NARCISSISM AND PHILOSOPHY

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In reviewing the relationship between narcissism and philosophy in this final chapter, I will focus on aspects of the relationship that require further development. In particular, I will consider from a more systematic perspective what the theory of narcissism adds to our understanding of philosophy, including social philosophy. My account of narcissism, like the accounts of Freud and Marcuse, appreciates the origins of philosophy in the most archaic needs. However, it does not risk reducing philosophy to these needs, as Freud's and Marcuse's accounts do. We shall then take up the question of how the narcissistic pursuit of the whole may best avoid the greed and hubris to which it is so vulnerable. Next we will consider both formal and substantive limits to my account of narcissism, and finally, whether a philosophy of selfishness, no matter how mature and refined, can ever be the basis of a decent social theory. First, however, a reprise of my argument may be useful.

Reprise of the Argument

After showing that Lasch and MacIntyre are addressing similar problems and thus that a psychoanalytic perspective on narcissism might be

philosophically fruitful, I defined narcissism in terms of four key themes: the persistence of narcissism throughout life, its inherent dualism, the way in which object mastery helps heal the narcissistic wound, and its quest for fusion and wholeness by means of reconciliation between ego and ego ideal. It is the content of the ego ideal and its relationship with the superego that largely determine whether this quest for wholeness is immature or mature. Mature reconciliation with the ego ideal will pass through object mastery. These four themes comprise what I call the theory of narcissism. I have also emphasized the psychoanalytic theory associated with the theory of narcissism, which stresses the importance of pre-oedipal issues, what Freud called the Minoan-Mycenean level of psychological development, to the development of mature autonomy. At this level it is issues associated with separation and individuation that are central.

Plato's Socrates, particularly in the Symposium and the Phaedrus, is revealed as having deep insight into the truths of narcissism. Indeed, the Symposium can be read as an argument designed to persuade Athenian gentlemen to abandon the temptations of immature narcissism for the satisfactions of mature narcissism. But it is not this that makes Socrates' program so rewarding for my reinterpretation of the program of the Frankfurt school. It is rather that the Platonic view of eros, which characterizes it in terms of its sublime aims rather than its mundane origins, is readily integrated with the theory of narcissism, enriching both our

understanding of Plato and the theory itself. For, like Plato, the theory of narcissism defines eros in terms of the higher purposes that it may serve: the perfection of the whole self. Chapter 3 concluded with the caution that we should not let Socrates off the hook too easily, that there is an element of hubris even in the desire to know the whole.

Adorno's sensitivity to the arrogance and hubris of philosophy is almost preternatural. Indeed, much of Adorno's philosophical program can be read as a rejection of the attempt to know the whole. While a retreat from this attempt is characteristic of much modern philosophy, it is carried through by Adorno with an antisystematic rigor that is striking. Adorno's retreat from the whole has been interpreted as a retreat from eros itself.

This would seem to make his project the antithesis of Plato's. Yet this is not really the case. It is Adorno's respect for the power and intensity of eros that leads him to reject it. Such a response is vastly preferable to one which assumes that eros need only be called by its right name to be fully subject to the power of reason. Though Adorno's all-or-nothing view of eros is misleading—an erotically influenced philosophy need not devour the world in rage and ressentiment — it nevertheless leads us to appreciate the subtle and manifold ways in which eros is manifested in philosophy. Indeed, in rejecting every philosophical expression of eros, he must virtually reject philosophy itself, which is why his program is often seen as terminating in a

cul-de-sac. After considering several contradictions in Horkheimer and Adorno's social psychology, we concluded that there are similarities between their psychological study of the "end of the individual" and Adorno's philosophical program of negative dialectics, both being characterized by a fear of false wholeness, of a false integration between man and world—false, ultimately, because the integration demands too great a sacrifice of the self.

It is Marcuse who best integrates the insights of the theory of narcissism. But his program is seriously flawed insofar as he idealizes the most regressive moments of eros and narcissism. This is precisely what the theory of narcissism corrects, by showing why mature gratification is even more satisfying—not merely more compatible with civilization — than its immature counterpart. This is also the point of the Platonic theory of sublimation. It is on the basis of the Platonic theory, as reinterpreted by the theory of narcissism, that we reformulated Marcuse's erotic utopia as what might be called "a utopia of mature narcissism." Our reformulation was sketchy, however, and it left important issues outstanding, not least, whether even mature narcissism is an adequate basis for social theory.

