Social Recognition and the Ethics of Empathy in Pastoral Theological Anthropology:
A Phenomenological and Relational Psychoanalytic Study

By

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To my father,
Neil Anthony Capretto
(1955 – 2018),

whose care for the marginalized
and prophetic witness to the suffering of the world
pushed empathy to its limits—
and, possibly, beyond.

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The Ethical Promise of Empathy in Theological Anthropology

In August of 2015, when listening to the news on NPR as I do every morning, I heard the bizarre story of a young woman and cameraman shot and killed in the middle of a live news report in Virginia. Confused, but perversely intrigued to learn more, I found the chaotic 30-second video of a blond-haired white woman, Alison Parker, running from gunfire and screaming. Still unclear about what even happened in the video after viewing it, I watched it a second time and noticed that one does not actually see the woman shot, but only hears screams, sees the camera dropping, and catches a brief, very blurry glimpse of the shooter. I sat in the same chair that August morning where I sat to watch the more detailed broadcasts of shootings and murders of many black men and women in previous years: Eric Garner, Laquan McDonald, Natasha Mckenna, and Tamir Rice, to name only a few. In those instances, my typical response had been what some might characterize as "slacktivism": I comment to myself and others close to me on the injustice of racism and white supremacy in the U.S., post some remark of resistance on Facebook, and proceed with my day. Yet this morning, when I watched this young white woman shot, for the first time in my life, something was very different. Soon after watching the video a second time, I could feel myself starting to vomit my breakfast. I stood to head to my kitchen sink, except I didn't make it that far, a mere four steps from where I was sitting in my small apartment. I had passed out. I woke up several minutes later on my kitchen floor with my face cut from my counter as I fell to the floor. I am not a squeamish person and I had never

passed out in my life until that day. The far more gruesome videos of black men and women didn't have this effect on me.

Since I consider myself a progressive white man and theological caregiver, you might understand I was disgusted to find myself so disproportionately affected by violence against a person in my racial in-group. Though I consider myself a progressive white man and theological caregiver, I am disgusted to find myself *intellectually* outraged by news stories of repeated unjust killings of persons of color but *viscerally* ill when watching a single televised story of a white person shot and killed. Moments like these do not debunk the interpersonal value of empathy. They do however confront us starkly with the disturbing biases and limits of empathy. The capacity to empathize or feel oneself into the experience of another person is a humbling task that requires constant work, even for those with good ethical intentions. If pastoral caregivers with normative[1] theological commitments cannot empathize with those different than themselves, then willing oneself to be more empathic may in fact be a futile effort at inclusive theological caregiving and ethical consciousness. With this problem in mind, the task of this dissertation is to better understand the ethical role that empathy serves for pastoral responses to the suffering of persons not recognized within one's particular group, identity, and social location.

Empathy from Heinz Kohut to Relational Psychoanalysis

Among the sources that initially drove interest around empathy in pastoral theology and care, self psychologist Heinz Kohut's description of empathy as vicarious introspection into the

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[1] I use "normative" throughout this dissertation in the philosophical sense of normative ethics, pertaining to ethical systems and commitments that are directed toward established norms and commitments. This includes but is not limited to preferential treatment for the poor and the importance of caring for marginalized suffering. In the context of this project, this will be particularly important to distinguish normative ethical commitments from phenomenological ethics in pastoral care and theology.

"thoughts, feelings, wishes, and fantasies" of others proved highly influential.[2] Not to be confused with positive regard or social affirmation, empathy for Kohut is more precisely the clinical and relational tool for interpreting the psychological lives of others. This means empathy can be used either to help or harm others in their psychological health and development. Kohut's theory thus made empathy useful not only to explain how psychotherapeutic healing and relation is possible, but also as an intercultural framework for understanding and combatting racism, sexism, xenophobia, and other insidious forms of unconscious bias directed at human difference. Particularly for liberal Protestants committed to awareness of marginalized suffering and oppression, the "freedom of choice" in empathy, as Kohut describes it, underscores the ethical significance of being able to empathize with the suffering of others. Empathy's theological and ethical potential is that it frees us from a deterministic or solipsistic existence, giving us "a wider and more vivid experience of freedom" to think and act beyond the deterministic ways we often direct our attention.[3] That is, freedom in empathy includes the prospect of being able empathize beyond pre-existing structures of social recognition.

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[2] Heinz Kohut, "Introspection, Empathy, and Psychoanalysis: An Examination of the Relationship between Mode of Observation and Theory," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 7 (1959): 459. Note that this famous essay of Kohut's was made more accessible and has been frequently cited in its reprinting: Heinz Kohut, "Introspection, Empathy, and Psychoanalysis: An Examination of the Relationship Between Mode of Observation and Theory," in *The Search for the Self: Selected Writings of Heinz Kohut: 1950 – 1978*, ed. Paul H. Ornstein, 205-232 (New York: International Universities Press, 1978). This and all subsequent citations refer to the pagination of the original publication of Kohut's essay in the *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*.

[3] Kohut, "Introspection, Empathy, and Psychoanalysis," 481.

Yet in the years following Kohut's death in 1981, relational psychoanalysts such as Jessica Benjamin,[4] Nancy Chodorow,[5] Donna Orange,[6] and Robert Stolorow[7] critiqued and modified Kohut's theory to address concerns around the individualism of self psychology and its understanding of empathy. They contend that empathy for other people emerges from relationships and the mutual co-constitution of persons within intersubjective psychological and cultural spaces, not necessarily through individual volition. Theologians working with social theory such as Ed Farley,[8] Bonnie Miller-McLemore,[9] and Pamela Cooper-White[10] have similarly insisted that empathy cannot simply traverse boundaries of human difference. Simply wanting to empathize with someone of a different race, gender, sex, ethnicity, nationality, or culture does not necessarily produce understanding or emotional responsiveness. This helps explain the internal conflict of pastoral caregivers over the biases of their empathy.

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[4] Jessica Benjamin, *Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988); Jessica Benjamin, "An Outline of Intersubjectivity: The Development of Recognition," *Psychoanalytic Psychology* 7 (1990): 33 – 46; Jessica Benjamin, *Like Subjects, Love Objects: Essays on Recognition and Sexual Difference* (New York: Yale University Press, 1998).

[5] Nancy J. Chodorow, "Toward a Relational Individualism: The Mediation of the Self through Psychoanalysis," in *Reconstructing Individualism: Autonomy, Individuality, and the Self in Western Thought*, ed. Thomas C. Heller, Morton Sosna, and David E. Wellbery (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986).

[6] Donna M. Orange, "Subjectivism, Relativism, and Realism in Psychoanalysis," in *Progress in Self Psychology, Volume 8: New Therapeutic Visions*, ed. Arnold Goldberg (Hillsdale, NJ: The Analytic Press, 1992); Donna M. Orange, "Countertransference, Empathy, and the Hermeneutic Circle," in *Progress in Self Psychology, Volume 9: The Widening Scope of Self Psychology*, ed. Arnold Goldberg (Hillsdale, NJ: The Analytic Press, 1993); Donna M. Orange, George E. Atwood, Robert D. Stolorow, *Working Intersubjectively: Contextualism in Psychoanalytic Practice* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

[7] Robert D. Stolorow and George G. Atwood, *Structures in Subjectivity: Explorations in Psychoanalytic Phenomenology* (Hillsdale, NJ: The Analytic Press, 1984); Robert D. Stolorow, George E. Atwood, and Bernard Brandchaft, *Psychoanalytic Treatment: An Intersubjective Approach* (Hillsdale, NJ: Analytic Press, 1987); Robert D. Stolorow and George E. Atwood, "The Myth of the Isolated Mind," in *Progress in Self Psychology, Volume 10: A Decade of Progress*, ed. Arnold Goldberg (Hillsdale, NJ: The Analytic Press, 1994).

[8] Edward Farley, "Phenomenology and Pastoral Care," *Pastoral Psychology* 26 (1977); Edward Farley, *Divine Empathy: A Theology of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990); Edward Farley, *Good and Evil: Interpreting a Human Condition* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996).

[9] Bonnie Miller-McLemore, "The Human Web: Reflections on the State of Pastoral Theology," *The Christian Century* April 7, 1993.

[10] Pamela Cooper-White, *Shared Wisdom: Use of the Self in Pastoral Care and Counseling* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004).

These revised relational theories of empathy appear to be a natural evolution of Kohut's thought. But with the relational psychoanalytic contention that empathy is only possible within confines of our socio-historical consciousness[11] and reflection upon "our own point of view or perspective," it becomes unclear how much control and responsibility persons really have over their empathy.[12] It may seem that the only strategy for broadening empathy for caregivers is to merge or join social groups, making outsiders insiders or out-groups part of the in-group. It is for this reason that, rather than fully abandoning the Kohutian framework, several scholars in pastoral theology, such as Archie Smith, Emmanuel Lartey, and, most recently, Mindy McGarrah Sharp, have worked to revise the social epistemology of empathy to fit within intercultural and relational forms of care.[13] "Intersubjectivity theory and relational psychoanalysis have not replaced these [Kohutian, self psychological] frameworks," Cooper-White notes.[14] Instead they have "expanded" relational and ethical theories of empathy to account for the "complexity and multiplicity of self-states that constitute the inner landscape of one's self and subjectivity, and [for] the importance of understanding the mutual co-construction of reality, including perceptions of self/selves, other/s, and the world."[15] Even if the Kohutian

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[11] Donna M. Orange, "Subjectivism, Relativism, and Realism in Psychoanalysis," in *Progress in Self Psychology, Volume 8: New Therapeutic Visions*, ed. Arnold Goldberg (Hillsdale, NJ: The Analytic Press, 1992), 191. Orange offers a complex though explicit connection between Husserlian solipsism, Kohutian self psychology, and empathic interpretation in relational psychoanalysis: "A phenomenological view of the method and theory of psychoanalysis—the view uncompromisingly espoused by Kohut—requires us to eliminate preconceptions (diagnostic, metapsychological, and otherwise) and to work as completely as possible within the subjective experience of the patient […] The qualifier 'as possible' recognizes the limits on this phenomenological project imposed by our own historically constituted subjectivity, our own organization of experience" (191).

