AFTER VIRTUE, NARCISSISM

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This book is based on the hypothesis that the psychoanalytic theory of narcissism can help us better understand certain basic philosophical issues, by enabling us to distinguish fruitful from sterile modes of philosophical speculation. In order to establish that this is a hypothesis worth considering, the first part of this chapter will be devoted to a comparison of Alasdair MacIntyre's *After* Virtue with Christopher Lasch's *The Culture of Narcissism* and *The* Minimal *Self.* If we can show that the theory of narcissism, and more generally, the psychoanalytic thought associated with it (the topic of chapter 2), can illuminate aspects of MacIntyre's work, then we will have demonstrated the potential of the theory of narcissism to illuminate philosophical issues.[1] In subsequent chapters we will examine the philosophies of Plato's Socrates, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, and Jurgen Habermas from this perspective. Although each chapter stands on its own as a case study, the theory of narcissism is used to explore in new ways what these thinkers share, as well as what divides them. We will also examine which theorist best integrates the insights of the theory of narcissism.

MacIntyre maintains that we do not fully understand the claims of any

(moral) philosophy "until we have spelled out what its social embodiment would be."[2] To this a perceptive critic adds: "Neither have we fully understood it until we have seen the kind of social criticism to which it gives rise."[3] The theory of narcissism adds a further qualification. Understanding the ideal social embodiment of a philosophy, as well as criticizing aspects of current society that prevent this philosophy's embodiment, requires an understanding of the characteristic self of each of these societies: the ideal society embodied by the philosophy and the real society that stands in the way. In particular, we must ask whether the ideal and the real societies foster mature or immature solutions to the self's longing for narcissistic wholeness and perfection. Of course, the longings of the self are not the primary determinant of society and philosophy. Self, society, and philosophy are interrelated in complex ways. However, the self cannot be left out of the discussion, and a persistent issue faced by the self is how it can achieve narcissistic wholeness and perfection.

But Isn't Narcissism a Psychological Disorder?

The *Diagnostic and Statistical* Manual *of* Mental *Disorders* of the American Psychiatric Association (DSM-III) characterizes narcissism as a personality disorder.[4] Indeed, narcissism is usually seen as an infatuation with self so extreme that the interests of others are ignored, others serving merely as mirrors of one's own grandiosity. That narcissism is a disorder is

reflected even in the mythological origins of the term. Not only does Narcissus become so infatuated with his own reflection in the still water that he pines away and dies, he is also confused about his identity and the value of his own selfhood. As Ovid's classic account has Narcissus say:

> Am I the lover
> Or beloved? Then why make love? Since I
> Am what I long for, then my riches are
> So great they make me poor.[5]

How, then, can the concept of narcissism have philosophical worth? How can it possess a progressive moment? In a sense, that is what this whole book is about. However, it may be useful at this point to outline what the answer to these questions looks like.

DSM-III characterizes pathological narcissism in terms of an exaggerated concern with power and control, the result of which is interpersonal exploitativeness. Typical also is an orientation of entitlement, the notion that one is worthy of great admiration, respect, and reward regardless of one's achievements. Pathological narcissism is further characterized by relationships that alternate between extremes of idealization and devaluation. Finally, the pathological narcissist's grandiosity is curiously coupled with great fragility of self-esteem.[6] Surely these are unattractive— indeed, pathological—qualities. Yet, they are not entirely alien to normal experience. Rather, they may be viewed as exaggerated, distorted

versions of normal traits. Most individuals seek power and control over their own lives, and often over aspects of the lives of others. Who has not sought to influence a friend, a spouse, or a child? In addition, most individuals seek not only recognition for their achievements, but to be loved regardless of their achievements. Furthermore, most of us seek others to idealize, and frequently we are disappointed and change our minds. And who has not suffered a blow to his or her self-esteem?

Putting it this way suggests that it may be fruitful to see these common — indeed, mundane—needs, qualities, and experiences as themselves narcissistic. This would be to frame the issue not in terms of narcissism versus something else—for example, Freud's mature object love—but rather, in terms of pathological narcissism versus normal narcissism, regressive narcissism versus progressive narcissism. From this perspective narcissism is neither sick nor healthy. It is the human condition. What is sick or healthy, regressive or progressive, is how individuals come to terms with their narcissism, understood as a longing for perfection, wholeness, and control over self and world. It is this aspect that lends itself to philosophical speculation, for the quest for perfection, wholeness, and mastery is part of many philosophical programs, including those of Plato and the Frankfurt school. This assumption about narcissism— that it can be a normal, as well as a pathological, condition—is shared by all the theorists of narcissism considered in chapter 2, including Freud. It is also central to my own theory of

narcissism, developed at the conclusion of chapter 2.