Both Adorno and Habermas fail to integrate the insights of the theory of narcissism into their accounts. However, it would be misleading to place them on a par in this respect. Adorno rejects eros and the quest for wholeness with reluctance, whereas

Habermas has no categories for them in the first place, in part because his psychological theory has no place for pre-verbal experience. One consequence of this is that Habermas's concept of the individual lacks roundness and depth, thereby coming to resemble the oversocialized man that Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse fear may be the modal man of this generation. This does not seem to concern Habermas, in large measure because he holds that it is neither eros nor ego, but language, that is the font of genuine autonomy. But unless one assumes that language has a life of its own, Habermas's confidence is unwarranted, for it ignores the earliest, deepest effects of culture and child rearing on the inner lives of those who use language. As we have seen, the psychoanalytic theory associated with narcissism reveals new possibilities for good and evil that critical social theory would do well to come to terms with. It shows the individual to be more vulnerable to manipulation than ever before, the narcissistic needs of the self to be more readily exploitable even than eros. At the same time, it reveals new sources of potential autonomy in the self's longing for perfection and control.

Narcissism, Sublimation, and Philosophy

Why would Freud put libido—eros in all its manifestations—at the center of his account of human motivation? A major reason is certainly that human nature is thereby linked with its biological basis and animal heritage.

It makes sense to talk of an erotic drive (Trieb) in a way that it does not make sense to talk of a drive for self-esteem or a creative drive. The latter are, evidently, drives only in a metaphorical sense, whereas eros possesses a physical basis. Since Freud saw himself as founding a science of human nature, eros was an especially appropriate foundation for his account. The difficulty, as we have seen, is that he came to see the most primitive physical expression of eros as its most essential expression, toward which all eros would recur. The theory of narcissism turns this aspect of his thought around, while fully appreciating Freud's insight into the power and ubiquity of eros. Indeed, it is Freud's insight into the archaic sources of eros in self-love that explains why the narcissistic quest is so subject to regression.

The theory of narcissism conceptualizes eros in terms not so much of its origins as its telos: the wholeness and perfection of the self. The push toward this goal obviously has biological roots in the sex drive, which energizes the oedipus conflict, understood, in Grunberger's words, as a "displacement of the subject's narcissistic wound to his conflict with the father." However, we have seen that the narcissistic quest gains much of its impetus from an experience more primitive, more global, and more profound than the oedipus conflict: the experience of narcissistic injury, which destroys that blissful state of harmony that theorists of narcissism conceptualize in various, but similar, ways. It is the desire to restore this state and hence the perfection of the self that has the potential to push men and women forward or to entice them

down a backward path. My account of narcissism brings together the aspect of narcissism stressed by Freud— narcissism as a vicissitude of the libido— and narcissism as a quest for mastery and control over self and world. In so doing, it shows why the narcissistic ideal is so compelling: it links pleasure and achievement, erotic passion and creative passion, ego satisfaction and id satisfaction, love and work.

This point is recognized by Freud, of course, particularly in his concept of the ego ideal. It is also recognized by Plato, especially in the Symposium. I have devoted a lot of attention to how Plato's account improves on Freud's. In particular, I have shown that Plato is quite justified, psychologically as well as philosophically and aesthetically, in seeing eros in terms of the higher, more abstract purposes that it may serve. The theory of narcissism explains why reconciliation between ego and ideal brings genuine pleasure, not just satisfaction in a job well done (though it brings this too). It does so because it recalls the most gratifying experience of all, narcissistic perfection. The theory of narcissism thus bridges the pleasure and reality principles, showing how mature object mastery satisfies both. It is on the basis of this

Platonic theory of sublimation, as revealed and systematized by the theory of narcissism, that I criticized and reformulated Marcuse's erotic utopia. It was also on this basis that I judged Marcuse's project to be more successful than that of either Adorno or Habermas.

Implicit in my argument is the contention that the account of human nature associated with the theory of narcissism enriches philosophy more than Freud's account does. To be sure, the theory of narcissism does not enrich every philosophy; it may be quite irrelevant to much analytic philosophy, for example. But it does enrich philosophies—such as Plato's, Aristotle's, and the Frankfurt school's — concerned with the good for man and how this good can be achieved. It does so by characterizing the good for man in terms of the pursuit of ideal values, while not forgetting the origins of this pursuit in the most primitive needs. It thereby connects the base with the sublime, the creation of beautiful philosophy with the potential for perversion. This is the key philosophical contribution of the theory of narcissism. It finds the sources of philosophy in the most primitive needs, without rendering these needs more fundamental than the philosophy they inspire.

Of course, one does not have to turn to the theory of narcissism to discover that men and women seek to perfect themselves by realizing ideal values. Plato certainly grasped this, and Aristotle's discussion of the good for man in terms of the complete development of the human excellences (N. Ethics 1097b22-1103al0) is also readily interpreted in these terms. What my account of narcissism contributes is an appreciation of the sheer intensity of the narcissistic quest. Plato seems to have recognized this intensity more fully than Aristotle, a claim that is supported by Nussbaum's assertion that

Aristotle's writings exhibit "an almost complete lack of attention to the erotic relationships that Plato defended."[390] It is in these erotic relationships that narcissism is most intense, and hence most susceptible to regression. Indeed, this is the lesson of the Symposium.

