say, it loses its status as a precondition of democratic debate; if it did operate there as a precondition, as a *sine qua non* of participation, it would impose its violence in the form of an exclu-

sionary foreclosure. This does not mean that universality is by definition violent. It is not. But there are conditions under which it can exercise violence. Adorno helps us to understand that its violence consists in part in its indifference to the social conditions under which a living appropriation might become possible. If no living appropriation is possible, then it would seem to follow that the precept can be undergone only as a deathly thing, a suffering imposed from an indifferent outside at the expense of freedom and particularity.

Adorno seems nearly Kierkegaardian in insisting upon the place and meaning of the existing individual and the necessary task of appropriating morality as well as opposing forms of ethical violence. But of course he cautions against the error to be found in the opposite position, when the "I" becomes understood apart from its social conditions, when it is espoused as a pure immediacy, arbitrary or accidental, detached from its social and historical conditions—which, after all, constitute the general conditions of its own emergence. He is clear that there is no morality without an "I," but pressing questions remain: In what does that "I" consist? And in what terms can it appropriate morality or, indeed, give an account of itself? He writes, for instance, "it will be obvious to you that all ideas of morality or ethical behavior must relate to an 'I' that acts" (*PMP*, 28). Yet there is no "I" that can fully stand apart from the social conditions of its emergence, no "I" that is not implicated in a set of conditioning moral norms, which, being norms, have a social character that exceeds a purely personal or idiosyncratic meaning.

The "I" does not stand apart from the prevailing matrix of ethical norms and conflicting moral frameworks. In an important sense, this matrix is also the condition for the emergence of the "I," even though the "I" is not causally induced by those norms. We cannot conclude that the "I" is simply the effect or the instrument of some prior ethos or some field of conflicting or discontinuous norms. When the "I" seeks to give an account of itself, it can start with

itself, but it will find that this self is already implicated in a social temporality that exceeds its own capacities for narration; indeed, when the "I" seeks to give an account of itself, an account that must include the conditions of its own emergence, it must, as a matter of necessity, become a social theorist.

The reason for this is that the "I" has no story of its own that is not also the story of a relation—or set of relations—to a set of norms. Although many contemporary critics worry that this means there is no concept of the subject that can serve as the ground for moral agency and moral accountability, that conclusion does not follow. The "I" is always to some extent dispossessed by the social conditions of its emergence.[3] This dispossession does not mean that we have lost the subjective ground for ethics. On the contrary, it may well be the condition for moral inquiry, the condition under which morality itself emerges. If the "I" is not at one with moral norms, this means only that the subject must deliberate upon these norms, and that part of deliberation will entail a critical understanding of their social genesis and meaning. In this sense, ethical deliberation is bound up with the operation of critique. And critique finds that it cannot go forward without a consideration of how the deliberating subject comes into being and how a deliberating subject might actually live or appropriate a set of norms. Not only does ethics find itself embroiled in the task of social theory, but social theory, if it is to yield nonviolent results, must find a living place for this "I."

There are a variety of ways to account for the emergence of the "I" from the matrix of social institutions, ways of contextualizing morality within its social conditions. Adorno tends to understand a negative dialectics to be at work when claims of collectivity turn out *not* to be collective, when claims of abstract universality turn out *not* to be universal. The divergence is always between the universal and the particular, and it becomes the condition for moral questioning. The universal not only diverges from the particular, but this very divergence is what the individual comes to experience, what becomes

for the individual the inaugural experience of morality. In this sense, Adorno's theory resonates with Nietzsche, who underscores the violence of "bad conscience," which brings the "I" into being as a consequence of a potentially annihilating cruelty. The "I" turns against itself, unleashing its morally condemning aggression against itself, and thus reflexivity is inaugurated. At least this is the Nietzschean view of bad conscience. I would suggest that Adorno alludes to such a negative view of bad conscience when he maintains that an ethics that cannot be appropriated in "a living way" by individuals under socially existing conditions "is the bad conscience of conscience" (*PMP*, 15).

We must ask, however, whether the "I" who must appropriate moral norms in a living way is not itself conditioned by norms, norms that establish the viability of the subject. It is one thing to say that a subject must be able to appropriate norms, but another to say that there must be norms that prepare a place within the ontological field for a subject. In the first instance, norms are there, at an exterior distance, and the task is to find a way of appropriating them, taking them on, establishing a living relation to them. The epistemological frame is presupposed in this encounter, one in which a subject encounters moral norms and must find his way with them. But did Adorno consider that norms also decide in advance who will and will not become a subject? Did he consider the operation of norms in the very constitution of the subject, in the stylization of its ontology and in the establishing of a legitimate site within the realm of social ontology?

Scenes of Address

> We begin with a response, a question that answers to a noise, and we do it in the dark—doing without exactly knowing, making do with speaking. Who's there, or here, and who's gone?
>
> —Thomas Keenan, *Fables of Responsibility*

For the moment, I will take leave of this discussion of Adorno, though I will return to him later to consider, not the relation that a subject has to morality, but a prior relation: the force of morality in the production of the subject. The first question is a crucial one and is not obviated by the investigation that follows, because a subject produced by morality must find his or her relation to morality. One cannot will away this paradoxical condition for moral deliberation and for the task of giving an account of oneself. Even if morality supplies a set of norms that produce a subject in his or her intelligibility, it also remains a set of norms and rules that a subject must negotiate in a living and reflective way.

In *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche offers a controversial account of how we become reflective at all about our actions and how we become positioned to give an account of what we have done. He remarks that we become conscious of ourselves only after certain injuries have been inflicted. Someone suffers as a consequence, and the suffering person or, rather, someone acting as his or her advocate in a system of justice seeks to find the cause of that suffering and asks us whether we might be that cause. It is in the interest of meting out a just punishment to the one responsible for an injurious action that the question is posed and that the subject in question comes to question him or herself. "Punishment," Nietzsche tells us, is "the making of a memory."[4] The question posits the self as a causative force, and it also models a specific mode of responsibility. In asking whether we caused such suffering, we are being asked by an established authority not only to avow a causal link between our own actions and the suffering that follows but also to take responsibility for these actions and their effects. In this context, we find ourselves in the position of having to give an account of ourselves.

We start to give an account only because we are interpellated as beings who are rendered accountable by a system of justice and punishment. This system is not there from the start, but becomes instituted over time and at great cost to the human instincts. Nietz-

sche writes that, under these conditions, people "felt unable to cope with the simplest undertakings; in this new world they no longer possessed their former guides, their regulating, unconscious, and infallible drives: they were reduced to thinking, inferring, reckoning, co-ordinating cause and effect, these unfortunate creatures; they were reduced to their 'consciousness,' their weakest and most fallible organ!" (*GM*, 84).