[12] Donna M. Orange. "Countertransference, Empathy, and the Hermeneutic Circle," in *Progress in Self Psychology, Volume 9: The Widening Scope of Self Psychology*, ed. Arnold Goldberg (Hillsdale, NJ: The Analytic Press, 1993), 253.

[13] Emmanuel Lartey, *In Living Color: An Intercultural Approach to Pastoral Care and Counseling*, 2nd ed. (New York: Jessica Kingsley Press, 2003); Archie Smith Jr., *The Relational Self: Ethics and Therapy from a Black Church Perspective* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1982); Melinda McGarrah Sharp, *Misunderstanding Stories: Toward a Postcolonial Pastoral Theology* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013); Pamela Cooper-White, *Many Voices: Pastoral Psychotherapy in Relational and Theological Perspective* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007).

[14] Cooper-White, *Many Voices*, 112.

[15] Cooper-White, *Many Voices,* 112.

understanding of vicarious introspection derives from a more individualistic psychoanalytic theory, pastoral theologians have shown that empathy is still the best way to describe social understanding within a more relational framework.

The Theo-Ethical-Political Problem: Empathy and In-Group Recognition

Yet through these complex developments, social neuroscientist and psychologist of religion Daniel Batson argues that one of the problems in understanding the social and political impact of empathy is that interdisciplinary research into the practice, structure, and nature of empathy is plagued by a problem of both question and definition: "Application of the term *empathy* to so many distinct phenomena is, in part, a result of researchers invoking empathy to provide an answer to two quite different questions: [1] How can one know what another person is thinking and feeling? [2] What leads one person to respond with sensitivity and care to the suffering of another?"[16] Batson's subsequent taxonomy of eight models of empathy reveals a complex history of how disciplines have made "empathy" their own, particularly within the past 30 years. For scholarship in theological anthropology, the relation of his two questions captures an ambivalence between theoretical and practical understandings of empathy. The first question is explicitly epistemological—a matter of *knowing* another person. The second question is explicitly ethical—a matter of *responding* to another person. Batson's task is not to divorce these aspects, but rather to show the methodological advantages of clarifying how empathy is being operationalized. It is not that those working in theological anthropology must treat empathy's social epistemology and relational ethics as two unrelated phenomena; rather, scholars and practitioners must scrutinize the compatibility of sources and theoretical frameworks used in

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[16] Daniel Batson, "These Things Called Empathy: Eight Related but Distinct Phenomena," *The Social Neuroscience of Empathy*, ed. Jean Decety and William Ickes (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 3.

conceptualizing empathy. Without this scrutiny, it is difficult to assess whether empathy is actually helpful for recognizing traumatic suffering that is marginalized from ethical consciousness, or whether the apparent versatility of empathy disguises the theoretical conflation of numerous disciplines using empathy for their distinct purposes.

From Batson's distinction emerges at least three obstacles or analytical problems for understanding the ethics of empathy for social and political recognition of trauma. One simple analysis is that scholars have misappropriated empathy from largely individualistic psychoanalytic and phenomenological traditions. That is, we can explain the failure of empathy's ethical and political function because of the disciplinary incompatibility between individualistic and intersubjective anthropologies. In this case, disciplines such as pastoral theology, systematic theology, and theological ethics simply cannot revise an individualistically designed empathy to make ethical or social epistemological sense after the effects of relational and intersubjective psychoanalysis.

But as definitive as this analysis seems, it neglects a second problem: It fails to explain whether and how social and political recognition can ever be expanded to marginalized trauma and suffering without empathy. Social theorists in both philosophy and psychology realize that political attention is shaped by unconscious bias and recognition. Moreover, empathy appears limited to in-group social recognition. This reduction of empathy only underscores the problem that, without descending into a perverse form of social solipsism, marginalized suffering often persists apart from our attention and recognition. If, in fact, an other-oriented ethics of marginalized suffering is incompatible with the early twentieth-century theoretical lineage of empathy, then all ethically-minded scholars concerned with trauma recognition—not only

theologians—face the problem of a social determinism that precludes any choice in empathy at the outset.

This leads to a third and perhaps most challenging problem, especially in relation to Kohut: What do we make of the seemingly essential role that freedom—that is, the ability to empathize beyond one's limited context—plays in empathic recognition? For thinkers such as the early experiential psychologist Franz Brentano,[17] phenomenologists Edmund Husserl[18] and Edith Stein,[19] and Freud[20] himself, freedom is an inherently opaque concept that obscures when science has overstepped the bounds of social, psychoanalytic, and phenomenological analysis. That is, psychic determinism precludes the idea of freedom not because it favors bondage or limitation, but rather because freedom of will is impossible to analyze. This opacity is problematic not only because empathic freedom cannot be explained on theoretical grounds, but because it is not clear how we can actually cultivate a broader ethical consciousness through it. If persons are truly free to direct their empathy however they please, then persons could extend psychological and political recognition beyond their social consciousness and cultural horizons, thus recognizing marginalized persons. Yet appeals to simply "use our freedom" get in the way of transparency and ethical rigor that might actually help broaden political consciousness. In other words, there is good reason for the progressive political suspicion toward empathic freedom: Social analysis cannot entertain the possibility of persons mysteriously knowing something about a foreign culture or identity under the guise of "freedom." By unyoking

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[17] Franz Brentano, *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, trans. Antos C. Rancurello, D. B. Terrell, & Linda L. McAlister (New York: Routledge, 1995).

[18] Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, Second Book*, trans. R. Rojcewicz and A. Schuwer (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002).

[19] Edith Stein, *On the Problem of Empathy,* Third Revised Edition, trans. Waltraut Stein (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1989).

[20] Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, trans. & ed. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton, 1960).

empathy from social restrictions in this way, this freedom also implies a transgression of social and cultural difference.

Yet to understand what this freedom might look like, it is important to note how Kohut himself describes the process of deciding where we direct our empathy. For Kohut, it is impossible to conceive of empathy without a freedom that defies the logic of psychic and social determinism.[21] Though the concept of freedom may push the limits of psychoanalysis and social theory, there is simply no way to revise empathy in a way that restricts people's freedom and choice in actually being empathic. Freedom and choice are inextricably what empathy has always been about. Kohut insists that it is not enough to empirically observe others, even in their embodiment; one must "feel" the unusual size of another, their physical acts, their skin and eyes.[22] A person can describe these bodily and sensory encounters with another, but unless there is the freedom to introspect vicariously into those acts, as we would our own, there is no encounter with the psychological life of the other. This is why one can't empathize with a rock; there are no "psychological facts" to the rock. The rock is literally petrified, "without world," as Martin Heidegger describes it in his *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*.[23]

The disparity between the rock and the human, however, is deceiving in its simplicity. Freud appreciated a messier, "not unambiguous" space where deciding between persons and those things which have no psychological intent is far more plausible. *Unheimlich* or uncanny experiences are not fully explained by this sort of intellectual uncertainty, yet a person is quite capable of confusing an "automaton" or robot with another person, such as with the character

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[21] Kohut, "Introspection, Empathy, and Psychoanalysis," 480.

[22] Kohut, "Introspection, Empathy, and Psychoanalysis," 461-462. "The mere fact that we see a pattern of movements leading to a specific end does not, by itself, define a psychological act. […] If there is conscious or unconscious intent with which we can empathize, we speak of a psychological act. […] Only a phenomenon that we can attempt to observe by introspection or by empathy with another's introspection may be called psychological."

[23] Martin Heidegger, *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: Worlds, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. William McNeill & Nicholas Walker (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, [1930] 1995), 196.

Olimpia in ETA Hoffmann's *der Sandmann*.[24] This comes as even less of a surprise in the twenty-first century, when an artificially intelligent machine's ability to pass a Turing Test is an increasing reality.

Yet Kohut sets up the illustration in a way that it would seem ludicrous to object that the rock is somehow psychological. We seem to come to the world already knowing the rocks from the people. The rock will never contest our unwillingness to recognize it; while we may not always empathize with other persons, their psychological life means there will always be substance for our empathy whenever we decide to employ it.

For this reason, Kohut's formulation that empathy can only be directed at psychological acts isn't so much "wrong" as it is tautological. It is true that empathy may be the precondition for certain types of therapeutic interpretation. Yet if one does not first empathize, how would one ever recognize the psychic life of this other person in the first place? He is also correct that in important ways, empathy is value neutral, with potential to be used beneficently or maliciously. Yet the decision of whether to empathize with ambiguous object A (a human shaped animal) and object B (a rock) is already to have interpreted and judged these experiential data in ways that harm or help. Indeed, psychiatrist and philosopher of race Frantz Fanon anticipated this problem before Kohut came on to the scene when he wrote, "Man [*sic*] is human only to the extent to which he tries to impose his existence on another man in order to be recognized by him. As long as he has not been effectively recognized by the other, that other will remain the theme of his actions. It is on that other being, on recognition by that other being, that his own human worth and reality depend. It is that other being in whom the meaning of his life is condensed."[25] Even if

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[24] Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVII (1917 – 1919): An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1919).