Narcissism is subject to regression not only because of its intensity, but also because of its infantile origins. The pleasure that it recalls is purely Dionysian: a state in which there are no ego boundaries, a state of fusion of the self with the All.

I have devoted much of this book to demonstrating the usefulness of evaluating societies, cultures, and political arrangements in terms of whether they foster progressive or regressive solutions to the problem of narcissistic injury. This, of course, is what Lasch's Culture *of Narcissism* is about. It is certainly the concern of Plato's Symposium. However, the most interesting result of my study may be that it is Marcuse who comes closest to fully appreciating Plato's insights into the contribution of eros to the good life. Where Marcuse goes wrong is in seeing eros in Freudian terms, and in adopting the reductive focus of modern science generally, in which it is the most primitive expression of eros that is regarded as the most essential.

My account of narcissism allows us to strike a balance between Plato's exquisitely sublimated account (at least in the Symposium: in the Phaedrus

eros is experienced more directly) and Marcuse's inadequately sublimated one. In other words, my account of narcissism allows us to see erotic satisfaction in terms of the larger purposes that it serves. Like Plato in the Symposium, the theory of narcissism sees these larger purposes in terms of the pursuit of ideal values. For Plato these values concern the creation of virtue and beauty. Not unlike Plato, the theory of narcissism sees the pursuit of these values as being in certain respects selfish, since it is the virtue and beauty of the soul (or self) that is the object of creation. That this project of creating a virtuous, beautiful soul (or self) is motivated by the narcissistic longing for perfection is apparent. Nor is it banal to liken self and soul. By psyche, or soul, the Greek meant as much mind as spirit. (The German *Geist* is similar in this respect.) Kohut defines the self as an independent center of initiative and perception, integrated with our ambitions and ideals on the one hand, our bodies on the other.[391] Is this so different from the entity that Socrates sought to persuade his fellow citizens to care for?

Just as Plato suggests that people create virtue and beauty in order to win a certain immortality, so the theory of narcissism suggests that an individual may seek to become worthy of his ego ideal even at the expense of life itself—for example, in a heroic act that exemplifies one's highest values. For, in exemplifying these values, one lives on in them, as Kohut points out in a pair of interesting studies on martyrdom.[392] These parallels between the Platonic theory of sublimation and the theory of narcissism are not mere

coincidences. Rather, they stem from the fact that both are concerned with the same thing: how and why people pursue, or fail to pursue, their highest values. It is to these values that the theory of narcissism "binds" eros and thus civilizes it, while still recognizing the validity of its demands for total satisfaction. But now, total satisfaction involves the demands of the total self.

"Transcendental Narcissism" or Minimal Philosophy?

Narcissism's demand for total satisfaction of the whole self may have troubling implications when transposed to philosophy, as we have seen. The desire to know and possess the whole may be so powerful that it rides roughshod over the unique and the particular. The appropriate philosophical lesson to draw, however, is not Adorno's, but Socrates' in the Phaedrus. It is from his study of eros that Socrates comes to recognize that there is value to the unique and the particular. Indeed, to truly know the whole, one must also come to know and value the individual. The unique and the particular, moreover, are not merely further instances of the whole. They must be appreciated for themselves, apart from the whole, even if at a more abstract level they partake of the whole, a loosely structured whole that has room for the individual. Is it the role of philosophy to pursue this loosely structured whole? Michel Foucault writes of "transcendental narcissism," the conceit—the hubris—that human knowledge might ever find a foundation outside the conventions of language and the flow of history.[393] Surely the philosophical

pursuit of the whole, even a loosely structured whole, betrays a similar conceit. Certainly it risks hubris.

My study of narcissism has stressed its duality: narcissism is evinced not only in grandiosity, but also in the retreat into the "minimal self." If this grandiosity finds its philosophical expression in transcendental narcissism, then perhaps the opposite pole is philosophically expressed in what might be called "minimal philosophy." The minimal self, it will be recalled, experiences the world as so dangerously out of control that it retreats into the self, in order to find something, anything, over which it can exert total mastery; diet, the body, any narrowly circumscribed activity that becomes a way of life, such as jogging, are all exemplary. Minimal philosophy is perhaps similarly motivated. It retreats to texts, narrowly framed analytic issues regarding language use, logical puzzles, and so forth, because the larger philosophical questions, the metaphysical questions with which philosophy has traditionally been concerned, now seem beyond human mastery. The cultural consensus that once allowed such mastery, as we now believe, seems gone forever.