So I start to give an account, if Nietzsche is right, because someone has asked me to, and that someone has power delegated from an established system of justice. I have been addressed, even perhaps had an act attributed to me, and a certain threat of punishment backs up this interrogation. And so, in fearful response, I offer myself as an "I" and try to reconstruct my deeds, showing that the deed attributed to me was or was not, in fact, among them. I am either owning up to myself as the cause of such an action, qualifying my causative contribution, or defending myself against the attribution, perhaps locating the cause elsewhere. These are the parameters within which my account of myself takes place. For Nietzsche, accountability follows only upon an accusation or, minimally, an allegation, one made by someone in a position to deal out punishment if causality can be established. And we become reflective upon ourselves, accordingly, through fear and terror. Indeed, we become morally accountable as a consequence of fear and terror.

But let us consider that being addressed by another carries other valences besides fear. There may well be a desire to know and understand that is not fueled by the desire to punish, and a desire to explain and narrate that is not prompted by a terror of punishment. Nietzsche did well to understand that I begin my story of myself only in the face of a "you" who asks me to give an account. Only in the face of such a query or attribution from an other—"Was it you?"—do any of us start to narrate ourselves, or find that, for urgent reasons, we must become self-narrating beings. Of course, it is always possible to remain silent in the face of such a question, where

the silence articulates a resistance to the question: "You have no right to ask such a question," or "I will not dignify this allegation with a response," or "Even if it was me, this is not for you to know." Silence in these instances either calls into question the legitimacy of the authority invoked by the question and the questioner or attempts to circumscribe a domain of autonomy that cannot or should not be intruded upon by the questioner. The refusal to narrate remains a relation to narrative and to the scene of address. As a narrative withheld, it either refuses the relation that the inquirer presupposes or changes that relation so that the one queried refuses the one who queries.

Telling a story about oneself is not the same as giving an account of oneself. And yet we can see in the example above that the kind of narrative required in an account we give of ourselves accepts the presumption that the self has a causal relation to the suffering of others (and eventually, through bad conscience, to oneself). Not all narrative takes this form, clearly, but a narrative that responds to allegation must, from the outset, accept the possibility that the self has causal agency, even if, in a given instance, the self may not have been the cause of the suffering in question.

Giving an account thus takes a narrative form, which not only depends upon the ability to relay a set of sequential events with plausible transitions but also draws upon narrative voice and authority, being directed toward an audience with the aim of persuasion. The narrative must then establish that the self either was or was not the cause of that suffering, and so supply a persuasive medium through which to understand the causal agency of the self. The narrative does not emerge after the fact of causal agency but constitutes the prerequisite condition for any account of moral agency we might give. In this sense, narrative capacity constitutes a precondition for giving an account of oneself and assuming responsibility for one's actions through that means. Of course, one might simply "nod" or make use of another expressive gesture to acknowledge that one is

indeed the one who authored the deed in question. The "nod" functions as an expressive precondition of acknowledgment. A similar kind of expressive power is at work when one remains silent in the face of the query "Do you have anything to say for yourself?" In both examples, though, the gesture of acknowledgment makes sense only in relation to an implied story line: "Yes, I was the one who occupied the position of the causal agent in the sequence of events to which you refer."

Nietzsche's view does not fully take into account the scene of address through which responsibility is queried and then either accepted or denied. He assumes that the query is made from within a legal framework in which punishment is threatened as an equivalent injury for the injury committed in the first place. But not all forms of address originate from this system and for this reason. The system of punishment he describes is based on revenge, even when that is valorized as "justice." That system does not recognize that life entails a certain amount of suffering and injury that cannot be fully accounted for through recourse to the subject as a causal agent. Indeed, for Nietzsche aggression is coextensive with life, so that if we sought to outlaw aggression, we would effectively be trying to outlaw life itself. He writes that "life operates *essentially*, that is in its basic functions, through injury, assault, exploitation, destruction and cannot be thought of at all without this character" (*GM,* 76). "Legal conditions," he writes further on, "constitute a partial restriction on the will of life," a will that is defined by struggle. The legal effort to obliterate struggle would be, in his words, "an attempt to assassinate the future of man" (ibid.).

At stake for Nietzsche is not simply the prevalence of a morality and legal order he opposes but a coerced crafting of the "human" in opposition to life itself. His view of life, however, assumes that aggression is more primary than generosity and that concerns for justice emerge from a revenge ethic. He fails to consider the interlocutory scene in which one is asked what one has done, or a situation in

which one tries to make plain, to one who is waiting to know, what one has done, and for what reason.

For Nietzsche, the self as "cause" of an injurious action is always retroactively attributed—the doer is only belatedly attached to the deed. In fact, the doer becomes the causal agent of the deed only through a retroactive attribution that seeks to comply with a moral ontology stipulated by a legal system, one that establishes accountability and punishable offenses by locating a relevant self as a causal source of suffering. For Nietzsche, suffering exceeds any effect caused by one self or another, and though there are clearly instances when one vents aggression externally against another, causing injury or destruction, there is something "justifiable" about this suffering to the extent that it is part of life and constitutes part of the "seduction" and "vitality" of life itself. There are many reasons to quarrel with this account, and I'll make some of my own differences clear as I proceed.

Importantly, Nietzsche restricts his understanding of accountability to this juridically mediated and belated attribution. Apparently he fails to understand the other interlocutory conditions in which one is asked to give an account of oneself, focusing instead on an original aggression that he holds to be part of every human being and, indeed, coextensive with life itself. Its prosecution under a system of punishment would, in his view, eradicate this truth about life. The institution of law compels an originally aggressive human to turn that aggression "inward," to craft an inner world composed of a guilty conscience and to vent that aggression against oneself in the name of morality: "in this psychical cruelty there resides a madness of the will which is absolutely unexampled; the *will* of man to find himself guilty and reprehensible to a degree that can never be atoned for" (*GM*, 93). This aggression, which Nietzsche regards as native to every human animal and to life itself, is turned against the will and then assumes a second life, imploding to construct a conscience that generates reflexivity on the model of self-beratement. That reflexivity is the precipitate of the subject, understood as a reflexive being, one who can and does take him or herself as an object of reflection.

As I mentioned above, Nietzsche does not consider other linguistic dimensions of this situation. If I am held accountable through a framework of morality, that framework is first addressed to me, first starts to act upon me, through the address and query of another. Indeed, I come to know that framework through no other way. If I give an account of myself in response to such a query, I am implicated in a relation to the other before whom and to whom I speak. Thus, I come into being as a reflexive subject in the context of establishing a narrative account of myself when I am spoken to by someone and prompted to address myself to the one who addresses me.