[25] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 169.

one empathizes with another to exploit their psychological motivations, one has at least recognized this person as a person.

It is with this issue that the seeming cold methodological problem of confirmation bias—the inferential error of seeking out data that confirm one's prior beliefs and hypotheses[26]—takes on utterly concrete ethical and political significance in the lives of embodied persons: When we empathize only with those objects whom we *recognize* as persons, we only affirm psychological life according to the interpretation of "person" we bring at the outset. Hence, the ethical magnitude of Batson's two questions emerges: *To know what another person is thinking or feeling is already to have recognized that there is a psychological life to this person worthy of response*. For this reason, Kohut and others are correct to describe empathy as morally neutral, but this also drastically understates its relational, theological, ethical, and political power to constitute which bodies matter and which do not.

What remains unclear, however, is whether pastoral theological descriptions of empathy in intersubjective and intercultural theories retain any sense of the freedom that Kohut originally described, which is the reason for empathy's ethical potential in the first place. Said otherwise, within contemporary intercultural or intersubjective pastoral care literature, it is difficult to explain how empathy is distinct from in-group recognition. Unless a theological caregiver already recognizes the suffering of another person, it is hard to see how empathy actually broadens ethical consciousness to those at the margins of pre-existing political consciousness. Thus, the primary question of this dissertation is whether attempts within contemporary

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[26] For a comprehensive account of the methodological issue of confirmation bias as it pertains to social scientific and philosophical reasoning, see Raymond S. Nickerson, "Confirmation Bias: A Ubiquitous Phenomenon in Many Guises," *Review of General Psychology* 2 (1998): 175 – 220; see also Amy M. Masnick and Corinne Zimmerman, "Evaluating Scientific Research in the Context of Prior Belief: Hindsight Bias or Confirmation Bias?," *Journal of Psychology of Science and Technology* 2 (2009): 29 – 36.

relational and intercultural pastoral theology to revise Kohutian empathy have inadvertently eliminated or overlooked the freedom that is essential for broadening ethical consciousness of marginalized suffering, thereby reducing empathy to social in-group recognition.

Thesis

I argue that pastoral theologians originally viewed empathy as an ethical resource because of the freedom described by Kohut, but that theologians and social theorists have gradually rejected the idea that one can freely extend empathy across human difference. This development was intended in part to appreciate social difference and to defend relational theory from psychic colonization and intellectual imperialism. While intersubjective psychoanalysis has helped pastoral theology clarify the co-constitution of social knowledge and the limits of empathy, it has largely overlooked the freedom that made empathy theoretically distinct and ethically valuable for pastoral theology at the outset.

However, such concerns about the limits of empathy had already emerged much earlier within psychoanalytic and phenomenological traditions near the turn of the twentieth century, a development that has gone unrecognized in contemporary discussions. Despite listening carefully to his patients, Sigmund Freud largely eschewed the idea of empathy, likening it and telepathy to versions of occultism that are unfit for any scientific project.[27] Similarly,

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[27] Freud, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*; Sigmund Freud, "Dreams and Telepathy," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVIII (1920-1922): Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Group Psychology and Other Works*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1955).

phenomenologists such as Brentano,[28] Husserl,[29] and Levinas[30] wrestled with the problem that, as Husserl wrote, "I obviously cannot have the 'alien' or 'other' as experience" within a phenomenological framework.[31] For these thinkers, describing empathy as "free" merely disguises and obfuscates the limits of social, psychoanalytic, and phenomenological analysis. Even if the idea of "freedom" were theoretically clear, one still could not translate this idea into any practical strategy for empathizing with marginalized experiences of suffering; advising someone to try harder to combat their empathic biases offers little to nothing for concrete pastoral situations.

This conflict over the ethical freedom of empathy—or whether people are able to empathize beyond their pre-existing social and ethical consciousness—is why Kohut described Freud's position on empathy as "contradictory" and "extremely reluctant," adding that "the psychoanalytic attitude concerning the existence of choice and decision is neither uncomplicated nor without discrepancies."[32] For Kohut, it is impossible to conceive of empathy without a freedom that defies the logic of psychic and social determinism. Though the concept of freedom may push the limits of psychoanalysis and social theory, there is simply no way to revise empathy in a way that restricts people's freedom and choice in actually being empathic. Freedom and choice are inextricably what empathy has always been about.

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[28] Brentano, *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*; Franz Brentano, *Descriptive Psychology*, trans & ed. Benito Müller (New York: Routledge, 1982).

[29] Husserl, *Ideas, Second Book*; Edmund Husserl, *Phenomenological Psychology: Lectures, Summer Semester, 1925*, trans. John Scanlon (The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977); Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorion Cairns (The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960).

[30] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1969).

[31] Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 125.

[32] Kohut, "Introspection, Empathy, and Psychoanalysis," 480.

Kohut's conviction about the importance of freedom in empathy thus reveals an uncomfortable situation for pastoral practitioners in complex caregiving situations. The liberal Protestant commitment to serving disenfranchised and marginalized persons appears both biblical and non-negotiable ethically. Yet one's helplessness over the limits of empathy is not only emotionally defeating, but also problematic for addressing the ethical need for and normative commitments to greater consciousness of marginalized suffering. The aporia is that Kohut's attention to freedom reveals both the absurdity and the essence of empathy: The only way empathy can broaden ethical consciousness is through the possibility that people have the ability to move vicariously into the psychic life and lived experiences of others we do not already recognize.[33] In short, when we use empathy, we often want to have it both ways: empathy reaps the ethical potential of a freely expanding social consciousness, yet has been cloaked in new theoretical garbs designed to sidestep critiques of social epistemological colonialism. The ideological conflict is whether we are willing to tolerate transgressions of difference for the sake of a broader ethical consciousness.

Which Empathy? What Ethics? Clarification on Definitions

Because there are so many competing models for conceptualizing empathy, a crucial task for this project will be to clarify and remain consistent in its understanding of empathy. One of the contentions of this dissertation is that oscillating between different understandings of empathy can produce imprecise or even harmful assumptions about what empathy can accomplish. The entirety of this project would be undermined if I fell prey to the same issue.

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[33] This contention around freedom bears a strong relation to the polarizing responses to theological and philosophical systems constructed around "revelation" as a founding event for theological reflection that is nonetheless inexplicable and something for which we cannot always prepare.

The humble reality is that there is no perfect definition for empathy. How one operationalizes empathy will invariably shape the way the problem is conceived and analyzed. The common confusion of the social epistemology and relational ethics of empathy presents the messier possibility that prioritizing one over the other will invariably shape how empathy is understood as a matter of practical response and theoretical knowledge. This does not mean, however, that the decision of what model of empathy to use must be random. To prevent the selection of a model of empathy from becoming an arbitrary decision, it is crucial to choose the model which best reflects the ethical and pastoral theological problem at hand. It would be pointless to reflect on an understanding of empathy detached from lived situations of suffering, marginalization, and caregiving. At the same time, it would be unproductive to deploy an unnecessarily convoluted model of empathy in an effort to match the messiness of lived situations.

At best, the model of empathy used should be attuned to the complex affective and social space of these encounters, but it should also offer an interpretive framework for better understanding and modeling the conflicts and prospects for broader ethical consciousness. Insofar as this project assumes some degree of ethical responsibility in caregiving, the model of empathy used must be attentive to caregiver's agency in empathizing. That is, the model of empathy must be able to conceptualize the process through which a caregiver would empathize with another, accounting for both the individual and social dimensions of this process. While there are notable differences between the affective and cognitive dimensions of the problem at hand, the model of empathy used must be able to account for the overlapping effects of cognitive perspective taking and its affective consequences. Scholars such as Max Scheler[34] and Volney

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[34] Max Scheler. *The Nature of Sympathy*, trans. Peter Heath (London: Routledge and Kegan Press, 1954).

Gay[35] have rightly noted the distinction between sympathy as affective and empathy as cognitive. However, one of the central contentions of this project is that the prospect of a sympathetic emotional response is predicated upon one's capacity to recognize the substance of another's psychological life. That is, while one may be able to cognitively empathize with another without being sympathetic to their emotional state, it is impossible to emotionally sympathize with another if one does not recognize that other's psychological substance. Said otherwise, a model of empathy that merely prioritizes the social and emotional dimensions of caregiving interactions without attention to the structures of social recognition fails to conceptualize the ethical problem at hand.

As this dissertation will argue, Kohut's model of empathy suffers from several theoretical, anthropological, and ethical problems. However, Kohut's model of empathy as vicarious introspection is methodologically, theoretically, and historically appropriate for this thesis, and there are several reasons why Kohut's description is best—if not ideally—suited for this project.

First, Kohut's definition of empathy as vicarious introspection is best suited for this analysis because of its precision. Though empathy as vicarious introspection is very specifically situated within a psychoanalytic framework, thereby limiting its theoretical reach, this also means that there is little room for obfuscating its meaning. The precision of Kohut's definition will prevent this project from meandering unwittingly across multiple definitions of empathy.

Second, historically speaking, Kohut's model came into greater prominence during a transitional time for both pastoral care and theology, as well as the emergence of relational psychoanalysis. As an interdisciplinary project in the area of religion, psychology, and culture,

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[35] Volney Gay, *Understanding the Occult: Fragmentation and Repair of the Self* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1989).

this dissertation focuses disciplinarily on the intersection of pastoral and psychoanalytic approaches to interpersonal situations. Yet given its interrogation of how empathy's use has become less clear within pastoral care and theology in recent decades, this dissertation benefits from focusing on a historical evolution of the term at the start of this period, marked notably by the rise of relational psychoanalysis's influence on pastoral care. While Kohut is not a universally adopted figure, he was uniquely influential in both relational psychoanalysis and pastoral care in the time after his death in 1981. While the focus of my project is on empathy and not precisely on Kohut, his presence in both relational psychoanalytic and pastoral theological literature will allow my analysis to be less speculative in tracing the influence of his model in recent decades. In other words, by narrowing the focus of my literature review more closely on those responding to Kohutian empathy, my margin for error in remaining consistent in my definition goes down drastically.