The concerns expressed by minimal philosophy, like Foucault's concerns regarding transcendental narcissism, are real. Sometimes discretion really is the better part of valor. Nevertheless, it should not be overlooked that minimal philosophy is just as surely narcissistic as is its counterpart,

transcendental narcissism. It is the search for total mastery and control, no matter what the scale, that marks an activity as narcissistic. What is needed, of course, is a balance, characterized not so much by a pulling back from the quest for mastery as by an appreciation that this quest must always tolerate vast amounts of contingency and imperfection: in one's self, in one's knowledge of the world, and in the world itself. In other words, this balance can be struck by continuing to pursue the whole, while recognizing that one can never know or possess it. Once again, Socrates shows us how.

Socrates and the Goal of Mature Narcissism

I will argue below that the pursuit of the whole, when engaged in by a mature narcissist like Socrates, is characterized by the type of internal limit that Marcuse would attribute to emancipated eros. One could argue, following Marcuse, that this means that mature narcissism is self-sublimating. But this would not be quite correct. As Freud states, "a man who has exchanged his narcissism for the worship of a high ego-ideal has not necessarily on that account succeeded in sublimating his libidinal instincts."[394] That is, the narcissistic pursuit of the highest values is not identical with sublimation. What generates the internal limit to the pursuit of narcissistic gratification is mature insight into the nature of that gratification: that it is found in the pursuit of wholeness and perfection, not in their possession. Knowledge is virtue, as the Socratic adage has it. It is this mature insight that underlies the

balance referred to above, a balance that may help us to tread a fine line between minimal philosophy and transcendental narcissism.

As Anne Carson points out in Eros the *Bittersweet,* Socrates understands eros in terms that are in many respects typically Greek. Eros yearns for that which is lacking; it reflects the fact that something is missing, that the lover is incomplete.[395] This is seen in Aristophanes' account, as well as in Socrates' mythic account of the parentage of eros. It is also reflected in Alcibiades' longing to perfect himself, the intensity of which suggests that for Alcibiades the goal of perfection is not merely to make the good better, but to satisfy an inner longing and compensate for a sense of incompleteness. What is it that allows us to say that Socrates is successful in dealing with this longing in a way that Alcibiades is not?

Recall the discussion, in chapter 4, of Socrates' argument in the Phaedrus, that a principle of reason is to divide things along proper lines, without forcing them into inappropriate categories (265e). Socrates is discussing the divine madness of eros, but he could be discussing knowledge of anything, as Adorno recognizes. But proper division is not the only task of reason. It is also necessary for reason to bring together scattered particulars, to collect and categorize, to synthesize (265d-e). It is both activities that constitute reason, activities that both complement each other and act as a check on each other. Synthesis can become a form of wild self-assertion, an

instance of domineering reason, unless checked by proper division. Yet proper division alone is inadequate, since it cannot bring together things that are genuinely related but just happen to be separated conventionally.

It is at the intersection of division and synthesis that Socrates locates eros, as Carson points out. Socrates describes division and synthesis as the combined activity that allows him to speak and think (Phaedrus 266b). He states that he is in love with this activity. "The fact is, Phaedrus, I am myself a lover [erastes] of these divisions and collections" (266b; see also idem, *Philebus* 16b). Socrates is in love with the process of learning. He loves to ask questions, pose riddles, construct arguments, tear them down, start over, make others uncomfortable with their knowledge, and make himself uncomfortable with his ignorance, but never at the expense of false certainty. Socrates and Alcibiades are different not only in the objects of their eros, but also in the way in which they approach their object: Socrates embraces the pursuit, whereas Alcibiades is interested only in the results, the capture. Socrates is "in love with the wooing itself," as Carson puts it.[396] This is the basis of the philosophical balance.

If physical eros is a model for its intellectual counterpart, the converse is also the case. Or rather, both expressions of eros are really one. This is the point of the "ladder of love" and certainly of the Phaedrus (249d-257a). From this perspective the goal of mature self-love is not merely to become worthy

of one's mature ego ideal, but to find the meaning of life in the pursuit of this task. Yet, the phrase "meaning of life" may be a bit misleading, because it is so serious and ponderous. Socrates shows that this pursuit can have a light touch: it is serious, worthy of the devotion of a lifetime, but it is not deadly serious. For Socrates the meaning of life resides not in realizing abstract and demanding ideals of moral perfection, but rather in the pursuit of these ideals, a pursuit that may be joyous once it is freed of the burden of perfection, a burden that seems to stem, as in the case of Alcibiades, from the belief that one must achieve perfection in order to be cured of one's narcissistic injury.