In *The Psychic Life of Power*,[5] I perhaps too quickly accepted this punitive scene of inauguration for the subject. According to that view, the institution of punishment ties me to my deed, and when I am punished for having done this or that deed, I emerge as a subject of conscience and, hence, a subject who reflects upon herself in some way. This view of subject formation depends upon an account of a subject who internalizes the law or, minimally, the causal tethering of the subject to the deed for which the institution of punishment seeks compensation.

One might expect this Nietzschean account of punishment to become crucial to Foucault's account of disciplinary power in the prison. It surely was, but Foucault differs explicitly from Nietzsche by refusing to generalize the scene of punishment to account for how a reflexive subject comes about. The turning against oneself that typifies the emergence of Nietzschean bad conscience does not account for the emergence of reflexivity in Foucault. In *The Use of Pleasure*, the second volume of *The History of Sexuality*,[6] Foucault examines the conditions under which a self might take itself to be an object for reflection and cultivation, concentrating on premodern formations of the subject. Whereas Nietzsche thinks ethics can be derived from a terrorizing scene of punishment, Foucault, departing from the final reflections in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, focuses on the peculiar creativity in which morality engages and how it is, in particular, that bad

conscience becomes the means for manufacturing values. For Nietzsche, morality emerges as the terrorized response to punishment. But this terror turns out to be strangely fecund; morality and its precepts (soul, conscience, bad conscience, consciousness, self-reflection, and instrumental reasoning) are all soaked in cruelty and aggression turned back upon itself. The elaboration of a morality—a set of rules and equivalences—is the sublimated (and inverted) effect of this primary aggression turned against oneself, the idealized consequence of a turn against one's own destructiveness and, for Nietzsche, one's own life impulses.

Indeed, whereas Nietzsche considers the force of punishment to be instrumental to the internalization of rage and the consequent production of bad conscience (and other moral precepts), Foucault turns increasingly to codes of morality, understood as codes of conduct—and *not* primarily to codes of punishment—to consider how subjects are constituted in relation to such codes, which do not always rely on the violence of prohibition and its internalizing effects. Nietzsche's masterly account in *On the Genealogy of Morals* shows us how, for instance, rage and spontaneous will are internalized to produce the sphere of the "soul" as well as a sphere of morality. This process of internalization is to be understood as an inversion, a turning of primarily aggressive impulse back on itself, the signature action of bad conscience. For Foucault, reflexivity emerges in the act of taking up a relation to moral codes, but it does not rely on an account of internalization or of psychic life more generally, certainly not a reduction of morality to bad conscience.

If one reads Nietzsche's critique of morality alongside Freud's assessment of conscience in *Civilization and Its Discontents* or his account of the aggressive basis of morality in *Totem and Taboo*, one might arrive at a fully cynical view of morality and conclude that human conduct that seeks to follow norms of prescriptive value is motivated less by any desire to do good than by a terrorized fear of punishment and its injurious effects. I'll save that comparative reading for another

occasion. Here it seems important to note how much Foucault wanted to move away from this particular model and conclusion when, in the early 1980s, he decided to rethink the sphere of ethics. His interest shifted to a consideration of how certain historically established prescriptive codes compelled a certain kind of subject formation. Whereas in his earlier work, he treats the subject as an "effect" of discourse, in his later writings he nuances and refines his position as follows: The subject forms itself in relation to a set of codes, prescriptions, or norms and does so in ways that not only (a) reveal self-constitution to be a kind of *poiesis* but (b) establish self-making as part of the broader operation of critique. As I've argued elsewhere,[7] ethical self-making in Foucault is not a radical creation of the self *ex nihilo* but what he terms a "delimit[ing] of that part of the self that will form the object of his moral practice" (*UP*, 28). This work on the self, this act of delimiting, takes place within the context of a set of norms that precede and exceed the subject. These are invested with power and recalcitrance, setting the limits to what will be considered to be an intelligible formation of the subject within a given historical scheme of things. There is no making of oneself (*poiesis*) outside of a mode of subjectivation (*assujettisement*) and, hence, no self-making outside of the norms that orchestrate the possible forms that a subject may take. The practice of critique then exposes the limits of the historical scheme of things, the epistemological and ontological horizon within which subjects come to be at all. To make oneself in such a way that one exposes those limits is precisely to engage in an aesthetics of the self that maintains a critical relation to existing norms. In the 1978 lecture "What Is Critique?" Foucault writes: "Critique would insure the desubjugation of the subject in the course of what we could call, in a word, the politics of truth."[8]

In the introduction to *The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault specifies this practice of self-stylization in relation to norms when he makes clear that moral conduct is a question neither of conforming to the pre-

scriptions entailed by a given code nor of internalizing a primary prohibition or interdiction. He writes:

> for an action to be "moral," it must not be reducible to an act or a series of acts conforming to a rule, a law, or a value. Of course all moral action involves a relationship with the reality in which it is carried out, and a relationship with the self. The latter is not simply "self-awareness" but self-formation as an "ethical subject," a process in which the individual delimits that part of himself that will form the object of his moral practice, defines his position relative to the precept he will follow, and decides on a certain mode of being that will serve as his moral goal. And this requires him to act upon himself, to monitor, test, improve, and transform himself. There is no specific moral action that does not refer to a unified moral conduct; no moral conduct that does not call for the forming of oneself as an ethical subject; and no forming of the ethical subject without "modes of subjectivation" and an "as-cetics" or "practices of the self" that support them. Moral action is indissociable from these forms of self-activity. (*UP*, 28)

For Foucault, as for Nietzsche, morality redeploys a creative impulse. Nietzsche laments that the internalization of morality takes place through debilitation of the will, even though he understands that this internalization constitutes "the womb of all ideal and imaginative phenomena" (*GM*, 87), which would include, presumably, his own philosophical writing, together with this very account.

For Foucault, morality is inventive, requires inventiveness, and even, as we shall consider later, comes at a certain price. However, the "I" engendered by morality is not conceived as a self-berating psychic agency. From the outset, what relation the self will take to itself, how it will craft itself in response to an injunction, how it will form itself, and what labor it will perform upon itself is a challenge, if not an open question. The injunction compels the act of self-making or self-crafting, which means that it does not act unilaterally

or deterministically upon the subject. It sets the stage for the subject's self-crafting, which always takes place in relation to an imposed set of norms. The norm does not produce the subject as its necessary effect, nor is the subject fully free to disregard the norm that inaugurates its reflexivity; one invariably struggles with conditions of one's own life that one could not have chosen. If there is an operation of agency or, indeed, freedom in this struggle, it takes place in the context of an enabling and limiting field of constraint. This ethical agency is neither fully determined nor radically free. Its struggle or primary dilemma is to be produced by a world, even as one must produce oneself in some way. This struggle with the unchosen conditions of one's life, a struggle—an agency—is also made possible, paradoxically, by the persistence of this primary condition of unfreedom.