Third, because this dissertation holds that clarity on interpersonal and ethical situations is strengthened by phenomenological analysis, Kohut's definition of empathy has the advantage of being remarkably consistent with phenomenological accounts of empathy. Though Kohut's references to phenomenology are sparse, scholars such as Marilyn Nissim-Sabat[36] and Bruce Reis[37] have noted the strong compatibility of Kohut's vicarious introspection with the Husserlian understanding of empathy that largely serves as the historical and theoretical foundation for phenomenological treatments of empathy. This means that, while there are important limitations and distinctions to be made between phenomenology and psychoanalytic work on empathy,

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[36] Marilyn Nissim-Sabat, "Kohut and Husserl: The Empathic Bond," in *Self Psychology: Comparisons and Contrasts*, ed. Douglas W. Detrick and Susan P. Detrick, (Hillsdale, NJ: The Analytic Press, 1989).

[37] Bruce Reis, "Reading Kohut Through Husserl," in *Psychoanalytic Inquiry* 31 (2011).

Kohut's model stands as a reasonably coherent model that translates well in this interdisciplinary setting.

Even with its many advantages, it is crucial to remain as mindful as possible about the limitations of Kohut's model. Perhaps the greatest limitation, which will be a recurrent theme in this project, is the individualism of self psychology and its understanding of empathy. It would make a straw man of Kohut to suggest that his understanding of the self is atomistic and asocial; there is, in fact, a strong case to be made that self psychology expands the social dimension of Freudian psychoanalysis. Even so, one must be mindful of the ways that even the most social evolution of an originally individualistic and Darwinian anthropology may prove problematic, especially within the context of broadening ethical consciousness.

Lastly, while this dissertation does not fall narrowly within the subdisciplines of theological or philosophical ethics, it repeatedly engages the question of the ethics of empathy, or what empathy can accomplish ethically within a pastoral theological framework. In a project that engages Heinz Kohut as its sustained interlocutor, operationalizing "ethics" and "ethical care" in a consistent fashion is particularly difficult, namely because Kohut—like Freud before him—was highly reticent to discuss ethics at all. In one of the rare instances when Kohut discusses ethics explicitly in his corpus, he describes "the analyst's readiness to take on an ethical, or ethically tinged, realistic stance" as a confounding liability to their efficacy as an empathic interpreter.[38]

To be more concrete in clarifying my use of "ethics," "ethical care," and "ethical consciousness" throughout this dissertation, by these terms I am referring to the ability of empathy to achieve the normative caregiving values expressed primarily though not exclusively

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[38] Heinz Kohut, *The Analysis of the Self: A Systematic Approach to the Psychoanalytic Treatment of Narcissistic Personality Disorders* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 221.

through Protestant pastoral care and theology: in particular, alleviating the suffering of marginalized oppression. Framed somewhat differently than above, the ethical conundrum for pastoral care is whether or not empathy is actually effective in enabling caregivers to (1) broaden their awareness of marginalized suffering, (2) affectively and cognitively understand something about that experience, and (3) compel them to respond and labor toward healing of that suffering. The first element is a matter of recognition; the second element is a matter of vicarious introspection; the third element is a matter of care. As will become clear, this ostensibly normative pastoral ethical framework is almost immediately problematized by the issue of recognition outlined within the ethics of figures such as philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, where ethics is decidedly phenomenological and not normative in character.[39] That is, ethics in this dissertation is ultimately understood and evaluated practically in terms of whether or not psychological capacities such as empathy actually help to alleviate marginalized suffering, but the conceptual issues that plague empathy are often phenomenological—not normative.

Method

Within the threefold taxonomy of scholarship in religion and psychology outlined by Miller-McLemore, this dissertation most closely aligns with "the critical personal and cultural correlation of theology and the social sciences," though it includes phenomenological analysis as a meaningful correlate as well.[40] By placing late twentieth-century pastoral theological uses of empathy in conversation with early psychoanalytic and phenomenological sources, it examines how ambivalence over the ethics of empathy may arise from less apparent conflicts between the

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[39] I take up Levinas's phenomenological ethical treatment of the problem of recognition in chapter five. See Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*.

[40] Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, "The Subversive Practice of Pastoral Theology," *Christian Theology in Practice: Discovering a Discipline* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2012), 142. The other two "groups" named by Miller-McLemore are "those involved in the empirical or hermeneutical social-scientific study of religious experience" and "those interested in practical and pastoral theology, care, and counseling" (142).

social epistemological limits of empathy and "normatively and eschatologically oriented" ethical commitments among pastoral caregivers—namely, the desire to care for and give voice to marginalized suffering.[41] This requires clarifying the concerns raised by psychoanalysts and phenomenologists over the limits and contradictions inherent within vicarious introspection, as well as the ways that pastoral theologians have used empathy as an ethical resource, often within liberal Protestant settings.

This project may be seen as scrutinizing methodological coherence and consistency more than is common in the field of religion and psychology, thereby neglecting the pragmatic lineage of U.S. pastoral care,[42] the versatile identity of pastoral caregivers as methodological "scavengers,"[43] or even the stern theological warning of feminist theologians over "methodolatry."[44] Yet while this project agrees with William James that wherever "no practical difference whatever can be traced, then […] all dispute is idle," I am convinced that theoretical ambivalence over the normative limits of empathy manifest themselves in very real and practical ways for pastoral situations—namely in strategies for responding to suffering across lines of human difference and reflecting on ethical responsibility in empathic failures.[45] Thus this project seeks an understanding of empathy that is theoretically coherent in pastoral theology, yet which provides meaningful reflection on ethical practice.

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[41] Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, "Introduction: The Contributions of Practical Theology," *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, ed. Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 14.

[42] William James, *Pragmatism* (New York: Dover Publications, 1995).

[43] Valerie DeMarinis, *Critical Caring: A Feminist Model for Pastoral Psychology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993); Robert C. Dykstra, "Introduction," in *Images of Pastoral Care: Classic Readings*, ed. Robert C. Dykstra (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2004), 10.

[44] Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), 11.

[45] James, *Pragmatism*, 18.

Outline of Project

Building from the opening analysis in the present chapter, this dissertation develops its argument through four additional chapters. Their main argumentative moves are worthy of outlining briefly.

In the second chapter, "Heinz Kohut and the Ethical Potential of Empathy," I introduce Kohut's definition of empathy as vicarious introspection within the context of Freud's early ambivalence over empathy, and underscore empathy's potential as a resource for theorizing ethical relationship with others. It starts with a synopsis of Freud's sparse uses of empathy within his clinical writings, with particular attention to his concerns over empathy's appropriateness for his psychoanalytic project. The chapter builds from Freud's concerns with a close reading of Kohut's explanation of why empathy is necessary for psychoanalytic relation and interpretation. It analyzes how this foundational understanding of empathy inevitably defines psychological acts and personhood through empathy itself. The chapter concludes with an analysis of Kohut's vision that empathy is neither ethically beneficent nor malevolent, but that it rather is the foundation for interpreting and responding to another's needs in a free and ethically viable way.

In the third chapter, "Relational Psychoanalytic Revisions of Kohutian Empathy," I outline the reception and revision of empathy in post-Kohutian relational psychoanalysis, with particular attention to empathy's confinement to social and cultural location in social theories of intersubjectivity and recognition. It begins by situating relational psychoanalysis's emergence in the 1980's in the context of growing concerns within developmental psychological theory over the individualism in schools of thought such as self psychology. Focusing on Jessica Benjamin, Robert Stolorow, and Donna Orange as sustained interlocutors with self psychology, it analyzes the psychoanalytic use of intersubjectivity as critiquing Kohut's idea that empathy is irreducibly

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free. Taking these critiques into account, it illustrates Benjamin's theory of recognition as revising vicarious introspection to relational settings in which personhood and identity are recognized interpersonally through subject positionality. It concludes by contending that freedom remains important within relational psychoanalysis after its many revisions, but that it is a far more muted sense of empathic freedom as limited by subject position.

In the fourth chapter, "Pastoral Theological Uses of Empathy in Intercultural and Intersubjective Context," I continue tracing the relational revisions of empathy within the history of pastoral care and theology. It begins with a brief review of early pastoral theological literature that adopted empathy into its discourse, and wrestled with the influences of both Carl Rogers and Kohut in the 1960's in particular. The chapter follows the historical development of this literature after Kohut's death in 1981 and in the wake of liberationist and relational psychoanalytic influences, which led to the critical insight by pastoral theologians that empathy is limited in its ability to traverse personal difference. The chapter outlines more recent responses in pastoral care literature that revise empathy as a form of intercultural understanding, which nonetheless remains limited in its relational knowledge of others. The chapter concludes by analyzing the practical ethical potential of empathy as a part of what Cooper-White describes as an intersubjective paradox of kenosis and chaos in empathy.