Yet, to call mine a *theory* of narcissism may be misleading. I invoke the term *theory* in only the most casual sense, to refer to a set of themes that are central to the accounts discussed in chapter 2. The authors of these accounts are not merely theorists of narcissism, however; most of them have developed their own psychoanalytic theories, which is what makes them so interesting. Most of these theories stress the importance of the very first years of life — what Freud called the Minoan-Mycenean level of psychological development, a level that Freud uncovered but did not describe in great detail. At this level it is not sexual issues, such as the oedipal conflict, that are central, but rather, issues of dependence, individuation, and separation—that is, issues relating to the very establishment and coherence of the self. Thus, to talk about narcissism is really to talk about issues concerned with the integrity or fragmentation of the self.

Frequently the term narcissism is used as a shorthand way of referring to these more general issues. If this is not recognized, the discussion of narcissism, and especially cultural narcissism, can be most confusing. For the key feature of the culture of narcissism is not selfishness or self-love, but the way in which this culture threatens the coherence of the self. This misunderstanding is referred to by Lasch in the very title of The Minimal *Self,* for the minimal self is the narcissistic self, withdrawn not out of selfishness or

self-love, but in response to threats to its integrity and coherence. In chapters 3-6 of the present book, in which the theory of narcissism is applied to the accounts of Socrates, Adorno, Marcuse, and Habermas, both the narrow and the broad meanings of the term narcissism will be employed: narcissism as a quest for wholeness and perfection, a quest that may find expression in a progressive or a regressive manner, and narcissism as a more general account of the vicissitudes of the self.

As the dualism of the concept suggests, one cannot focus on the progressive aspect of narcissism without analyzing its regressive aspect, and vice versa. In general, however, it is the progressive aspect that I wish to emphasize. Thus, my approach is the opposite to that of Lasch, who focuses on the regressive dimension. I shall argue (in Chapter 3) that the power of Socratic philosophy stems in large measure from its ability to draw on narcissistic strivings for wholeness and perfection and transform them into a quest for virtue and beauty. I shall also argue that Plato's Socrates holds a view of sublimation that is in some respects superior to that of Freud, insofar as Socrates' account recognizes that "higher" pleasures are not only more compatible with civilization, but also hold out the promise of even greater satisfaction. Platonic sublimation heightens pleasure, a view that is supported by the theory of narcissism. This insight, I contend (in chapter 5, on Marcuse), can help us better distinguish between the progressive and regressive aspects of Marcuse's ideal society, without succumbing to "neo-Freudian

revisionism," which risks sacrificing happiness to social integration. Despite all its flaws, Marcuse's ideal is valuable because Marcuse, like Socrates, takes seriously the quest for narcissistic wholeness, in contrast to Adorno (chapter 4) and Habermas (chapter 6), who, for very different reasons and in quite different ways, reject the motive power of narcissism, with problematic consequences for their projects. Adorno is almost led to abandon philosophy altogether, whereas Habermas pursues philosophy by abandoning a psychologically robust view of the individual.

Why These Particular Authors?

I have chosen to look at Plato's Socrates because it is he who introduces narcissism into philosophy. Indeed, Socrates' "ladder of love" in Plato's Symposium remains the finest philosophical expression of the transformation of immature into mature narcissism. Other aspects of the Symposium suggest that Socrates was not entirely immune to the hubris of narcissism. The *Phaedrus* is read as the dialogue in which Socrates comes to terms with this fact. The other authors—Adorno, Marcuse, and Habermas — are associated with the Frankfurt school of critical theory, which stands in a particularly interesting relationship to the classical philosophical tradition, in that it seeks to restore something of the legacy of the concept of reason held by Plato and Aristotle, while at the same time being immensely suspicious of reason as itself a tool of domination. This duality is expressed most clearly perhaps in

Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* which is discussed in some detail in chapter 4. To esteem reason as the most distinctly human attribute risks not fully appreciating the power of the narcissistic quest for wholeness and perfection, for the narcissistic quest is prerational, originating in the first months of life and remaining largely unconscious throughout life. Yet, to abandon reason for some sort of aesthetic sensibility risks perverting the quest for perfection.