Whereas many critics have claimed that the view of the subject proffered by Foucault—and other poststructuralists—undermines the capacity to conduct ethical deliberations and to ground human agency, Foucault turns both to agency and to deliberation in new ways in his so-called ethical writings and offers a reformulation of both that deserves a serious consideration. In the final chapter, I'll analyze more closely his attempt to provide an account of himself. Here I would like to turn to the more general question: Does the postulation of a subject who is not self-grounding, that is, whose conditions of emergence can never fully be accounted for, undermine the possibility of responsibility and, in particular, of giving an account of oneself?

If it is really true that we are, as it were, divided, ungrounded, or incoherent from the start, will it be impossible to ground a notion of personal or social responsibility? I will argue otherwise by showing how a theory of subject formation that acknowledges the limits of self-knowledge can serve a conception of ethics and, indeed, responsibility. If the subject is opaque to itself, not fully translucent and knowable to itself, it is not thereby licensed to do what it wants or

to ignore its obligations to others. The contrary is surely true. The opacity of the subject may be a consequence of its being conceived as a relational being, one whose early and primary relations are not always available to conscious knowledge. Moments of unknowingness about oneself tend to emerge in the context of relations to others, suggesting that these relations call upon primary forms of relationality that are not always available to explicit and reflective thematization. If we are formed in the context of relations that become partially irrecoverable to us, then that opacity seems built into our formation and follows from our status as beings who are formed in relations of dependency.

This postulation of a primary opacity to the self that follows from formative relations has a specific implication for an ethical bearing toward the other. Indeed, if it is precisely by virtue of one's relations to others that one is opaque to oneself, and if those relations to others are the venue for one's ethical responsibility, then it may well follow that it is precisely by virtue of the subject's opacity to itself that it incurs and sustains some of its most important ethical bonds.

In the rest of this chapter, I will begin by examining Foucault's later theory of subject formation and will consider the limitations one encounters when one tries to use it to think the other. I will then proceed to a post-Hegelian account of recognition that seeks to establish the social basis for giving an account of oneself. In this context, I will consider the critique of a Hegelian model of recognition offered by Adriana Cavarero, a feminist philosopher who draws on the work of Levinas and Arendt.[9] In Chapter Two, I will turn to psychoanalysis and to the limits the unconscious imposes on the narrative reconstruction of a life. Although we are compelled to give an account of our various selves, the structural conditions of that account will turn out to make a full such giving impossible. The singular body to which a narrative refers cannot be captured by a full narration, not only because the body has a formative history that remains irrecoverable by reflection, but because primary relations are

formative in ways that produce a necessary opacity in our under-
standing of ourselves. An account of oneself is always given to an-
other, whether conjured or existing, and this other establishes the
scene of address as a more primary ethical relation than a reflexive
effort to give an account of oneself. Moreover, the very terms by
which we give an account, by which we make ourselves intelligible
to ourselves and to others, are not of our making. They are social in
character, and they establish social norms, a domain of unfreedom
and substitutability within which our "singular" stories are told.

I make eclectic use of various philosophers and critical theorists
in this inquiry. Not all of their positions are compatible with one
another, and I do not attempt to synthesize them here. Although
synthesis is not my aim, I do want to maintain that each theory
suggests something of ethical importance that follows from the limits
that condition any effort one might make to give an account of
oneself. Following from this, I want to argue that what we often
consider to be ethical "failure" may well have an ethical valence and
importance that has not been rightly adjudicated by those who too
quickly equate poststructuralism with moral nihilism.

In Chapter Three, I consider diachronic and synchronic efforts to
establish the emergence of the subject, including the ethical implica-
tions of these accounts of subject formation. I also study Adorno's
contribution to a theory of responsibility that can negotiate between
the so-called human and inhuman dimensions of ethical dispositions,
examining how a critical politics is related to an ethics and, indeed,
a morality that at times requires a first-person account of oneself. I
hope to show that morality is neither a symptom of its social condi-
tions nor a site of transcendence of them, but rather is essential to
the determination of agency and the possibility of hope. With the
help of Foucault's self-criticism, it may be possible to show that the
question of ethics emerges precisely at the limits of our schemes of
intelligibility, the site where we ask ourselves what it might mean to
continue in a dialogue where no common ground can be assumed,

where one is, at it were, at the limits of what one knows yet still under the demand to offer and receive acknowledgment: to someone else who is there to be addressed and whose address is there to be received.

Foucaultian Subjects

In Foucault's account of self-constitution, a question that emerges centrally in his work of the 1980s, a regime of truth offers the terms that make self-recognition possible. These terms are outside the subject to some degree, but they are also presented as the available norms through which self-recognition can take place, so that what I can "be," quite literally, is constrained in advance by a regime of truth that decides what will and will not be a recognizable form of being. Although the regime of truth decides in advance what form recognition can take, it does not fully constrain this form. Indeed, *decide* may be too strong a word, since the regime of truth offers a framework for the scene of recognition, delineating who will qualify as a subject of recognition and offering available norms for the act of recognition. In Foucault's view, there is always a relation to this regime, a mode of self-crafting that takes place in the context of the norms at issue and, specifically, negotiates an answer to the question of who the "I" will be in relation to these norms. In this sense, we are not deterministically decided by norms, although they do provide the framework and the point of reference for any set of decisions we subsequently make. This does not mean that a given regime of truth sets an invariable framework for recognition; it means only that it is in relation to this framework that recognition takes place or the norms that govern recognition are challenged and transformed.

His point, however, is not only that there is always a relation to such norms, but that any relation to the regime of truth will at the same time be a relation to myself. An operation of critique cannot take place without this reflexive dimension. To call into question a

regime of truth, where that regime of truth governs subjectivation, is to call into question the truth of myself and, indeed, to question my ability to tell the truth about myself, to give an account of myself.

Thus if I question the regime of truth, I question, too, the regime through which being, and my own ontological status, is allocated. Critique is not merely *of* a given social practice or a certain horizon of intelligibility within which practices and institutions appear, it also implies that I come into question for myself. Self-questioning becomes an ethical consequence of critique for Foucault, as he makes clear in "What Is Critique?" It also turns out that self-questioning of this sort involves putting oneself at risk, imperiling the very possibility of being recognized by others, since to question the norms of recognition that govern what I might be, to ask what they leave out, what they might be compelled to accommodate, is, in relation to the present regime, to risk unrecognizability as a subject or at least to become an occasion for posing the questions of who one is (or can be) and whether or not one is recognizable.