In the fifth chapter, "The Phenomenological Problem of Recognition for Empathy in Pastoral Theology," I examine in greater detail how the phenomenological conundrums of empathy and social recognition persistently undermine efforts within pastoral care to come to a consensus over the ethical prospect of empathic freedom, which leads to an aporia over the necessity and offense of freedom in empathy. It begins by revisiting Kohut's 1959 essay on vicarious introspection to gain better insight into exactly what is included in his concept of a

wider and more vivid experience of freedom. Using the theological anthropology of Edward Farley and his engagement with Edmund Husserl and Emmanuel Levinas, the chapter argues that phenomenological sources primarily confirm rather than solve the problem that empathy is structured by pre-existing social and political recognition. While this insight does not discredit normative pastoral commitments to marginalized experiences of suffering, it illustrates that the problem of responding to those outside one's in-group is not solved simply by being more empathic. It argues that the tension between these ethical commitments and limits of empathy reveals an ideological conflict among both pastoral practitioners and theorists. Namely, persons disagree over whether the idea of empathic freedom is an affront to theories of human difference, or a necessity for responding to marginalized suffering. The project does not adjudicate this aporia. It contends that ignoring it will make pastoral responsibility and practical strategies for broadening political consciousness of marginalized suffering more difficult. It concludes with three critiques of my argument, and a cursory account of how practitioners might build differing caregiving strategies based on the aporetic quality of empathy in pastoral theological context.

Scholarly Contribution

Strictly in terms of scholarship, this dissertation contributes to existing literature in pastoral theological anthropology. Specifically, it builds upon the insights of pastoral theologians and theologians concerned with theological anthropology by more systematically clarifying what ethical promise they can expect from empathy in interpersonal caregiving. On its own, this project does not indict liberal Protestant normativity, nor does it condemn empathy as an ethical resource for pastoral care and theology. In the end, this project cannot offer a unified strategy for religiously-motivated caregivers to manage their unconscious biases in empathy. Decisions or

resolutions regarding the scope of freedom in pastoral theological anthropology will fall upon more specific confessional traditions and political contexts.

Yet this project might clarify whether normative ethical judgments can be made against caregivers for their failures or absences in empathy beyond their in-group. Efforts to "be more empathic" may be both unhelpful for broadening political consciousness and unethical given one's beliefs about human difference. For some, this project may recommend that caregivers not try to will themselves to be more empathic; instead, they should broaden their social practices beyond their in-group to include persons previously unrecognized. For others, such a strategy simply conceals the cultural imperialism of privileged caregivers inserting themselves into social spaces where they are not part of the in-group; instead, caregivers might have to accept the possibility that dialogue and empathic affect is not always possible.

More broadly for scholarship and practice in religion, psychology, and culture, this project reveals that imprecise understandings of "empathy" can hide unresolved personal conflicts over how free persons are within a theological anthropology. Accepting this ethical aporia around empathy in religious caregiving may be troubling and destabilizing for the connection between theoretical convictions about human difference and practical impulses for responsibility. For religious caregivers, this will mean greater humility in criticizing others for seemingly unempathic moments, and greater respect for how personal freedom is shaped and even limited by relational difference. It advises theological practitioners to accept the aporia of empathy as demanding broader ethical consciousness of marginalized suffering, yet respecting the limits of empathy around human difference.

The motivation for my dissertation grew out of two intimate and humbling theological experiences. The first was working with the dying and their families as a hospice chaplain; the

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second was witnessing racialized police violence against persons of color in America. As a trained pastoral and practical theologian, I had been instructed that empathy is a foundational resource for bettering interpersonal relationships and religious life, particularly in difficult traumatic and political situations. Yet as I struggled to console grieving wives and brothers, and as I reflected honestly on the biases of my racialized consciousness, I have become convicted that religious practitioners need a clearer sense of what empathy is good for, and what it simply cannot accomplish. My dissertation research takes an equally philosophical (i.e., phenomenological) and interpersonal (i.e., relational psychoanalytic) approach to help clarify the role that empathy serves in recognizing and ethically responding to social injustice and marginalization. While it makes a partially "negative" claim on empathy, this dissertation hopes to contribute to the well-being of American religious life by opening up a more genuine and earnest attitude toward empathy's relational purpose in communal, political, and intrapsychic settings.

CHAPTER II:

HEINZ KOHUT AND THE ETHICAL POTENTIAL OF EMPATHY

Introduction

Insofar as this dissertation is concerned with the specific pastoral theological function of

Kohutian empathy in broadening ethical consciousness, an important starting point will be to

contextualize how Kohut conceptualized empathy. More specifically, because pastoral

theologians who draw upon empathy in their work also draw heavily upon psychoanalytic

resources, it will be crucial to understand the contribution that Kohutian empathy made to

psychoanalysis. This is necessary to establish the historical trajectory of empathy's use and

development within pastoral theology and to enable more precise and responsible analyses of

how later theorists either remained faithful to Kohut's vision for empathy or deviated from his

understanding.

While several detailed histories of empathy are readily available,[1] this chapter takes a

more modest focus. Rather than plotting the entire history of empathy from its earliest inception,

it instead examines the historical evolution of empathy from Sigmund Freud to Kohut. This

narrower historical account inspects Kohut's innovative claim that vicarious introspection is the

foundational tool of psychoanalysis and shows how this claim challenged both Freud's attitude

toward empathy and his method. Whereas Freud was reluctant to accept the legitimacy of

empathy in psychoanalysis because he thought it lacked scientific and methodological

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[1] Histories of empathy have proliferated in recent years. For only three notable examples, see Susan
Lanzoni, *Empathy: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018); Dan Zahavi, *Self and Other: Exploring
Subjectivity, Empathy, and Shame* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Lou Agosta, *Empathy in the Context
of Philosophy* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010).

transparency, Kohut contended that empathy was not only acceptable within the psychoanalytic method, but was foundational to its empirical, epistemological, and therapeutic tasks. For Kohut, empathy and introspection are present in all psychological understanding. This means that empathy both defines the field of psychoanalysis and defines psychological life itself. And while Kohut vociferously contended at several points in his career that empathy is subsequently morally neutral, he also underscored the broader ethical potential that empathy holds for interpersonal relation: Empathy cultivates psychological development "like oxygen" for the self; empathy is what makes cure and human development itself possible, because the psychological understanding derived from empathy enables analytic interpretation. Empathy is beneficial because it recognizes the inner psychic life of others.

Yet the most consequential claim this chapter makes is how Kohut's innovation with vicarious introspection is not only a departure from Freud's attitude toward empathy; Kohut's work on the interpersonal and ethical function of empathy is a direct challenge to Freud's commitment to psychic determinism in psychoanalysis. By insisting on the "freedom" enabled in and through empathy, Kohut's project effectively reprimands Freud for being insufficiently attentive to the hermeneutic structure of empathy: As fundamental as core psychoanalytic concepts such as "drive" and "compulsion" may seem, they are always filtered through empathy and introspection. The task of this chapter is to argue that Kohut's innovation on vicarious introspection in psychoanalytic relation clarified the ethical potential of empathy and that the freedom of empathy is irreconcilable with Freud's psychic determinism.

Early Psychoanalytic Reluctance to Empathy

To understand Freud's attitude toward empathy is to understand Freud's project in psychoanalysis within a contentious intellectual environment for the development of new

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scientific disciplines. While it is not difficult to identify the countless conceptual innovations that

Freud made possible with psychoanalysis, it is easy to lose sight of how fiercely he had to defend

each one. In the face of a brutally scrutinizing scientific community that took neither psychology

nor psychiatry seriously, Freud was forced to be selective about which psychic and interpersonal

concepts were necessary for his disciplinary pursuits and which were not worth justifying. Said

otherwise: a concept is not necessary merely because it is helpful; it must be essential for

elaborating psychoanalytic processes, and must be able to hold up to scrutiny within the

empirical and positivistic context of medical science. For Freud, empathy was no exception to

this principle, which will be instructive in understanding his reluctance to adopt it within his

early innovations in psychoanalysis.

    The problem of empathy has been a perennial issue of psychological and philosophical

discourse since the late nineteenth century. For psychologists and aestheticians such as Robert

Vischner and Theodor Lipps in the 1870s and 1880s, the problem of how to account for the

aesthetic phenomenon of feeling into others presented itself as the most pressing issue to

philosophical and psychological consciousness.[2] Franz Brentano, whose influence on Freud is

well documented by Freud himself,[3] wrestled seriously with the problem of how to maintain

scientific rigor in the psychological method while also developing a satisfactory response to the

existence of other minds.[4] In both the analytic and the continental philosophical traditions of the

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[2] See George W. Pigman, "Freud and the History of Empathy," *The International Journal of Psycho-analysis* 76 (1995): 239. Pigman writes, "German aesthetics at the turn of the century usually had significant psychological concerns, even if all aestheticians do no go as far as Theodor Lipps, who states categorically, 'An aesthetic investigation is always psychological' (1898, p. v), and 'Aesthetics is a psychological discipline' (1908, p. 351)."

[3] See Sigmund Freud, "Appendix: Franz Brentano's Riddles," in, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, trans. & ed. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton, 1960), 295-296. Freud provides an oddly colloquial telling of some arcane jokes attributed to Brentano, which indicates a personal as well as an intellectual lineage between them.

[4] See Franz Brentano, *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, trans. Antos C. Rancurello, D. B. Terrell, & Linda L. McAlister (New York: Routledge, 1995).

twentieth century, the problem of other minds[5] and the problem of alterity[6], respectively, have

been central frameworks for interrogating how modern philosophical and psychological

subjectivity exists socially and ethically. If a system is unable to give an account of other

psychologies or other mental phenomena that are congruent with or at least referential to a

discipline's theory of subjectivity, then that system may fall prey to solipsism and social

irrelevance.