At this point an objection suggests itself. Eros, particularly as it is expressed in the self-love of narcissism, has been characterized throughout in terms of its utterly demanding character. Narcissistic eros wants satisfaction now and forever. Indeed, narcissism is defined by Grunberger in terms of its quest to recapture the experience of eternity. Furthermore, the eternity that narcissism seeks is the eternity of perfection: not the striving for wholeness but its perpetual realization, not the frustration of constant effort but the peace of permanent perfection. As Marcuse reminds us, "Joy wants eternity," a phrase that suggests to Marcuse the affinity of narcissism with the peace and cessation of stimulation that Freud writes of in *Beyond the Pleasure* Principle. How are these considerations compatible with Socrates' mature narcissism, which is characterized by a readiness to grasp the moment, to enjoy the pursuit, the wooing itself? The answer is that Socrates finds eternity in the

moment of pursuit, and in so doing comes as close as is humanly possible to eternal perfection. This is the basis of the psychological balance.

Why this is so is suggested by Carson's analysis of eros. Eros is not only about unity; it is also about edges. It exists because certain boundaries do: between reach and grasp, desire and fulfillment, one person and another, human finitude and perfection, knowledge and ignorance.[397] Indeed, this is why eros is as relevant to the desire for knowledge as it is to the desire for another person. "Stationed at the edge of itself, or of its present knowledge, the thinking mind launches a suit for understanding into the unknown. So too the wooer stands at the edge of his value as a person and asserts a claim across the boundaries of another."[398] To look at eros this way reminds us that the edges are permanent. To try to obliterate them is bound to result in frustration and unhappiness. Alcibiades will never perfect himself—at least, not for more than a moment, and certainly not for eternity. Nor will Socrates. But Socrates recognizes this, which is why he embraces the pursuit, the wooing. It is the pursuit itself that connects what one once was, what one is, and what one could be, thereby giving continuity to what MacIntyre calls the narrative unity to a human life.

MacIntyre never suggests that this narrative unity depends on reaching a particular goal. Rather, it is the pursuit of noble goals that itself gives meaning, that connects one's past, present, and future, and in this limited

sense realizes unity and wholeness. The boundaries, the edges—between self and world, self and other, self and ego ideal—are never effaced. Or rather, they are effaced only in an act of imagination, of longing, of desire, which projects what one is onto what one could be. This is why it is the desire, the longing, that must be embraced. It is through the desire, the wooing itself, that one catches a glimpse of perfection, a glimpse of what one would eternally be. But only a glimpse. It is because Socrates recognizes this that his pursuit of eros is tempered by lightness and irony. Unlike Alcibiades, he knows that the *effort* to achieve self-perfection is itself the goal. Socrates is already there. He no longer needs to struggle. He is free to be imperfect.

Reinterpreting Aristophanes

These considerations suggest that it is necessary to reinterpret slightly Aristophanes' account of the goal of love, an account that has served as a virtual motto for my account of narcissism. Aristophanes asks us to suppose that if Hephaestus were to stand over a pair of lovers and ask them what they want, their answer would be that they wish to be melded together, fused into one (Symposium 192d-e). My strategy has been to transform this expression of regressive narcissism into the progressive desire to fuse with the mature ego ideal and thereby achieve mature narcissistic wholeness. But Carson reminds us that neither Aristophanes nor Hephaestus can be considered very reliable commentators on love: Aristophanes is a poet of comic verse, and

Hephaestus is the impotent cuckold of the Olympian pantheon.[399] Indeed, upon closer examination, aspects of Aristophanes' account are incoherent. If being whole is a source of complete satisfaction, why would the round beings of his fantasy challenge the gods? The conclusion would seem to be that not even actual fusion—with another, and perhaps even with the ego ideal — is a satisfactory goal. This is not "merely" because such a goal is unrealizable and bound to lead to frustration. Rather, the goal is too static; it would end the chase. If joy is in the wooing, then joy requires separation, edges, boundaries. Even Marcuse appreciates this point, stating that "all pleasure and all happiness and all humanity originate and live in and with these divisions and these boundaries [between individuals]."[400]

That Socrates recognizes this too is seen not only in his "location" of eros, as Carson calls it. Nor is it reflected only in the lightness and the irony with which he pursues eros. It is also seen in his recognition that the goal of eros is action: not the experience of virtue and beauty, not merely their acquisition, but their creation. But this seems but another way of saying that the narcissistic goal is to create for oneself a life that possesses a narrative unity, understood as the self-conscious pursuit of ideal values over time. The consequence of this perspective for the theory of narcissism is to heighten the importance of object mastery. Though fusion between ego and ego ideal remains the goal, it is best understood in terms of the means by which it is realized— mastery. The narcissistic ideal, which can be characterized in

terms of the desire for undeserved, effortless, and perpetual wholeness via fusion with the All, is in fact realized by its antithesis: activity, creativity, effort that will inevitably fail to reach its goal, but that in failing succeeds. This too is the duality of narcissism.