These questions imply at least two kinds of inquiry for an ethical philosophy. First, what are these norms, to which my very being is given over, which have the power to install me or, indeed, to disinstall me as a recognizable subject? Second, where and who is this other, and can the notion of the other comprise the frame of reference and normative horizon that hold and confer my potential for becoming a recognizable subject? It seems right to fault Foucault for not making more room explicitly for the other in his consideration of ethics. Perhaps this is because the dyadic scene of self and other cannot describe adequately the social workings of normativity that condition both subject production and intersubjective exchange. If we conclude that Foucault's failure to think the other is decisive, we have perhaps overlooked the fact that the very being of the self is dependent, not just on the existence of the other in its singularity (as Levinas would have it), but also on the social dimension of normativity that governs the scene of recognition.[10] This social dimension of

normativity precedes and conditions any dyadic exchange, even though it seems that we make contact with that sphere of normativity precisely in the context of such proximate exchanges.

The norms by which I recognize another or, indeed, myself are not mine alone. They function to the extent that they are social, exceeding every dyadic exchange that they condition. Their sociality, however, can be understood neither as a structuralist totality nor as a transcendental or quasi-transcendental invariability. Some would doubtless argue that norms must already be in place for recognition to become possible, and there is surely truth in such a claim. It is also true that certain practices of recognition or, indeed, certain breakdowns in the practice of recognition mark a site of rupture within the horizon of normativity and implicitly call for the institution of new norms, putting into question the givenness of the prevailing normative horizon. The normative horizon within which I see the other or, indeed, within which the other sees and listens and knows and recognizes is also subject to a critical opening.

It will not do, then, to collapse the notion of the other into the sociality of norms and claim that the other is implicitly present in the norms by which recognition is conferred. Sometimes the very unrecognizability of the other brings about a crisis in the norms that govern recognition. If and when, in an effort to confer or to receive a recognition that fails again and again, I call into question the normative horizon within which recognition takes place, this questioning is part of the desire for recognition, a desire that can find no satisfaction, and whose unsatisfiability establishes a critical point of departure for the interrogation of available norms.

In Foucault's view, this opening calls into question the limits of established regimes of truth, and there a certain risking of the self becomes, he claims, the sign of virtue.[11] What he does not say is that sometimes calling into question the regime of truth by which my own truth is established is motivated by the desire to recognize another or be recognized by one. The impossibility of doing so within

the norms available to me compels me to adopt a critical relation to those norms. For Foucault, the regime of truth comes into question because "I" cannot recognize myself, or will not recognize myself, within the terms that are made available to me. In an effort to escape or overcome the terms by which subjectivation takes place, my struggle with norms is my own. His question effectively remains "Who can I be, given the regime of truth that determines ontology for me?" He does not ask the question "Who are you?" nor does he trace the way in which a critical perspective on norms might be elaborated starting out from either of those questions. Before we consider the consequences of this occlusion, let me suggest one final point about Foucault, although I will return to him later.

In asking the ethical question "How ought I to treat another?" I am immediately caught up in a realm of social normativity, since the other only appears to me, only functions as an other for me, if there is a frame within which I can see and apprehend the other in her separateness and exteriority. So, though I might think of the ethical relation as dyadic or, indeed, as presocial, I am caught up not only in the sphere of normativity but in the problematic of power when I pose the ethical question in its directness and simplicity: "How ought I to treat you?" If the "I" and the "you" must first come into being, and if a normative frame is necessary for this emergence and encounter, then norms work not only to direct my conduct but to condition the possible emergence of an encounter between myself and the other.

The first-person perspective assumed by the ethical question, as well as the direct address to a "you," are disoriented by this fundamental dependency of the ethical sphere on the social. Whether or not the other is singular, the other is recognized and confers recognition through a set of norms that govern recognizability. So, whereas the other may be singular, if not radically personal, the norms are to some extent impersonal and indifferent, and they introduce a disorientation of perspective for the subject in the midst of recognition

as an encounter. If I understand myself to be conferring recognition on you, for instance, then I take seriously that the recognition comes from me. But the moment I realize that the terms by which I confer recognition are not mine alone, that I did not single-handedly devise or craft them, I am, as it were, dispossessed by the language that I offer. In a sense, I submit to a norm of recognition when I offer recognition to you, which means that the "I" is not offering this recognition from its own private resources. Indeed, it seems that the "I" is subjected to the norm at the moment it makes such an offering, so that the "I" becomes an instrument of that norm's agency. Thus the "I" seems invariably *used* by the norm to the degree that the "I" tries to use the norm. Though I thought I was having a relation to "you," I find that I am caught up in a struggle with norms. But could it also be true that I would not be in this struggle with norms if it were not for a desire to offer recognition to you? How do we understand this desire?

Post-Hegelian Queries:

> I can only recognize myself recognized by the other to the extent that this recognition of the other alters me: it is desire, it is what trembles in desire.
>
> —Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Restlessness of the Negative*

Perhaps the example I have just considered is misleading because, as Hegel would have it, recognition cannot be unilaterally given. In the moment that I give it, I am potentially given it, and the form in which I offer it is potentially given to me. This implied reciprocity is noted in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* when, in the section entitled "Lordship and Bondage," the first self-consciousness sees that it cannot have a unilateral effect on the other self-consciousness. Since they are structurally similar, the action of the one implies the action of the other. Self-consciousness learns this lesson first in the context of aggression toward the other, in a vain effort to destroy the structural similarity between the two and restore itself to a sovereign

position: "this action of the one has itself the double significance of being both its own action and the action of the other as well. . . . Each sees the *other* do the same as it does; each does itself what it demands of the other, and therefore also does what it does only in so far as the other does the same."[12]

Similarly, when recognition becomes possible between these two vying subjects, it can never elude the structural condition of implicit reciprocity. One might say, then, that I can never offer recognition in the Hegelian sense as a pure offering, since I am receiving it, at least potentially and structurally, in the moment and in the act of giving. We might ask, as Levinas surely has of the Hegelian position, what kind of gift this is that returns to me so quickly, that never really leaves my hands. Does recognition, as Hegel argues, consist in a reciprocal act whereby I recognize that the other is structured in the same way I am? And do I recognize that the other also makes, or can make, this recognition of sameness? Or is there perhaps another encounter with alterity here that is irreducible to sameness? If it is the latter, how are we to understand this alterity?