Situated firmly between these historical epochs of the nineteenth and twentieth century,

Freud indeed follows this trend in his departure from, as Phillip Rieff puts it, a "pre-Renaissance

science" to a modern science and a more rigorous analogical method.[7] As far as the encounter

with external mental phenomena and stimuli is concerned, empathy has a strong precedent as the

touchstone for characterizing the possibility of feeling oneself into the situation of another and

being affected by that other person. Contemporary psychoanalyst George Pigman surveys the

pre-Freudian landscape of empathy from Baumgarten to Kant on aesthetics as the branch of

philosophy pertaining to both beauty and the senses,[8] through the blending of nineteenth century

German romanticism and aesthetics on the desire to feel oneself into [*Einfühlung*] the sensory

world,[9] up and through modern psychology's and Freud's use of the term. Among other things,

Pigman importantly notes the diminished reception of the concept of empathy for English

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[5] Among several figures in the Anglo-American tradition, see Norman Malcolm, "Knowledge of Other Minds," *Journal of Philosophy* 55: September (1958): 35-52.

[6] For perhaps the hallmark work in the continental tradition, see Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1969).

[7] See Phillip Rieff, "Introduction," in *Sigmund Freud, General Psycho-Logical Theory: Theories on Paranoia, Masochism, Repression, Melancholia, the Unconscious, the Libido, and Other Aspects of the Human Psyche* (New York: Collier Books, 1963), 8.

[8] Pigman, "Freud and the History of Empathy," 239. Pigman writes, "Kant objected to Baumgarten's use of *Aesthetik* to designate the branch of philosophy concerned with beauty, and preferred to use it to refer to perception by the senses, but Baumgarten's innovation was eventually adopted in both German and English."

[9] Pigman, "Freud and the History of Empathy," 242. Pigman offers, "*Einfühlung* underwrites our understanding of things as well as of other individuals: only our understanding of ourselves through introspection occurs without it."

readers of Freud, since the standardized James Strachey translations (which were nonetheless approved by Freud) often translated the substantive and transitive forms of *Einfühlung* and *einfühlen* as terms other than "empathy" and "empathize."[10] Offering even greater analysis of the original German texts, psychoanalyst Peter Shaughnessy details that Strachey regularly translated *Einfühlung* merely as "understanding" or "sympathetic understanding" across Freud's texts—particularly his clinical works such as "On Beginning the Treatment."[11] Shaughnessy largely echoes Pigman's critique of Strachey in arguing that "[t]his particular wording implies a surface level, cognitive stance rather than a deeply felt affective experience," though adds that this may have stemmed from Strachey's attempt to honor Freud's "clinical, dispassionate position."[12] Because this historical sandwiching of Freud between seminal thinkers concerned centrally the issue of empathy, it is no surprise that Freud takes up the phenomenon, albeit seldomly.

While Freud makes no mention of empathy in his 1916 *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, he does look to empathy several times in his early 1905 work *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*. This might seem like an odd place to find such a central psychological process for Freud. Yet when it comes to understanding the inhibitions that individuals have to wit and comic juxtaposition, Freud is quite clear that the prospect of seeing oneself into the situation of another is invaluable for interpretation. "[I]n order to recognize the naïve, we must know that the internal inhibition is absent in the producing person," he implores. "Only when

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[10] Pigman, "Freud and the History of Empathy," 243. Pigman helpfully summarizes his survey of the German and English translations: "Most English-speaking analysts do not realise that empathy was an important concept for Freud. There are two main reasons for this. First, eight of the twenty occurrences of *Einfühlung* occur in *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905), a work rarely studied by clinicians. Second, the *Standard Edition* translates only three of the twelve other occurrences as 'empathy' and never translates *einfühlen* (which occurs eight times) as 'empathise.'"

[11] Peter Shaughnessy, "Empathy and the Working Alliance: The Mistranslation of Freud's *Einfühlung*," *Psychoanalytic Psychology* 12 (1995): 224.

[12] Shaughnessy, "Empathy and the Working Alliance," 225.

this is certain do we laugh instead of being indignant. Thus we take the producing person's

psychical state into consideration, put ourselves into it and try to understand it by comparing it

with our own. It is these processes of empathy and comparison that result in the economy in

expenditure which we discharge by laughing."[13] Again invoking the language of economy,

laughter for Freud is derivative of the system of our unconscious desires, memories, and

thoughts. Recognizing or understanding the jokes that another finds funny requires an inferential

comparison of one's own economy of what one is able to hold back and what one must discharge

in laughter.

Yet with this treatment of empathy in psychological relation and therapy, Freud voices

numerous hesitations regarding the extent that an empathic comparison or inference even into the

life of jokes in another is possible:

> The origin of comic pleasure which has been discussed here—its derivation from a
> comparison of another person with our self, from the difference between our own
> psychical expenditure and the other person's as estimated by empathy—is probably the
> most important genetically. It is certain, however, that it has not remained the only one.
> We have learnt at one time or other to disregard this comparison between the other
> person and ourself and to derive the pleasurable difference from the one side only,
> whether from the empathy or from the processes in ourself—which proves that the
> feeling of superiority bears no essential relation to comic pleasure. A comparison is
> indispensable for the generation of this pleasure. We find that it is made between two
> cathectic expenditures that occur in rapid succession and are concerned with the same
> function, and these expenditures are either brought about in us through empathy into
> someone else or, without any such relation, are discovered in our own mental processes.[14]

A bit obtuse, the "two cathectic expenditures" Freud refers to are the two systems of attachments

that separate individuals have which may cause one to disregard the prospect of empathy as a

means of comparison between oneself and another. An individual's system of attachments and

libidinal expenditures will construct very different psychic worlds. One can see in this single

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[13] Freud, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, 230.
[14] Freud, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, 242-243.

passage Freud's conflicted attitude toward empathy. Comparative or vicarious thought may be the vehicle through which the ego may enter into the psychic system of another person and vice versa, yet numerous limitations around attachment and other desires may pose obstacles to empathy as a means of broadening the psychic economy.

It is likely with this in mind that Freud in his 1921 work over a decade later on *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* suggests that "we are far from having exhausted the problem of identification, and that we are faced by the process which psychology calls 'empathy' and which plays the largest part in our understanding of what is inherently foreign to our ego in other people."[15] Freud further notes that one of the most central reasons for psychoanalysis's inability to surmount this problem is that even if functional in many regards for interpretation, empathy goes beyond the limits of the immediacy of identification.[16] Even if departing from a more immediate sense of introspection, empathy's subsequent projection into the psychic life of another is too speculative for the scientific rigor of Freud's psychoanalytic method.

Freud's position on the social dimension of empathy in the psychoanalytic method is therefore a conflicted place to look. Pigman's sensible determination is that "[o]ne might be tempted to characterise Freud's attitude towards empathy as ambivalent, and perhaps it is. I think, however, it would be more accurate to say that he adopts an intellectual attitude because he is ambivalent about emotions, suspicious of their place within the analyst."[17] It is not that Freud is necessarily suspicious of the existence or substance of emotions, but rather that affectivity itself is an elusive feature of psychic life both individually and between those in the analytic situation.

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[15] Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, trans. & ed. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton, 1959), 50.

[16] Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, 50.

[17] Pigman, "Freud and the History of Empathy," 252.

Because Freud is sparse in discussing empathy across his works, one might alternatively focus on transference as a more common yet equally complex correlate in Freud's theoretical corpus for understanding his position on exteriority—or, how we are to account for the psychological existence of egos beyond our own interior existence.[18] Taken up extensively in his 1912 "Dynamics of Transference" as well as his section devoted to the dynamic in the 1916 *Introductory Lectures*, transference for Freud is perhaps a more restricted and analytically defined feature of the therapeutic relationship than empathy.[19] When considering the effect that another psychic life might have on the ego and vice versa, transference refers to the exchange of feelings or affect between individuals in the therapeutic context.

For this dissertation's purpose, the concept of transference may be a helpful way of speaking about psychic exteriority in the form of affect. But for Freud, transference is a necessary concept for explaining certain feelings which enter the analyst during therapy that have no direct origin within the analyst's own psychic economy of affect and desire. By this, Freud "mean[s] a transference of feelings onto the person of the doctor, since we do not believe that the situation in the treatment could justify the development of such feelings. We suspect, on the contrary, that the whole readiness for these feelings is derived from elsewhere, that they were already prepared in the patient and, upon the opportunity offered by the analytic treatment, are transferred on to the person of the doctor."[20] Transference appears in countless ways in the therapeutic relationship—negatively and positively—as resistance, hostility, and more. Yet the

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[18] Later in this dissertation, it will become clear that Freud's problem with empathy is closely connected to the phenomenological problem of exteriority as found in the work of figures such as Emmanuel Levinas.

[19] See Sigmund Freud, "The Dynamics of Transference," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XII (1911-1913): The Case of Schreber, Papers on Technique and Other Works*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1958); Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, trans. & ed. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1966), 536-556.

[20] Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, 550.

very possibility of transference rests on the possibility of exchange between the discrete economies of individuals in the therapeutic relationship.

While transference is a helpful term to describe these otherwise aberrational affects that enter into the therapeutic relation, introducing this term in place of empathy does not answer the question of how this dyadic exchange is possible in the first place. That is, substituting "transference" for "empathy" is just that: a substitution of one enigmatic interpersonal concept for another. The only way that Freud is able to offer a more thorough response to the conundrum of transference as a psychic possibility is by relying upon the distinction between consciousness and unconsciousness.