In the work of Adorno, Marcuse, and Habermas, we see three quite different attempts at the difficult balancing act required. Put simply, Adorno recognizes the power of the narcissistic quest for wholeness, and its intensity frightens him, with good reason. Marcuse embraces the narcissistic quest but is unable fully to distinguish between its progressive and regressive moments. Habermas implicitly rejects this quest almost entirely. Thus, within the Frankfurt school, we see a range of orientations to narcissism that we might expect to find only among philosophers of different schools. To be sure, other philosophers might have been considered. Rousseau and Marx (especially in the "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844") come to mind as philosophers who recognize the power of the narcissistic quest for wholeness and perfection but embrace it in very different ways. However, my purpose is not to apply the theory of narcissism to as many different philosophers as possible. It is rather, to show that the psychoanalytic theory of narcissism can illuminate traditional philosophical concerns; and for this, a

study of the philosophies of Socrates, Adorno, Marcuse, and Habermas is sufficient.

Though the chapters on Socrates, Adorno, Marcuse, and Habermas are of roughly equal length, it is the chapter on Socrates that serves as the linchpin. Socrates illuminates what the theory of narcissism seeks to explain; conversely, the theory of narcissism illuminates aspects of Socrates' project. Much of the discussion in chapters 4-6 concerns how this Socratic conception of sublimation can help overcome certain difficulties in the Frankfurt school's analysis of the relationship between eros and reason.

What Does an Account of Narcissism Add to our Understanding of these Issues?

Some have seen the quest for human wholeness and perfection as a noble undertaking. Aristotle, for example, writes of this quest in terms of the full development of the distinctively human excellences (N. *Ethics* 1097b22-1103al0). He also states that self-love is the primary source of human action (ibid., 1168a28-1169bl). Nor does he see anything pathological in this. To him it is obvious that people will love themselves and seek to develop themselves as fully as possible. No encouragement is needed in this direction; nor can people be deterred effectively from this path. What is required is instruction, so that they can learn to distinguish genuine full development from its simulacrum. One need not be a philosopher to recognize that self-love and the

quest to develop oneself as fully as possible—that is, to become as perfect as possible—lie behind a great deal of human action.

If so, what does my account, which draws upon a depth-psychological theory of narcissism, add to what we already know? It adds the following:

1. An appreciation of the drive-like character of the quest for wholeness and perfection, which is as intense as the quest for erotic satisfaction, to which it is closely related.

2. The recognition that this intensity is reflected in the closeness of the progressive and regressive aspects of the quest, and insight, therefore. into why the quest is so liable to regression.

3. Insight into why the mastery of self and world that characterizes the successful completion of the narcissistic quest—so similar to what Aristotle means by the full development of the distinctively human excellences—is such a compelling ideal.

The narcissistic ideal is compelling because it links pleasure and achievement, erotic passion and creative passion, ego satisfaction and id satisfaction, love and work. This is Freud's insight. It is also Plato's, particularly in the Symposium. I shall argue that the theory of narcissism shows Plato's account of eros to be psychologically—not just philosophically or aesthetically — more compelling than Freud's, and that Plato's account of

sublimation, as illuminated by the theory of narcissism, can help us to balance a respect for the claims of reason against an appreciation of the intensity of the nonrational demands generated by the narcissistic pursuit of perfection.

What is it that gives the theory of narcissism its philosophical potential, it might be asked. Is its value that it directs us to a lost experience of wholeness and perfection—the state of primary narcissism to which Freud refers — that all seek to recover? Or does it rather stem from its ability to illuminate the content and meaning of the perfection we all seek? The psychoanalytic theorists of narcissism suggest that the answer is both. However, in an important, controversial recent book, The *Interpersonal* World *of the Infant: A View from Psychoanalysis* and *Developmental* Psychology, Daniel Stern reviews a number of studies of cognitive development in the infant and concludes that at no time is the infant so cognitively and emotionally undeveloped that it experiences itself as fused with the mother and the world, an experience that for many theorists is the paradigm of narcissistic wholeness and bliss. Rather, this notion is an elaborate secondary construction, albeit an enormously powerful one. Thus, Stern in effect answers no to the first question raised above and yes only to the second.[7]

Stern has been harshly criticized, however.[8] It has not been overlooked, for example, that he leaps from assumptions about the cognitive development of the infant to assumptions about its emotional development. But these

modes of development do not necessarily run parallel. The biological organization of the infant, particularly as it pertains to its cognitive capabilities, is not a reliable indicator of its subjective experience of self. It may be that the infant is cognitively able to do things that it is still psychologically unable to make sense of. Yet, much of Stern's argument hinges on this not being the case, as critics have pointed out."[9] Nevertheless, let us assume for a moment that Stern is correct. This would not fundamentally alter my argument. It is not essential that narcissism refer to the archaic memory of an actual state of "oceanic contentment," as Freud put it. The power of the narcissistic quest depends hardly at all on the historical accuracy of the ideal that it represents, but only on the intensity of the ideal. Thus, when Marcuse states that his utopia expresses a "return to an imaginary temps perdu in the real life of mankind,"[10] a primitive state of innocence and perfection, a garden of Eden, the intensity of this longing, as well as its effect on history and culture, does not depend on whether such a state ever actually existed. Indeed, the influence of this so-called memory may be all the greater for evoking a state that never was. And the same could be said of the memory of wholeness, perfection, and gratification associated with the theory of narcissism. This would not change the course of the argument. It would require the reinterpretation of much psychoanalytic theory, however. Most psychoanalysts have not chosen to do this. Nor have I.