The Hegelian other is always found outside; at least, it is *first* found outside and only later recognized to be constitutive of the subject. This has led some critics of Hegel to conclude that the Hegelian subject effects a wholesale assimilation of what is external into a set of features internal to itself, that its characteristic gesture is one of *appropriation* and its style that of imperialism. Other readings of Hegel, however, insist that the relation to the other is ecstatic,[13] that the "I" repeatedly finds itself outside itself, and that nothing can put an end to the repeated upsurge of this exteriority that is, paradoxically, my own. I am, as it were, always other to myself, and there is no final moment in which my return to myself takes place. In fact, if we are to follow *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, I am invariably transformed by the encounters I undergo; recognition becomes the process by which I become other than what I was and so cease to be able to return to what I was. There is, then, a constitutive loss in the

process of recognition, since the "I" is transformed through the act of recognition. Not all of its past is gathered and known in the act of recognition; the act alters the organization of that past and its meaning at the same time that it transforms the present of the one who receives recognition. Recognition is an act in which the "return to self" becomes impossible for another reason as well. An encounter with an other effects a transformation of the self from which there is no return. What is recognized about a self in the course of this exchange is that the self is the sort of being for whom staying inside itself proves impossible. One is compelled and comported *outside oneself*; one finds that the only way to know oneself is through a mediation that takes place outside of oneself, exterior to oneself, by virtue of a convention or a norm that one did not make, in which one cannot discern oneself as an author or an agent of one's own making. In this sense, then, the Hegelian subject of recognition is one for whom a vacillation between loss and ecstasy is inevitable. The possibility of the "I," of speaking and knowing the "I," resides in a perspective that dislocates the first-person perspective it conditions.

The perspective that both conditions and disorients me from within the very possibility of my own perspective is not reducible to the perspective of the other, since this perspective also governs the possibility of my recognizing the other, and of the other's recognizing me. We are not mere dyads on our own, since our exchange is conditioned and mediated by language, by conventions, by a sedimentation of norms that are social in character and that exceed the perspective of those involved in the exchange. So how are we to understand the impersonal perspective by which our personal encounter is occasioned and disoriented?

Although Hegel is sometimes faulted for understanding recognition as a dyadic structure, we can see that within the *Phenomenology* the struggle for recognition is not the last word. It is important to see that the struggle for recognition as it is staged in the *Phenomenology* reveals the inadequacy of the dyad as a frame of reference for under-

standing social life. After all, what eventually follows from this scene is a system of customs (*Sittlichkeit*) and hence a social account of the norms by which reciprocal recognition might be sustained in ways that are more stable than either the life and death struggle or the system of bondage would imply.

The dyadic exchange refers to a set of norms that exceed the perspectives of those engaged in the struggle for recognition. When we ask what makes recognition possible, we find that it cannot merely be the other who is able to know and to recognize me as possessing a special talent or capacity, since that other will also have to rely, if only implicitly, upon certain criteria to establish what will and will not be recognizable about the self to anyone, a framework for seeing and judging who I am as well. In this sense, the other confers recognition—and we have yet to know precisely in what that consists—primarily by virtue of special internal capacities to discern who I may be, to read my face. If my face is readable at all, it becomes so only by entering into a visual frame that conditions its readability. If some can "read" me when others cannot, is it only because those who can read me have internal talents that others lack? Or is it that a certain practice of reading becomes possible in relation to certain frames and images that over time produce what we call "capacity"? For instance, if one is to respond ethically to a human face, there must first be a frame for the human, one that can include any number of variations as ready instances. But given how contested the visual representation of the 'human' is, it would appear that our capacity to respond to a face as a human face is conditioned and mediated by frames of reference that are variably humanizing and dehumanizing.

The possibility of an ethical response to the face thus requires a normativity of the visual field: there is already not only an epistemological frame within which the face appears, but an operation of power as well, since only by virtue of certain kinds of anthropocentric dispositions and cultural frames will a given face seem to be

a human face to any one of us.[14] After all, under what conditions do some individuals acquire a face, a legible and visible face, and others do not? There is a language that frames the encounter, and embedded in that language is a set of norms concerning what will and will not constitute recognizability. This is Foucault's point and, in a way, his supplement to Hegel when he asks, "What can I become, given the contemporary order of being?" In "What Is Critique?" he writes, "What, therefore, am 'I,' I who belong to this humanity, perhaps to this piece of it, at this point in time, at this instant of humanity which is subjected to the power of truth in general and truths in particular?"[15] He understands that this "order" conditions the possibility of his becoming, and that a regime of truth, in his words, constrains what will and will not constitute the truth of his self, the truth he offers about himself, the truth by which he might be known and become recognizably human, the account he might give of himself.

"Who Are You?"

> You don't know me, anonymity insists. Now what?
>
> —Leigh Gilmore, *The Limits of Autobiography*

Though the social theory of recognition insists upon the impersonal operation of the norm in constituting the intelligibility of the subject, we nevertheless come into contact with these norms mainly through proximate and living exchanges, in the modes by which we are addressed and asked to take up the question of who we are and what our relation to the other ought to be. Given that these norms act upon us in the context of being addressed, the problem of singularity might provide a starting point for understanding the specific occasions of address through which these norms are appropriated in a living morality. In a Levinasian—though perhaps more decidedly Arendtian—vein, Adriana Cavarero argues that the question to ask

is not "what" we are, as if the task were simply to fill in the content of our personhood. The question is not primarily a reflexive one, one that we pose to ourselves, as it is for Foucault, when he asks "What can I become?" For her, the very structure of address through which the question is posed gives us a clue to understanding its significance. The question most central to recognition is a direct one, and it is addressed to the other: "Who are you?" This question assumes that there is an other before us whom we do not know and cannot fully apprehend, one whose uniqueness and nonsubstitutability set a limit to the model of reciprocal recognition offered within the Hegelian scheme and to the possibility of knowing another more generally.

Cavarero underscores the kind of action that this speech act performs, grounding herself in an Arendtian conception of the social, which she mines for its ethical import. To this end, she cites Arendt's *Human Condition*: "Action and speech are so closely related because the primordial and specifically human act must at the same time answer to the question asked to every newcomer: 'who are you?'"[16]

In *Relating Narratives*, Cavarero offers a radically counter-Nietzschean approach to ethics in which, she claims, the question of the "who" engages the possibility of altruism. By the "question of the who" she does not mean the question "Who did this to whom?" that is, the question of strict moral accountability. Rather, it is a question that affirms that there is an other who is not fully known or knowable to me. In her chapter 2, Cavarero argues that Arendt focuses on a politics of "the who" in order to establish a relational politics, one in which the exposure and vulnerability of the other makes a primary ethical claim upon me (20–29).

In stark contrast to the Nietzschean view that life is essentially bound up with destruction and suffering, Cavarero argues that we are beings who are, of necessity, *exposed* to one another in our vulnerability and singularity, and that our political situation consists in part in learning how best to handle—and to honor—this constant and

necessary exposure. In a sense, this theory of the "outside" to the subject radicalizes the ecstatic trend in the Hegelian position. In her view, I am not, as it were, an interior subject, closed upon myself, solipsistic, posing questions of myself alone. I exist in an important sense for you, and by virtue of you. If I have lost the conditions of address, if I have no "you" to address, then I have lost "myself." In her view, one can tell an autobiography only to an other, and one can reference an "I" only in relation to a "you": without the "you," my own story becomes impossible.