Limits of the Theory of Narcissism, Formal and Substantive

Today many thoughtful people agree that a philosophy which does not address the questions raised by what Habermas calls "the classical doctrine of politics"—the teachings of Plato and Aristotle—has in fact abandoned philosophy. My book is addressed to those who do not wish to abandon this tradition. It has been addressed to those who do not wish to practice minimal philosophy. MacIntyre argues that one does not fully understand a philosophy until one grasps the type of society within which it would be most perfectly embodied. In a related fashion I have argued that one does not fully understand a philosophy concerned with human good, and not merely analytic issues, until one understands how it deals with the narcissistic quest for wholeness and perfection. A fruitful way to begin this investigation might be to conceptualize a (possibly utopian) society which has as its goal the maximization of mature narcissistic satisfaction for its members and then, working in the reverse direction from MacIntyre, consider which philosophies are most compatible with and supportive of this ideal. This would not tell us which philosophies are good, obviously; but would tell us

which philosophies take the power of the narcissistic quest seriously. Conversely, this exercise would act as a check on the ethic implicit in the theory of narcissism: that mature reconciliation between ego and ego ideal is good. One might conceivably discover, for example, that a philosophy esteemed on other grounds implies a quite different ethic. This would challenge the fruitfulness of much of my account, but it reveals an important point: namely, that the relevance of the theory of narcissism to philosophy is a hypothesis, not a tautology.

Formal Limits

As MacIntyre points out, epics such as the *Iliad* possess a narrative unity because the lives which they are about possess this unity. In the rationalized, relativistic modern world it is not so apparent that individual lives could possess this unity. However, the theory of narcissism, particularly as interpreted from a Socratic perspective, reminds us that even modern lives have the potential (generally unrealized) for narrative unity, understood as a lifelong quest for self-perfection via the pursuit of ideal values. What the theory of narcissism does not do is provide sufficient leverage by which to fully distinguish good from bad values, good from bad quests. It distinguishes only between progressive and regressive pursuits. In this, it allows us to reject shortcuts to narcissistic perfection as misguided, in the sense that, in the end, these shortcuts will result in less fulfillment than the pursuit of

mature reconciliation between ego and ideal. To be sure, such a claim skirts the naturalistic fallacy. For one could argue quite rationally that regressive pursuits are morally good, even if they result in less happiness, because they affirm other higher values. Here I am making an antecedent moral decision. Because it is a decision, not a conclusion from factual premises, it avoids the naturalistic fallacy. The antecedent moral decision is simply that a life of mature gratification and happiness is, *ceteris* paribus, better than one without such fulfillment. The ceteris paribus proviso refers to such things as this fulfillment not depending on the gross exploitation of others and so forth. The difficulty is that this proviso cannot be derived from the theory of narcissism.

The theory does not allow us to fully distinguish good from bad goals, because it cannot exclude the possibility that some forms of mature reconciliation between ego and ego ideal might be morally repugnant. In a review of *After* Virtue, Philippa Foot suggests that a Nietzschean might well conceive of his life as a narrative quest, its telos being the aggrandizement of his own power.[401] Such a pursuit might well remove the Nietzschean from the community of the powerless, but it would not necessarily remove him from the community of other Nietzscheans, with whom he might share this quest. This Nietzschean community would presumably share a common ego ideal, characterized perhaps by the so-called aristocratic virtues of the great-souled man; and it is the sharing of a common ego ideal, Freud tells us, that binds a community.[402] It is not difficult to imagine that in such a community

regressive shortcuts to reconciliation with this ego ideal would be regarded with great disdain. But would we really want to say that mature reconciliation with the community's ego ideal is ethically desirable? (To define an ethically repugnant ego ideal as, ipso facto, immature is, of course, no answer.) Just as Aristotle suggests that not every man, but only the good man, should love himself (N. *Ethics* 1169al0-15), so our considerations suggest that reconciliation between ego and ego ideal is good only when the content of the ego ideal is truly good.