The Culture of Emotivism as a Culture of Narcissism

Whereas progressive narcissism illuminates the discussion of the good for man, regressive narcissism only obscures it. From this perspective one can read MacIntyre's *After* Virtue as a philosophical version of Lasch's *The* Culture *of Narcissism.* Both are concerned with how social changes threaten the self by fostering regressive solutions to the problem of identity, solutions that render virtue, as well as any coherent discussion of the good life, almost impossible. Consider MacIntyre's analysis of emotivism.

Emotivism is the doctrine that all evaluative judgments, and especially all moral judgments, are nothing but expressions of attitudes or feelings.[11] MacIntyre sees this as the dominant moral attitude of the modern world, reflected in everything from Max Weber's "decisionism" to the political compromises of the Supreme Court of the United States. The fundamental problem with emotivism, in MacIntyre's view, is that it obliterates any genuine distinction between manipulative and nonmanipulative social relations. Evaluative utterances, as expressions only of my own feelings, can ultimately appeal to nothing but my own needs. In this emotive, manipulative culture, three characters stand out as archetypes: the aesthete, the bureaucratic manager, and the therapist. In calling these archetypes "characters," MacIntyre means to suggest that they are the moral representatives of our culture. "Characters are the masks worn by moral philosophies."[12] These characters are also the primary players in Lasch's

account of the culture of narcissism.

Lasch expresses the character of the aesthete in terms of what he calls the "survival mentality," which he defines (much as the aesthete is by MacIntyre) as a withdrawal of interest in the past and the future. The resultant, enfeebled self is capable of doing no more than holding on to the tenuous present. "The everyday survivalist has deliberately lowered his sights from history to the immediacies of face-to-face relationships. He takes one day at a time. He pays a heavy price for this radical restriction of perspective, which precludes moral judgment and intelligent political activity."[13] Compare this view with MacIntyre's characterization of the emotivist self, which "in acquiring sovereignty in its own realm lost its traditional boundaries provided by a social identity and a view of human life as ordered to a given end."[14] The survival mentality is the loss of what MacIntyre calls a "narrative self," the ability to see the events of one's life as connected and as having a meaning that can be projected into the future. All attempts to elucidate the notion of personal identity "independently of and in isolation from the notions of narrative, intelligibility and accountability are bound to fail. As all such attempts have."[15]

Survivalism, as Lasch makes clear, is pathological narcissism, the shrinking of the self back into nothing but the self, a last-ditch effort to protect its integrity. This survival mentality is seen especially clearly in what

Lasch calls the "minimalist aesthetic."

> Overwhelmed by the cruelty, disorder, and sheer complexity of modern history, the artist retreats into a solipsistic mode of discourse that represents "not so much an attempt to understand the self," in [Philip] Roth's words, as an attempt "to assert it." He conducts his own struggle for survival as an artist, under conditions that have made it more and more difficult to transcribe any shared experience or common perceptions of the world, undermined the conventions of artistic realism, and given rise to a type of art that no longer seems to refer to anything outside itself."[16]

Such a retreat serves a purpose, however. In abandoning a conception of a self that can influence the world, the minimal aesthetic seeks relief from the burden of selfhood. This is the strategy of pure narcissistic regression, the pathological shortcut to narcissistic perfection.

> An inner agenda nevertheless underlines much of contemporary music, art, and literature, one that seeks to recapture a sense of psychic oneness without taking any account of the obstacles, psychic or material, that lie in the way of oneness. ... They seek the shortest road to Nirvana. . . . Instead of seeking to reconcile the ego and its environment, (they) deny the very distinction between them.[17]

MacIntyre and Lasch both see bureaucracy as the central phenomenon of the modern age and agree that it is characterized by an orientation of manipulation and control for their own sake — that is, by what Horkheimer and Adorno call "instrumental reason." MacIntyre focuses on why this pure culture of manipulation and control has no choice but to treat people as mere means, since it abandons—as the primary institutional exemplar of

emotivism—any hope of rational discourse over ends. Lasch does not ignore this aspect of bureaucracy—indeed, like many others, he points out how readily the emotionally shallow narcissist finds a home in the superficial, manipulative world of the bureaucracy—but he stresses another aspect of it — namely, the way in which it fosters dependence, once again leading the individual toward more regressive modes of satisfaction.