For Cavarero, this position implies a critique of conventional ways of understanding sociality, and in this sense she reverses the progression we saw in Hegel. Whereas *The Phenomenology of Spirit* moves from the scenario of the dyad toward a social theory of recognition, for Cavarero it is necessary to ground the social in the dyadic encounter. She writes:

> The "you" comes before the *we*, before the plural *you* and before the *they*. Symptomatically, the "you" is a term that is not at home in modern and contemporary developments of ethics and politics. The "you" is ignored by individualistic doctrines, which are too preoccupied with praising the rights of the *I*, and the "you" is masked by a Kantian form of ethics that is only capable of staging an *I* that addresses itself as a familiar "you." Neither does the "you" find a home in the schools of thought to which individualism is opposed—these schools reveal themselves for the most part to be affected by a moralistic vice, which, in order to avoid falling into the decadence of the *I*, avoids the contiguity of the *you*, and privileges collective, plural pronouns. Indeed, many revolutionary movements (which range from traditional communism to the feminism of sisterhood) seem to share a curious linguistic code based on the intrinsic morality of pronouns. The *we* is always positive, the *plural you* is a possible ally, the *they* has the face of an antagonist, the *I* is unseemly, and the *you* is, of course, superfluous. (90–91)

For Cavarero, the "I" encounters not only this or that attribute of the other, but the fact of this other as fundamentally exposed, visible, seen, existing in a bodily way and of necessity in a domain of appearance. *This* exposure that I am constitutes, as it were, my singularity. I cannot will it away, for it is a feature of my very corporeality and, in this sense, of my life. Yet it is not that over which I can have control. One might borrow from Heideggerian parlance to explain Cavarero's view and say that no one can be exposed for me, and I am, in this way, nonsubstitutable. But does the social theory derived from Hegel, in its insistence on the impersonal perspective of the norm, counter by establishing my substitutability after all? Am I, in relation to the norm, substitutable? And yet, as a being constituted bodily in the public sphere, argues Cavarero, I am exposed and singular, and this is as much a part of my publicity, if not my sociality, as is the way I become recognizable through the operation of norms.

Cavarero's argument both undercuts the Nietzschean account of aggression and punishment and limits the claims of Hegelian sociality upon us; it also offers direction for a different theory of recognition. There are at least two points to be made here. The first has to do with our fundamental dependency on the other, the fact that we cannot exist without addressing the other and without being addressed by the other, and that there is no wishing away our fundamental sociality. (You can see that I resort here to the plural *we*, even though Cavarero advises against it, precisely because I am not convinced that we must abandon it.) The second point limits the first. No matter how much we each desire recognition and require it, we are not therefore the same as the other, and not everything counts as recognition in the same way. Although I have argued that no one can recognize another simply by virtue of special psychological or critical skills and that norms condition the possibility of recognition, it still matters that we feel more properly recognized by some people than we do by others. And this difference cannot be explained solely through recourse to the notion that the norm operates variably. Ca-

varero argues for an irreducibility to each of our beings that becomes clear in the distinct stories we have to tell, so that any effort to identify fully with a collective "we" will necessarily fail. As Cavarero puts it:

> what we have called an altruistic ethics of relation does not support empathy, identification, or confusions. Rather this ethic desires a *you* that is truly an other, in her uniqueness and distinction. No matter how much you are similar and consonant, says this ethic, your story is never my story. No matter how much the larger traits of our life-stories are similar, I still do not recognize myself *in* you and, even less, in the collective *we*. (92)

The uniqueness of the other is exposed to me, but mine is also exposed to her. This does not mean we are the same, but only that we are bound to one another by what differentiates us, namely, our singularity. The notion of singularity is very often bound up with existential romanticism and with a claim of authenticity, but I gather that, precisely because it is without content, my singularity has some properties in common with yours and so is, to some extent, a substitutable term. In other words, even as Cavarero argues that singularity sets a limit to substitutability, she also argues that singularity has no defining content other than the irreducibility of exposure, of being *this* body exposed to a publicity that is variably and alternately intimate and anonymous. Hegel analyzes the "this" in the *Phenomenology*, pointing out that it never specifies without generalizing, that the term, in its very substitutability, undercuts the specificity it seeks to indicate: "When I say: 'a single thing,' I am really saying what it is from a wholly universal point of view, for everything is a single thing; and likewise 'this thing' is anything you like. If we describe it more exactly as 'this bit of paper,' then each and every bit of paper is 'this bit of paper,' and I have only uttered the universal all the time."[17] Insofar as "this" fact of singularizing exposure, which follows from bodily existence, is one that can be reiterated endlessly, it constitutes

a collective condition, characterizing us all equally, not only reinstall-ing the "we," but also establishing a structure of substitutability at the core of singularity.

One may think that this conclusion is too happily Hegelian, but I would like to interrogate it further, since I think it has ethical consequences for the problem of giving an account of oneself for another. This exposure, for instance, cannot be narrated. I cannot give an account of it, even though it structures any account I might give. The norms by which I seek to make myself recognizable are not fully mine. They are not born with me; the temporality of their emergence does not coincide with the temporality of my own life. So, in living my life as a recognizable being, I live a vector of tempo-ralities, one of which has my death as its terminus, but another of which consists in the social and historical temporality of the norms by which my recognizability is established and maintained. These norms are, as it were, indifferent to me, to my life and my death. Because norms emerge, transform, and persist according to a tempo-rality that is not the same as the temporality of my life, and because they also in some ways sustain my life in its intelligibility, the tempo-rality of norms interrupts the time of my living. Paradoxically, it is this interruption, this disorientation of the perspective of my life, this instance of an indifference in sociality, that nevertheless sustains my living.

Foucault put this point dramatically in his essay "Politics and the Study of Discourse" when he wrote, "I know as well as anyone how 'thankless' such research can be, how irritating it is to approach dis-courses not by way of the gentle, silent and intimate consciousness which expresses itself through them, but through an obscure set of anonymous rules." He continues, "Must I suppose that, in my dis-course, it is not my own survival that is at stake? And that, by speak-ing, I do not exorcise my death, but establish it; or rather, that I suppress all interiority, and yield my utterance to an outside which is so indifferent to my life, so *neutral*, that it knows no difference

between my life and my death?" These rhetorical questions mark a sense of inevitability in the face of the fact that one's own life cannot be redeemed or extended through discourse (even though they tacitly praise discourse as that which finally has a life that is more robust than our own). For those who believe that language houses an intimate subjectivity whose death is overcome there as well, Foucault writes, "they cannot bear—and one can understand them a little—to be told: discourse is not life; its time is not yours."[18]

So the account of myself that I give in discourse never fully expresses or carries this living self. My words are taken away as I give them, interrupted by the time of a discourse that is not the same as the time of my life. This "interruption" contests the sense of the account's being grounded in myself alone, since the indifferent structures that enable my living belong to a sociality that exceeds me.