The theory of narcissism provides no shortcut to the traditional philosophical analysis of what is right and good. The theory of narcissism is powerful philosophically only when combined with a comprehensive account of the good. It is this combination—which combines an analysis of the roots of human motivation with a justification of what it should aim at— that makes the accounts of Socrates and Marcuse so powerful. Another way of expressing the limits of my account of narcissism is in terms of Kant's distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic teleology.[403] Intrinsic teleology characterizes the internal relationships among the various parts and processes of an organized entity, such as a human being. Extrinsic teleology characterizes functional and hierarchical relationships among different kinds of entities.[404] My account of narcissism is an intrinsic teleology. It is about what people do to fulfill themselves, as well as what people should do if they wish to fulfill themselves more completely. What the role of narcissistic fulfillment is or

should be in the larger scheme of things—from the perspective of extrinsic teleology—has not been addressed. Though this surely constitutes a deficit in my argument, I am consoled by the fact that two of the most profound, teleologically oriented books in recent years, Galston's *Justice and the Human* Good and MacIntyre's *After* Virtue, have also stopped short of trying to justify an intrinsic teleology in terms of an extrinsic one.

Substantive Limits: Selfishness or Individualism?

The considerations above concern the formal limits of my account of narcissism. However, there are also substantive objections, for it can be argued that narcissism, no matter how sublimated, is an inadequate basis for social theory, that a decent society can be based only on mutuality, and that narcissism, no matter how refined, is ultimately selfish. In "Beyond Drive Theory," Nancy Chodorow raises this objection to Marcuse's erotic utopia. But it is also applicable to my account of narcissism. Chodorow argues that Marcuse's view of narcissism in effect denies that the external world, including other people, possesses an independent existence. The narcissist's "'refusal to accept separation from the libidinous object (or subject),' [his] 'union with a whole world of love and pleasure,' denies the object or external world its own separateness and choice."[405] Chodorow concludes that the "higher values" that Marcuse would transcend must include respect and concern for the needs and autonomy of others. But the narcissist neither

knows nor cares that others have needs as real and legitimate as his own, and a world composed solely of such individuals would seem to have more in common with Hobbes's state of nature than with an erotic utopia. As Chodorow puts it, the "narcissistic mode of relating and of drive gratification based on the pleasure principle precludes those very intersubjective relationships that should form the core of any social and political vision."[406]

Chodorow's criticism is trenchant. Though it has been countered from a number of different perspectives, it may be useful to review, from a slightly different angle, what all counter-arguments have in common. In The Heresy *of Self-Love,* Paul Zweig examines narcissistic themes in literature. Zweig's understanding of narcissism is not psychoanalytically informed, and he often seems to equate narcissism with withdrawal and a morbid concern with the self. Nevertheless, his main point is incisive and complements my approach here. It is that self-love is heretical because, as a source of subversive individualism, it challenges society and authority, in particular, all those forces that alienate man from himself, that threaten his authentic wholeness and individuality. Paramount among these forces today are industrialism, bureaucracy, and commerce (or rather, the transformation of all relationships into commercial ones).[407] Zweig's heroes—Kierkegaard, Baudelaire, and Walt Whitman, among others—all retreat into the self in order to resist these fragmenting forces. However, Zweig is quick to distinguish between heroes, neurotics, and madmen. His heroes are those who, after withdrawing into the

sanctuary of the inner self, are able to communicate to others the potential for authenticity and wholeness that they find there. His heroes risk the madness of isolation and are saved by their ability to reach out to others and touch them with what they have found.

The role of narcissism in Marcuse's work should be seen in a similar fashion. The roots of narcissism do indeed tap a level of experience that cares only for the wholeness and fulfillment of the self. But this is not a totally negative phenomenon, as Zweig points out. For it is precisely because of these roots that narcissism is such a powerful source of opposition to all that would fragment this wholeness. Indeed, Jay makes a similar point in his analysis (discussed in chapter 5) of how Marcuse sees in the memory of primitive gratification a source of revolutionary activity. What is necessary is that the profoundly selfish demands of narcissism be socialized without being co-opted. What are needed are men and women of the kind Zweig calls heroes, who can communicate this experience to others and use its demands to help build a better society. It has been my purpose to show how this process is aided by the very duality of narcissism: its potential for finding the most primitive narcissistic gratification in the pursuit of the most mature values, including values that recognize the autonomy and needs of others.

Although narcissism is not a source of mutuality per se, it is compatible with mutuality and the recognition of the subjectivity of others. To ask more

of narcissism would be to compromise the source of its power, what Zweig calls the subversive individualism of self-love. Conversely, there is no reason to assume that narcissism is the only source of mature autonomy. Jessica Benjamin, for example, in studying the roots of autonomy in the child's earliest relations with others, has drawn on the object relations theory of Fairbairn and Guntrip, as we saw in chapter 4, to show how autonomy develops from relationships, not merely from the demands of drives. Nonetheless, though it is not the only source, narcissism remains a particularly deep and powerful font of genuine autonomy, which is why the theory of narcissism is so compatible with an immanent critique of Marcuse's project. Unlike the perspectives of Chodorow and Benjamin, the theory of narcissism supports Marcuse's subversive individualism. It also shows the individual to be capable of socialization in a way that Marcuse's perspective does not. Unlike Chodorow's theory, the theory of narcissism is sympathetic to the radical individualism that she correctly identifies as being at the root of Eros *and Civilization.* The theory of narcissism concerns how this individualism can be tempered, not how it can be overcome.