Psychoanalysis is, of course, predicated on the existence of the unconscious, which itself is a radical and scientifically contentious claim. The unconscious, by definition, is not something that is directly available to experience. Freud's extensive work on the mechanics of parapraxes and dream work in his *Introductory Lectures* illustrates that, despite the fact that we do not have direct access to the unconscious, there are countless sources of evidence for its existence and effects. Slips of the tongue and dream work manifest the latent content of the unconscious. Yet as far as the dynamics of transference are concerned, Freud perhaps uses the unconscious as a means of concealing that there is no direct account for how transference is actually a possibility. Backpedaling slightly, he argues, "The peculiarities of the transference to the doctor, thanks to which it exceeds, both in amount and nature, anything that could be justified on sensible or rational grounds, are made intelligible if we bear in mind that this transference has precisely been set up not only by the *conscious* anticipatory ideas but also by those that have been held back or are unconscious."[21] Freud asserts here that transference presents itself in the discourse of

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[21] Freud, "The Dynamics of Transference," 100. Emphasis original.

therapy, which is aimed at making conscious the otherwise unspoken or unconscious features of psychic life. Yet if one scrutinizes how the conscious transference of affect and feelings is rationally intelligible or defensible, then one must merely remember that transference has roots in the unconscious.

While a clever move, Freud's reasoning about transference's relation to the unconscious unquestionably sweeps the problem under the rug of unconsciousness itself. In effect, he is claiming that one must be willing to accept that if one is not rationally satisfied with the verifiable experience of transference (i.e., the conscious), then one ought to be satisfied with the unverifiable portion (i.e., the unconscious). A transference between the unconscious of an analyst and analysand may very well occur, but the ability to speak empirically or rationally about the mechanics of this occurrence is another matter. In the moments that Freud feels compelled to explain the possibility of transference, one is left wanting a more rigorous account of the mechanics of the phenomenon.

Despite the objections I raise about Freud's attitude and explanation of the role of empathy and transference in the therapeutic relationship, it remains the case that they both continue to be common practices of Freud's clinical practice and theoretical work. What might thus be said of Freud's position on both empathy and transference is that he recognizes that the psychic economy of the ego is not strictly closed off from others, despite his inability to explain with greater depth how these are possible. It is difficult to say the extent to which for Freud this system is inclusive of others at the outset, or closed yet subsequently permeable to others.[22]

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[22] In the case of Husserl, for example, the problem of solipsism is avoided not by creating the distinct lived psychic experience of others, but rather by including others within the purview of a transcendental solipsism at the outset. This attitude precludes the possibility that others are removed from the ego by including their existence within the intersubjective space of transcendental consciousness at the outset. See Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, Second Book*, trans Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002).

While it would seem rather far astray from this conversation on exteriority, empathy, and transference, Freud's attitude toward telepathy is also a relevant, albeit brief, feature for this discussion. In his 1922 "Dreams and Telepathy," Freud shows the true colors of his scientific suspicion toward any occult means of referring to the inner psychic life of others in the therapeutic setting. As if only to tease his audiences, he writes, "At the present time, when such great interest is felt in what are called 'occult' phenomena, very definite anticipations will doubtless be aroused by the announcement of a paper with this title. I will therefore hasten to explain that there is no ground for any such anticipations. You will learn nothing from this paper of mine about the enigma of telepathy; indeed, you will not even gather whether I believe in the existence of 'telepathy' or not."[23] Telepathy, the concept that ideas might transfer between psychic systems or minds without assistance of usual modes of communication, both verbal and not, is indeed the extreme or occult iteration of what might be seen as the more acceptable or at least less stigmatized concepts of empathy and transference. One would think that with this hyperbolized example of the ego's encounter with exteriority, at the very least Freud would be able to offer a definitive condemnation of the concept as simply unpalatable for his scientific sensibilities. Yet while Freud does at least momentarily suggest that psychoanalysis may be able to aid studies in telepathy by rendering them more transparent through psychoanalytic technique,[24] he claims to remain "impartial" and to "have no opinion on the matter and know nothing about it."[25] That is, despite the hope that there would be certain clear boundaries in

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[23] Sigmund Freud, "Dreams and Telepathy," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVIII (1920-1922): Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Group Psychology and Other Works*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1955): 197.

[24] Freud, "Dreams and Telepathy," 219. Freud writes, "On the other hand, psycho-analysis may do something to advance the study of telepathy, in so far as, by the help of its interpretations, many of the puzzling characteristics of telepathic phenomena may be rendered more intelligible to us; or other, still doubtful, phenomena may for the first time definitely be ascertained to be of a telepathic nature."

[25] Freud, "Dreams and Telepathy," 220.

Freud's method around the issue of exteriority in psychoanalysis, there seems to be a rather loose limitation on what Freud would no longer be willing to consider as a possibility. The fact remains, however, that given the centrality of transference in particular for the psychoanalytic method, Freud is of course quite convinced of the exchange of affect between discrete psychic systems.

Kohut and the Necessity of Empathy for Psychoanalytic Relation

While there is much to speculate about Freud's attitude toward empathy, one uncontestable fact is that, at least nominally, he did not view it as a central or even necessary concept for psychoanalysis. Given how infrequently Freud discusses the term, the most one can do is speculate on how he truly did value empathy, even if he did not realize it. Perhaps empathy was simply too recent of an innovation for Freud to be able to incorporate it centrally within his new science. Or perhaps Freud appreciated the interpersonal dynamics of empathy, but chose to explore them through more established concepts such as transference, countertransference, and telepathy. Or maybe, as Pigman suggests, Freud saw great promise in the term, but believed he was "borrowing from another discipline," and therefore refused to reappropriate it for psychoanalysis.[26] Though possible, these readings of Freud on empathy remain highly speculative. Not only did Freud reference *Einfühlung* a mere 20 times in his massive corpus, but he first referenced the term in 1905,[27] which means he had over three decades to evaluate it more closely. The most plausible interpretation of Freud on empathy is the simplest: Empathy for Freud was ultimately a peripheral and non-essential concern for developing a full theory of the psychoanalytic process.

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[26] Pigman, "Freud and the History of Empathy," 244.
[27] For the first English translated occurrence of "empathy" in Freud's corpus, see *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, 230.

However, the work of psychoanalyst Heinz Kohut would drastically this reticence within the psychoanalytic community on empathy. Born in 1913 in close proximity to the epicenter of Freud's influence, Kohut completed his medical training at the University of Vienna in 1938, but was forced to flee the rise of fascism in Austria shortly after in 1939—almost certainly in part due to his cultural Jewishness. Kohut relocated to the United States and began his development as a psychoanalyst—which he only took up near the end of his medical school training—at the University of Chicago. Particularly in the last three decades of his life until his young death in 1981, Kohut adopted English as his writing language and wrote prolifically on matters pertaining to a large of clinical issues, particularly the treatment of narcissism. He wrote three book-length works, the last of which was published posthumously: *The Analysis of the Self: A Systematic Approach to the Psychoanalytic Treatment of Narcissistic Personality Disorders* in 1971;[28] *The Restoration of the Self* in 1977;[29] and *How Does Analysis Cure?* in 1984.[30] Kohut served as President of the American Psychoanalytic Association from 1964 to 1965, and reached such a degree of prominence in the field that he was reported to have described himself as "Mr. Psychoanalysis."[31] Through a combination of both charisma and general intensity, Kohut generated a strong following—perhaps close in tenor to Freud's—particularly among those associated with the Chicago Psychoanalytic Institute, with which he was highly involved.[32]

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[28] Heinz Kohut, *The Analysis of the Self: A Systematic Approach to the Psychoanalytic Treatment of Narcissistic Personality Disorders* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971).

[29] Heinz Kohut, *The Restoration of the Self* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977).

[30] Heinz Kohut, *How Does Analysis Cure?*, ed. Arnold Goldberg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

[31] This anecdote is record in a number of biographical works on Kohut, but can be found in Charles B. Strozier, "Heinz Kohut's Struggles with Religion, Ethnicity, and God," in *Religion, Society, and Psychoanalysis: Readings in Contemporary Theory*, ed. Janet Liebman Jacobs and Donald Capps, 165 – 180 (New York: Routledge, 1997), 165.

[32] For the most thorough biographical account of Kohut's life and development, see Charles B. Strozier, *Heinz Kohut: The Making of a Psychoanalyst* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001). Strozier paints a complex and at times ugly portrait of Kohut's obsession with becoming a famous psychoanalyst and garnering a following like Freud's, which Strozier notes was largely successful. Strozier describes Kohut as charismatic and

Though the story is almost surely apocryphal, Kohut was so inclined to identify with the center

of mainstream Freudian psychoanalysis that he was known to repeat a fictitious story of crossing

paths with Freud at a train station in Vienna in 1938 as they both left the country: Freud an

infirmed psychoanalyst fleeing to England, and Kohut a fresh young psychiatrist heading to the

U.S. to carry the torch.[33]

But while for most of his career he viewed himself as extending Freud's understanding of

psychoanalysis, Heinz Kohut ultimately held a very different vision of the relationship between

empathy and the possibility of psychoanalytic relation than Freud. This stems, in part, from

Kohut's appreciation of a rather enigmatic feature of the interpersonal dimension of

psychoanalysis. Put simply, the clinical practice of psychoanalysis is impossible without

understanding details about the inner psychic life of another person. Yet despite Freud's mission

to convince scholarly communities of the scientific rigor of his discipline, there is no avoiding

the fact that one does not have any direct experience of this inner life of another person. Whereas

Freud launched psychoanalysis into prominence in *The Interpretation of Dreams* with what is

now known to be primarily self-reporting of his own dreams, Kohut was concerned with a new

way of conceptualizing the possibility of the Freudian science. Freud's psychoanalysis may have

been provoked by the haunting of his dreams, but Kohut's psychoanalysis was provoked by the

haunting of a more interpersonal and pragmatically clinical question: How does one make the

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brilliant, but also intensely petty, angry, and insecure. "Kohut also *never* apologized for his rage, for his arrogance," Strozier recounts (86).