> Modern capitalist society not only elevates narcissists to prominence, it elicits and reinforces narcissistic traits in everyone. It does this in many ways: by displaying narcissism so prominently and in such attractive forms; by undermining parental authority and thus making it hard for children to grow up; but above all by creating so many varieties of bureaucratic dependence. This dependence, increasingly widespread in a society that is not merely paternalistic but maternalistic as well, makes it increasingly difficult for people to lay to rest the terrors of infancy or to enjoy the consolations of adulthood.[18]

This is a social-psychological characterization of what MacIntyre calls the "emotivist culture."

Lasch and MacIntyre view the therapist in almost identical terms—as the representative of the bureaucratic manager within the private sphere. Like the bureaucratic manager, the therapist also abandons rational and moral considerations, teaching adaptation to the needs of the bureaucratic, industrial system. Lasch, following Talcott Parsons, refers to this as the "production of personality." MacIntyre puts it this way:

> The manager represents in his *character* the obliteration of the distinction

between manipulative and nonmanipulative social relations; the therapist represents the same obliteration in the sphere of personal life. The manager treats ends as given, as outside his scope; his concern is with technique. . . . The therapist also treats ends as given, as outside his scope; his concern also is with technique, with effectiveness in transforming neurotic symptoms into directed energy, maladjusted individuals into well-adjusted ones.[19]

The outcome of the activities represented by these three characters is the destruction of the possibility of narrative selfhood. Indeed, we may provisionally define the culture of narcissism as a culture which destroys this possibility by disconnecting men and women from their past and their future. What remains is an abstract, ghostly self, which retreats further into itself in order to find security, a process which intensifies the very problem it attempts to redress, that of situating the self in the world. MacIntyre's discussion of a self deprived of narrative unity might well have been written by Lasch.

The self thus conceived, utterly distinct on the one hand from its social embodiments and lacking on the other any rational history of its own, may seem to have a certain abstract and ghostly character. . . . For one way of re-envisaging the emotivist self is as having suffered a deprivation, a stripping away of qualities that were once perceived to belong to the self. . . . The particularly modern self, the emotivist self, in acquiring sovereignty in its own realm lost its traditional boundaries provided by a social identity and a view of human life as ordered to a given end.[20]

This process, MacIntyre shows us, has philosophical as well as psychological consequences, which cannot be separated. For the destruction

of narrative selfhood destroys not only the meaning of human life, but the very possibility of virtue. No longer is it possible to intelligibly ask questions about the good life, for such questions presuppose that a life has a unity and a purpose, something that is lost when life is seen as no more than a succession of moments.

The virtues, says MacIntyre, are precisely those attributes that will lead us successfully through the risks associated with the quest for narrative selfhood. From the perspective of the theory of narcissism, the prime risk is that the individual will become persuaded that it is not necessary to grow up in order to reestablish narcissistic wholeness. Indeed, this is what the culture of narcissism is all about. It panders to the desire for instant wholeness, via religions that promise instant salvation, therapies that promise instant happiness, and commodities that promise love and feelings of power and control. From this perspective, the virtues of which MacIntyre writes are attributes associated with maturity. For, as the psychoanalyst Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel points out, it is maturity that allows the individual to postpone and delay narcissistic satisfaction, as well as to accept less than complete satisfaction, in the knowledge that in the long run such satisfaction is more gratifying to the self than regressive satisfaction.[21]

This perspective recognizes the importance of a pair of Aristotelian virtues that MacIntyre does not stress: temperance and moderation.[22]

MacIntyre seeks to combat liberal—what he calls "bureaucratic"—individualism, which leads him to stress the social and cooperative aspects of the self. Aristotelian moderation and temperance, on the other hand, are primarily concerned not with the orientation of the self toward others, but with its orientation toward objects of consumption and enjoyment.[23] In this respect the theory of narcissism comes closer to Aristotle than to MacIntyre, for it accepts a certain fundamental selfishness in human beings, even the most generous. As Aristotle puts it, "One will wish the greatest good for his friend as a human being. But perhaps not all the greatest goods, for each man wishes for his own good most of all" (N. *Ethics* 1159al0-13). What divides individuals, making them less than perfect communitarians, is not merely capitalism, possessive individualism, and emotivism (as MacIntyre sometimes seems to imply), but the stubborn facts of human separateness and difference.[24] This, too, philosophy and social theory must come to terms with.