Mutuality, Individualism, or Harmony?

What degree of mutuality a society that sought to encourage mature narcissism could support remains an open question. Certainly there are no grounds for thinking that such a society could not move well beyond the

competitive individualism of liberal democracy. An observation by Michael Balint supports this conclusion.

> It is taken for granted (by the infant) that the other partner, the object on the friendly expanse, will automatically have the same wishes, interests, and expectations. This explains why this is so often called the state of omnipotence. This description is somewhat out of tune: there is no feeling of power, in fact, no need for either power or effort, as all things are in harmony.[408]

To be sure, the expectation of harmony can readily degenerate into a struggle for control. Harmony on whose terms, regarding what needs, on the basis of whose compromises, are all questions especially subject to conflict. Nevertheless, there does seem to be a difference between understanding narcissism as the quest for omnipotence and control and understanding it as a quest for harmony, albeit on the narcissist's terms. For the latter way of putting it implies that narcissism contains within it the seeds of cooperation, mutuality, and intersubjectivity. From this perspective mature narcissism would involve recognition that harmony strictly on my terms is not harmony at all, but the ground of perpetual conflict. To realize my goal of harmony, which, if it is an expression of primary narcissism, is deeply rooted indeed, I must coordinate my narcissistic needs with the needs of others.

Nothing in my discussion of narcissism is incompatible with Balint's interpretation, once it is recognized that the harmony to which he refers is a harmony in which all things are in order and everything is perfect; for only in

such a state is there "no need for either power or effort." From this perspective, the quest for mastery stems from narcissistic injury, understood as the loss of harmony, the loss of effortless equilibrium, the loss of nirvana. Perhaps this perspective renders narcissism less aggressive, less imperialistic. Nevertheless, there remains associated with the theory of narcissism an assertion of the value of individuality, even mastery and control, that is not associated with many visions of the good society. The harmony of primary narcissism must be disrupted, and only mastery—which is not the same as aggression or self-aggrandizement—can restore its simulacrum. However, to put it this way reveals more clearly than ever that to call ideal the society that fosters mature narcissism for all its citizens is not simply to call for all good things. The social theory associated with the theory of narcissism does not seek to decenter the individual or even to recenter him, in the manner of Habermas and Chodorow. Rather, it seeks to preserve and restore the individual in an era in which many of the most powerful economic, cultural, and social trends—as well as a surprising number of social philosophies—seem headed in the other direction.

Notes

390 Martha Nussbaum, Fragility of Goodness, p. 371.

391 Heinz Kohut, Restoration of the Self, p. 177.

392 Kohut, Self Psychology and the Humanities, chaps. 1 and 14.

393 Michel Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge, p. 203; quoted by Martin Jay, Marxism and Totality, p. 524.

394 Sigmund Freud, “On Narcissism,” p. 94.

395 Anne Carson, Eros the Bittersweet, pp. 3-9.

396 Ibid., p. 173.

397 Ibid., pp. 30-31.

398 Ibid.. p. 71.

399 Ibid., p. 68. Hephaestus was hurled out of heaven by his mother, Hera, because, alone of all the gods, he was born deformed and ugly. To punish his mother, Hephaestus chained her to a golden throne; but he freed her when she promised him Aphrodite as his wife. Aphrodite was an unwilling wife, however, and committed adultery with the handsome Ares. Whether Hephaestus was in fact impotent, as Carson claims, depends on how one interprets his unsuccessful advances toward Athena. In one account, he embraced her, she repulsed him, and his seed fell on her leg. See Catherine Avery, ed. The New Century Handbook of Greek Mythology and Legend, pp. 245-49.

400 Herbert Marcuse, “Love Mystified," p. 236.

401 Philippa Foot, review of After Virtue, by Alasdair MacIntyre.

402 Freud. "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego," pp. 129-30.

403 Immanuel Kant, Critique of Judgment, pp. 318-24.

404 See William Galston, Justice and the Human Good, p. 12.

405 Nancy Chodorow, "Beyond Drive Theory,” p. 293.

406 Ibid. Chodorow suggests that an alternative construction of narcissism that stresses the connections between individuals could encourage community (p. 306). but she does not

elaborate.

407 Paul Zweig, The Heresy of Self-Love: A Study of Subversive Individualism, pp. 233-34.

408 Michael Balint, The Basic Fault, p. 20.

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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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