Indeed, this interruption and dispossession of my perspective *as mine* can take place in different ways. There is the operation of a norm, invariably social, that conditions what will and will not be a recognizable account, exemplified in the fact that I am used by the norm precisely to the degree that I use it. And there can be no account of myself that does not, to some extent, conform to norms that govern the humanly recognizable, or that negotiate these terms in some ways, with various risks following from that negotiation. But, as I will try to explain later, it is also the case that I give an account *to* someone, and that the addressee of the account, real or imaginary, also functions to interrupt the sense that this account of myself is my own. If it is an account of myself, and it is an accounting *to* someone, then I am compelled to give the account away, to send it off, to be dispossessed of it at the very moment that I establish it as *my* account. No account takes place outside the structure of address, even if the addressee remains implicit and unnamed, anonymous and unspecified. The address establishes the account as an account, and so the account is completed only on the occasion when it is effectively exported and expropriated from the domain of what

is my own. It is only in dispossession that I can and do give any account of myself.

If I try to give an account of myself, if I try to make myself recognizable and understandable, then I might begin with a narrative account of my life. But this narrative will be disoriented by what is not mine, or not mine alone. And I will, to some degree, have to make myself substitutable in order to make myself recognizable. The narrative authority of the "I" must give way to the perspective and temporality of a set of norms that contest the singularity of my story.

We can surely still tell our stories, and there will be many reasons to do precisely that. But we will not be able to be very authoritative when we try to give a full account with a narrative structure. The "I" can tell neither the story of its own emergence nor the conditions of its own possibility without bearing witness to a state of affairs to which one could not have been present, which are prior to one's own emergence as a subject who can know, and so constitute a set of origins that one can narrate only at the expense of authoritative knowledge. Narration is surely possible under such circumstances, but it is, as Thomas Keenan has pointed out, surely fabulous.[19] Fictional narration in general requires no referent to work as narrative, and we might say that the irrecoverability and foreclosure of the referent is the very condition of possibility for an account of myself, if that account is to take narrative form. The irrecoverability of an original referent does not destroy narrative; it produces it "in a fictional direction," as Lacan would say. So to be more precise, I would have to say that I can tell the story of my origin and I can even tell it again and again, in several ways. But the story of my origin I tell is not one for which I am accountable, and it cannot establish my accountability. At least, let's hope not, since, over wine usually, I tell it in various ways, and the accounts are not always consistent with one another. Indeed, it may be that to have an origin means precisely to have several possible versions of the origin—I take it that this is part of what Nietzsche meant by the operation of genealogy. Any

one of those is a possible narrative, but of no single one can I say with certainty that it alone is true.

Indeed, I can try to give narrative form to certain conditions of my emergence, try, as it were, to tell a story about what meanings "exposure to the other" may have had for me, what it was to be this emergent body in that intimate or public sphere, try to tell a story about norms in discourse as well—when and where I learned them, what I thought of them, which ones became incorporated at once, and in what way. At this point the story that I tell, one that may even have a certain necessity, cannot assume that its referent adequately takes narrative form,[20] since the exposure I seek to narrate is also the precondition of that narration, a facticity, as it were, that cannot yield to narrative form. And if I tell the story to a "you," that other is implied not only as an internal feature of the narrative but also as an irreducibly exterior condition and trajectory of the mode of address.

There are, then, several ways in which the account I may give of myself has the potential to break apart and to become undermined. My efforts to give an account of myself founder in part because I *address* my account, and in addressing my account I am exposed to you. Can I take account of this very exposure implied by address in the course of my narrative? This exposure takes place in spoken language and, in a different way, in written address as well, but I am not sure I can give an account of it.[21] Is it there, as it were, as a condition of my narration, one I cannot fully thematize within any narrative I might provide, one that does not fully yield to a sequential account? There is a bodily referent here, a condition of me that I can point to, but that I cannot narrate precisely, even though there are no doubt stories about where my body went and what it did and did not do. The stories do not capture the body to which they refer. Even the history of this body is not fully narratable. To be a body is, in some sense, to be deprived of having a full recollection of one's life. There is a history to my body of which I can have no recollection.

If there is, then, a part of bodily experience as well—of what is indexed by the word *exposure*—that cannot be narrated but constitutes the bodily condition of one's narrative account of oneself, then exposure constitutes one among several vexations in the effort to give a narrative account of oneself. There is (1) a non-narrativizable *exposure* that establishes my singularity, and there are (2) *primary relations*, irrecoverable, that form lasting and recurrent impressions in the history of my life, and so (3) a history that establishes my *partial opacity* to myself. Lastly, there are (4) *norms* that facilitate my telling about myself but that I do not author and that render me substitutable at the very moment that I seek to establish the history of my singularity. This last dispossession in language is intensified by the fact that I give an account of myself to someone, so that the narrative structure of my account is superseded by (5) the *structure of address* in which it takes place.

Exposure, like the operation of the norm, constitutes the conditions of my own emergence as a reflective being, one with memory, one who might be said to have a story to tell (these postulates from both Nietzsche and Freud can be accepted, even if the formative role of punishment and morality in their accounts is disputed). Accordingly, I cannot be present to a temporality that precedes my own capacity for self-reflection, and whatever story about myself that I might give has to take this constitutive incommensurability into consideration. It constitutes the way in which my story arrives belatedly, missing some of the constitutive beginnings and the preconditions of the life it seeks to narrate. This means that my narrative begins *in media res*, when many things have already taken place to make me and my story possible in language. I am always recuperating, reconstructing, and I am left to fictionalize and fabulate origins I cannot know. In the making of the story, I create myself in new form, instituting a narrative "I" that is superadded to the "I" whose past life I seek to tell. The narrative "I" effectively adds to the story every time it tries to speak, since the "I" appears again as the narrative perspective, and

this addition cannot be fully narrated at the moment in which it provides the perspectival anchor for the narration in question.

My account of myself is partial, haunted by that for which I can devise no definitive story. I cannot explain exactly why I have emerged in this way, and my efforts at narrative reconstruction are always undergoing revision. There is that in me and of me for which I can give no account. But does this mean that I am not, in the moral sense, accountable for who I am and for what I do? If I find that, despite my best efforts, a certain opacity persists and I cannot make myself fully accountable to you, is this ethical failure? Or is it a failure that gives rise to another ethical disposition in the place of a full and satisfying notion of narrative accountability? Is there in this affirmation of partial transparency a possibility for acknowledging a relationality that binds me more deeply to language and to you than I previously knew? And is the relationality that conditions and blinds this "self" not, precisely, an indispensable resource for ethics?