The connection between *After* Virtue and *The Culture of Narcissism* is apparent. Immature or pathological narcissism makes virtue impossible, because it disconnects man from his past and future. For the minimal self it is senseless even to consider what the excellent performance of a human life—the classical definition of virtue—might entail. What are the implications of the connection between these two books for the theory of narcissism? Does the theory tell us about the good for man or only about what feels good? As we shall see, the answer lies somewhere in between. The mature, progressive

narcissist is not necessarily a virtuous man. However, the theory of narcissism is far more than just an explanation of the sources of human pleasure, for it links pleasure with the pursuit of humanity's highest values.

Can Narcissism Be a Cultural Phenomenon?

It may be useful here to address an issue that cannot help but have troubled the thoughtful reader, that of whether it makes sense to talk of a psychoanalytic category, narcissism, as though it were also a cultural, indeed a philosophical, category? If it does not, then the demonstration that Lasch's work can illuminate MacIntyre's is not helpful, for Lasch's work would itself be a misguided attempt to apply psychoanalytic schemes to non-psychoanalytic issues. In the last analysis this question is best answered by the entirety of my book. Does its use of the psychoanalytic category of narcissism reveal aspects of culture and philosophy that might otherwise have been overlooked, aspects that upon consideration seem important? The proof of the pudding is in the eating. However, it may be helpful here to explain why it is at least possible that a psychoanalytic category could be meaningfully applied to cultural and philosophical phenomena, and that so doing is not to be involved in some sort of category mistake.

It might be asked whether in applying the concept of narcissism to cultural phenomena, we do not face a levels of analysis problem analogous to

trying to explain large-scale historical events strictly in terms of the beliefs and actions of individuals, while ignoring the larger social and economic changes to which these individuals were subject. The answer is that, in principle, there is no philosophical barrier to the concept of cultural narcissism, since nothing in the issues dealt with by the philosophy of science under the categories of reductionism, emergence, and composition laws suggests that large-scale social changes could not affect individual psychological development, which in turn would further affect this social change.[25] Indeed, this is precisely what the Frankfurt school argues under rubrics such as the "end of the individual" and the "obsolescence of the Freudian concept of man" (see chapter 4).

In a particularly harsh criticism of Lasch's attempt to apply the psychoanalytic category of narcissism to social and cultural phenomena, Colleen Clements nevertheless agrees that while the concept "could lead to a significant reductionist error, confusing metaphors (or models) from different levels of organization," it need not do so.[26] That it could lead to such an error is because macro-level events are often not merely the additive consequence of individual micro-level phenomena. Clements's cautions are well taken. However, the moral is surely not to abandon the attempt to discover relationships between social and psychological changes, but rather, to take care to specify precisely the links between individuals and society. Otto Kernberg's speculations on the relationship between social change,

family change, and personality change are a case in point, as we shall see in the next chapter. Kernberg is most careful to distinguish social changes that might reach sufficiently deep into the psyche to affect basic personality from those that are unlikely to do so. He is not necessarily correct, of course, but he does exemplify how this issue can be approached in a sophisticated and self-conscious fashion.

Clements's primary objection is more fundamental, however. She argues that to call a culture "narcissistic" is to transform a clinical diagnostic term into a moral judgment, and a harsh one at that. On this issue she seems to be correct. Indeed, this is why it was suggested that the theory of narcissism becomes a powerful analytic tool only when linked with a philosophical account of the human good. It is this philosophical account, not the theory of narcissism per se, that supports the moral judgment about the culture. Presumably Clements does not mean that it is inappropriate to make moral judgments about individuals and societies, though sometimes she seems to imply this.[27]

Even if all this is granted, one might argue that it is not appropriate to apply the theory of narcissism to philosophy, that the theory is little more than a metaphor. Yet, this in itself is not a criticism. Many explanations, including scientific ones, employ metaphor. As Max Black puts it in Models and Metaphors: "Perhaps every science must start with metaphor and end

with algebra; and perhaps without the metaphor there would never have been any algebra."[28] Since even the strictly psychoanalytic theory of narcissism has not yet reached the stage of algebra, the key question would seem to be not whether narcissism as applied to philosophy is a metaphor, but whether it is a useful one.

This question cannot be answered in advance. Whether the theory of narcissism can reveal neglected aspects of philosophical thought that are worth pursuing can be determined only by applying the theory and seeing what happens, which is what this book seeks to do.

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that the theory of narcissism can be nothing more than a metaphor when applied to philosophy. As MacIntyre showed in *After* Virtue, how people live and what their lives are like affect how they think about philosophical matters. For example, do they see their lives as possessing a unity over time such that they can take moral responsibility for their own actions? To demonstrate that the individual's sense of self might make a difference in this regard was my purpose in comparing Lasch and MacIntyre. From this perspective social changes may well affect philosophy, by affecting how individuals understand the meaning of their own lives. Nor is this an unusual claim. Karl Marx made a similar one. Once it is admitted that social change might affect philosophy, and that psychological change might affect social change, the possibility of a

relationship between psychological and philosophical change is readily established—via the property of transitivity, one might say.

The Ethnopsychiatric Paradigm

In Basic Problems o/Ethnopsychiatry, George Devereux distinguishes between two components of the unconscious: a part that was never conscious, the realm of the id, and a part that contains material that was once conscious but has since been repressed. This second portion, which Devereux calls the "ethnic unconscious,"[29] also includes most of our defense mechanisms and a substantial portion of the superego. Each culture permits certain impulses, fantasies, and so forth to become and remain conscious, while requiring that others be repressed. "Hence, all members of a given culture will have certain unconscious conflicts in common."[30] A particularly interesting element of the ethnic unconscious consists of what might be called "directives for the misuse of cultural material"—what others have called "patterns of misconduct." It is as though the group says to the individual, "Don't do this, but if you do, go about it in this way, and not that."[31]

In terms of its relationship to the ethnic unconscious, mental illness may take two forms. The most severe illness will be idiosyncratic, for the individual will be unable to utilize the culture or to follow the "directives for the misuse of cultural material." Such an individual is fundamentally isolated

and schizophrenic. One reason for this, according to Devereux, is that the traumas causing the most severe psychoses occur very early in life, mostly at the oral stage, when the infant does not yet have at its disposal the cultural resources that could be drawn on as a defense. Hence, it must improvise defenses, which will always retain their improvisational character, even if, later, they come to utilize superficially the symbols of the culture. In general, however, emotional illness will follow the "directives for misuse." As examples, Devereux mentions a Malayan running amok and an American Indian becoming a shaman. Of the shaman Devereux says, "He is quite often like everyone else—'only more so,' " which is why his performance strikes normal people as uncanny, "as something that their unconscious experiences as 'disturbingly and unexpectedly familiar."[32]

The relevance of these considerations to the phenomenon of cultural narcissism is clear. It is the culture, mediated first by the parents and later by schools, television, and so forth, that "instructs" the individual that the way to deal with the stresses associated with this culture is to withdraw into the self. Prime among the stresses, as Lasch points out, is the sense of isolation in the midst of others, alienation in a mass society. From this perspective, the ethnic illness of modern industrial society— schizoid withdrawal — is especially problematic, since it fosters the very problems against which it is a defense. Indeed, this is the thesis of The Culture *of Narcissism* and *The Minimal Self.* This vicious circle is characteristic of much mental illness, as

Devereux points out. More evidence that withdrawal is indeed the ethnic illness of modern industrial society is found in Richard Sennett's The *Fall of* Public Man: On the Social *Psychology of Capitalism,* particularly the sections on narcissism.[33] The locus *classicus* of this discussion, of course, is the second volume of Alexis de Tocqueville's Democracy in America.

From this perspective, Devereux's chapter entitled "Schizophrenia: An Ethnic Psychosis, or Schizophrenia Without Tears," is intriguing.[34] He argues that a mild form of schizophrenia (what W. R. D. Fairbairn and Harry Guntrip call "schizoid disorder") is characteristic of the United States today. Its symptoms are withdrawal, emotional aloofness, hyporeactivity (emotional flatness), sex without emotional involvement, segmentation and partial involvement (lack of interest in and commitment to things outside oneself), fixation on oral-stage issues, regression, infantalism, and depersonalization. These, of course, are many of the same designations that Lasch employs to describe the culture of narcissism. Thus, it appears that it is not misleading to equate narcissism with schizoid disorder. This is important, as a key argument of chapter 2 is that it is helpful to understand narcissism in just this fashion. Devereux goes on to argue that such cultural schizophrenia is the mark of a sick and declining civilization. Less sick societies have less severe modal ethnic neuroses. As an example, he mentions hysteria in Periclean Athens.[35] In this, Devereux seems to be mistaken, or at least fails to give the complete picture, for, as we shall see in chapter 3, narcissism appears to have

been the modal ethnic neurosis in ancient Greece. Indeed, Devereux's "Greek Homosexuality and the 'Greek Miracle,"' will be employed to support this claim.

The preceding considerations do not, of course, demonstrate that cultural narcissism is a useful analytic concept. Nor do they show that one of the most abstract aspects of culture, philosophy, can fruitfully be viewed from the perspective of the psychoanalytic theory of narcissism. What they do reveal is that it is neither incoherent nor merely metaphorical to say of a culture or its philosophy that it exhibits symptoms and characteristics usually associated with individual emotional states. Indeed, to regard such speech as incoherent would itself reflect a sense of the individual as isolated and alienated, a monad whose mentation operates independently of the culture. Yet, there remains a danger associated with the concept of cultural narcissism. Because the culture influences the unconscious, and vice versa, does not mean that these two entities stand in some sort of mirror relationship. The influence of culture on the unconscious and the reverse thereof may be very indirect, as we will see in part 3 of chapter 4.

One further methodological issue needs to be clarified: at no point will it be argued either that any individual philosopher had difficulty in coming to terms with his own narcissism, or that he was particularly successful in so doing. This level of analysis, akin to so-called psycho-biography, is excluded.

Notes

1 Most valuable to me has been Lasch's organization and assessment of the psychoanalytic literature, much of which does not refer to narcissism specifically. It is Lasch who points out its relevance. Useful, too, is Lasch's insight into the connection between seemingly disparate cultural phenomena and the theory of narcissism.

2 Alasdair MacIntyre, After Virtue, p. 22.

3 William Galston, "Aristotelian Morality and Liberal Society: A Critique of Alasdair MacIntyre's After Virtue," p. 1.

4 American Psychiatric Association, Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 3d ed. (hereafter cited as DSM-/II), pp. 315-17, esp. p. 316.

5 Ovid Metamorphoses 3. 464-68. Ovid's is by far the most complex and sophisticated version of the myth. It is he who introduces Echo. It is generally held that Ovid learned of the myth via the Alexandrian poetic tradition. Its ancient Greek origins are lost. Though Ovid's is the primary account, there are two major variants and many minor ones. One major variant is from a Greek author called Conon, roughly contemporary with Ovid (36B.C.-A.D.17). In this version, Narcissus invites a young man who has fallen in love with him to kill himself. He does, Narcissus then kills himself out of guilt and confusion (Felix Jacoby, ed., Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker, pp. 197ff.). The other is by Pausanias. Writing in the second century, Pausanias asks how a grown man could fail to recognize his own image in a pond and goes on to offer what he regards as a more plausible version, according to which Narcissus is in love with his twin sister. When she dies, he finds some relief from his loneliness by looking at his own reflection, seeing in it her likeness (Pausanias 9. 31. 6-9). There is obviously a great deal of material here for psychoanalytic exploration! Yet few psychoanalysts have taken it up. An exception is Hyman Spotnitz and Philip Resnikoff, "The Myths of Narcissus." I shall not analyze the myth, preferring instead to analyze more abstract philosophical expressions of narcissism.

6 DSM-III. pp. 315-17.

7 Daniel Stern, The Interpersonal World of the Infant, pp. 10, 46, 69-70.

8 See, e.g., the symposium on The Interpersonal World of the Infant. in Contemporary Psychoanalysis 23 (1987):6-59.

9 Ibid., pp. 34, 42; contribution by Louise J. Kaplan.

10 Herbert Marcuse. An Essay on Liberation, p. 90.

11 MacIntyre, After Virtue, p. 11.

12 Ibid.. p. 27.

13 Christopher Lasch, The Minimal Self. p. 93.

14 MacIntyre, After Virtue, p. 32.

15 Ibid., p. 203.

16 Lasch, Minimal Self. p. 131.

17 Ibid., p. 165.

18 Lasch. The Culture of Narcissism, p. 391.

19 MacIntyre, After Virtue, p. 29.

20 Ibid., pp. 31-32.

21 Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel, The Ego Ideal, pp. 187-88.

22 MacIntyre does not entirely ignore these issues, however; see After Virtue, pp. 170-71.

23 See Galston, "Aristotelian Morality." p. 10.

24 Ibid., p. 13. I follow Galston closely here.

25 See May Brodbeck, "Methodological Individualisms: Definition and Reduction," and Ernest Nagel,

The Structure of Science, chap. 11.

26 Golleen Clements, "Misusing Psychiatric Models," p. 284.

27 Ibid., pp. 293-94.

28 Max Black, Models and Metaphors, p. 242.

29 George Devereux, Basic Problems of Ethnopsychiatry, pp. 5-8.

30 Ibid.. p. 6.

31 Ibid., p. 29.

32 Ibid., pp. 13-27; quote from p. 17.

33 Richard Sennett. The Fall of Public Man, esp. chap. 14.

34 Devereux. Basic Problems, pp. 214-36.

35 Ibid., pp. 235-36.

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Note: Classical sources given in the text in the form that is usual in classical studies are not repeated here.

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