[33] For an account of this story and its discrediting, see Charles B. Strozier, "Glimpses of a Life: Heinz Kohut (1913 – 1981)," in *Progress in Self Psychology, Volume I*, ed. Arnold Goldberg (Hillsdale, NJ: The Analytic Press, 1985), 6. Strozier writes, "Kohut never knew or met Freud, but there is a famous story he liked to tell of visiting the train station when Freud left for England on June 4, 1938. Freud, in a wheelchair, along with his wife, her sister Minna, Anna, Dorothy Burlingham, his dog Lun, and an entourage of patients and servants boarded the Orient Express bound for Paris. As the train left the station, Freud looked out the window and there stood Kohut with a friend. Kohut tipped his hat. Freud tipped his hat in return and the train rolled off down the track. It is a story that stresses the continuities and Viennese connections in a crumbling world. Kohut's fond telling also suggests to me a special sense of mission that he felt about psychoanalysis as a young man."

inner psychic experience of another person—a terrain to which one has no direct empirical access—into the primary domain of one's science?

The clearest way of framing Kohut's gradual departure from a more strictly Freudian account of psychoanalysis is through debates over drive theory, and, more specifically, just how explanatory drives are for psychoanalytic relation. Yet Kohut's departure from a more Freudian drive theory to his own self psychological framework was motivated not so much by the coherence of drive theory. Rather, Kohut's innovations from Freud stemmed from a critique of the validity or relevance of drive theory for the lived practice of psychoanalysis. Referring back to his earliest writings on empathy near the end of his career, Kohut explicitly narrated this trajectory in his own thought,

> What prompted me to undertake an epistemological investigation concerning the quintessence of psychoanalysis? […] It was my growing discomfort with the fact that the significance of the quintessential best in psychoanalysis was being increasingly downplayed by modern analysis and that this process was taking place without anyone seemingly knowing about it or, at least, without anyone openly acknowledging its very consequential, and, in my judgment, deleterious presence. While it is not only legitimate but, of course, even desirable to apply psychoanalysis to biology and social psychology […] these exports beyond the bounds of the basic rule were not acknowledged as such. Instead it was simply taken for granted that these new developments—I will provide conspicuous examples immediately—were true expansions of analysis itself.[34]

Freud set a strong precedent for psychoanalysis to think in biological and social psychological[35] terms. Kohut understood well that drive theory offers several methodological advantages for understanding psychoanalytic practice and relation. In an intellectual climate that frequently seeks to discredit psychoanalysis, drive theory presents a biological framework with its own psychic economy that can be correlated to other sciences, and subsequently defended in scientific

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[34] Heinz Kohut, "Introspection, Empathy, and the Semi-Circle of Mental Health," in *The Search for the Self: Selected Writings of Heinz Kohut: 1978-1981, Volume 4*, ed. Paul H. Ornstein (New York: International Universities Press, 1978), 546-547.

[35] Though subtle, it is reasonably clear in this context that Kohut's reference to social psychology refers more precisely to the social analysis of behavior in mainstream research psychology. It is safe to infer that Kohut is not referring to interpersonal or relational psychoanalysis.

terms. However, Kohut's original discomfort emerges because of his conviction that Freud's

impulse to justify his discipline within more established scientific disciplines is a betrayal of why

psychoanalysis is necessary to begin with. Kohut's claim is counterintuitive not because it rails

against orthodox psychoanalysis; it is counterintuitive because it calls into question how it is that

Freud and other mainstream psychoanalysts believed they would legitimate their science.

Throughout his career, Kohut makes it clear that he believed Freud's obsession with

scientific respectability, objectivity, and truth ultimately obscured his attention to interpersonal

and empathic relation. In one of the more explicit condemnations in his corpus, Kohut

comments, "I believe that in Freud's work, as is the case with all great achievement, the intensity

and profundity of insight in one area had to be paid for by a comparative flatness in another.

Freud was not able or willing to devote himself in close empathic immersion to the vicissitudes

of the self as he had been able to do with regard to the vicissitudes of object-instinctual

experiences."[36] Kohut does not discount Freud's contributions to psychoanalysis, but he does not

idealize them either.[37] The most generous reading of Kohut's criticism is that the gravity of

Freud's intellectual project meant that even he was incapable of adequately theorizing the

significance of empathy for psychological life. As rich as Freud's project was in countless

regards, its "flatness" is in part manifested in his lack of engagement with empathy as a

psychological tool.

Kohut's consistent deference and respect for Freud should not, however, disguise the

more substantive theoretical critique that Kohut makes regarding the coherence of drive theory

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[36] Kohut, *The Restoration of the Self*, 297.
[37] Despite his critiques, Kohut remained a consistently generous and even deferential reader of Freud. Even in his posthumously published work, he offers extensive caveats before making rather simple critiques of Freud's theory: "I can still derive a great deal of pleasure from participating in Freud's pride in the magnitude of his achievement, but, as I have observed, I am no longer unquestioningly convinced of the universal validity of Freud's implied claim that the theory of the unconscious is by its very content intolerably offensive to man-in particular, that it is intolerably offensive to man [*sic*] as he is constituted at all times" (Kohut, *How Does Analysis Cure?*, 56).

itself. In his groundbreaking 1959 article, "Introspection, Empathy, and Psychoanalysis: An Examination of the Relationship between Mode of Observation and Theory," Kohut makes the subtle though consequential claim that, methodologically and theoretically, introspection precedes even drive. "[M]uch clarity is gained if we admit that the psychoanalytic term 'drive' is derived from the introspective investigation of inner experience" he argues.[38] "A drive, then, is an abstraction from innumerable inner experiences; it connotes a psychological quality that cannot be further analyzed by introspection; it is the common denominator of sexual and aggressive strivings."[39] Kohut is not arguing that drives are unsubstantial or insignificant in psychoanalytic theory. In fact, he contends that drives are one of the few limits or boundaries of introspection and empathy. Yet he is also claiming that it is impossible for us to conceive of or conceptualize drive without first traveling through a method of introspection. Put simply, Kohut's claim is that as brilliant as Freud's insights into the structure of drive may have been, he neglected the experiential filter of introspection upon which drives are always and necessarily layered. In this regard, Kohut believes he offers a more genuinely psychological theory than Freud's drive theory would ever provide.

Introspection is a viable strategy for exploration and interpretation of one's own psychological experiences. However, in that same 1959 essay, Kohut famously does not restrict his argument to solitary psychological reflection in the form of introspection. A simple way of framing Kohut's innovation is that he had a revelation: Psychoanalysis requires introspection, but for another person who is not me. Persons come to analysis because they need some form of assistance with their own introspective and interpretive processes. The genesis of empathy for

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[38] Heinz Kohut, "Introspection, Empathy, and Psychoanalysis: An Examination of the Relationship between Mode of Observation and Theory," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 7 (1959): 478.
[39] Kohut, "Introspection, Empathy, and Psychoanalysis," 478.

Kohut emerges precisely in this need. To engage others relationally in psychoanalysis, one must

do this "through empathy (i.e., vicarious introspection) in others."[40]

Kohut elaborated on this terse definition of empathy—vicarious introspection—several

times in his career. However, in the closing moments of his career,[41] he presented a deliberately

pared down and less technical clarification of this definition: "The best definition of empathy—

the analogue to my terse scientific definition of empathy as 'vicarious introspection' (1978b,

1:205-32)—is that it is the capacity to think and feel oneself into the inner life of another person.

It is our lifelong ability to experience what another person experiences, though usually, and

appropriately, to an attenuated degree."[42] Operationalizing empathy as vicarious introspection

respects the more colloquial understanding of empathy as putting oneself in the shoes of another,

yet retains the analytic rigor of "experienc[ing] the inner life of another while simultaneously

retaining the stance of an objective observer."[43] What thus becomes clear through Kohut's

constant re-narration of empathy is that, despite the technical and specific way he operationalizes

the term, it is far from arbitrary. From a more decidedly analytic situation, defining empathy as

vicarious introspection helps name an intuitive practice for therapy of using cognition to attune

oneself to the psychological structures of others.[44]

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[40] Kohut, "Introspection, Empathy, and Psychoanalysis," 459.

[41] See Heinz Kohut, "On Empathy," in *The Search for the Self: Selected Writings of Heinz Kohut: 1978-1981, Volume 4*, ed. Paul H. Ornstein, (New York: International Universities Press, 1978), 528. This text is a transcription of Kohut's final public lecture, delivered at the Fifth Conference on Self Psychology in 1981. For the original video recording of this text, see Heinz Kohut, *Reflections on Empathy*, produced by Marion F. Solomon (Los Angeles: University of California, Berkeley, 1981), DVD.

[42] Kohut, *How Does Analysis Cure?*, 82.

[43] Kohut, *How Does Analysis Cure?*, 174-175.

[44] See Kohut, *Analysis of the Self*, 300. Kohut writes, "Empathy is a mode of cognition which is specifically attuned to the perception of complex psychological configurations. Under optimal circumstances, the ego will employ empathic observation when it is confronted with the gathering of psychological data and will use nonempathic modes of perception when the data which it gathers do not concern the area of the inner life of man. There are a great number of pathological disturbances in the use of empathy; the resulting misperceptions of reality, however, can be classified by distinguishing two groups."

A particularly noteworthy elaboration offered by Kohut in *Restoration of the Self* to help

discourage misunderstanding the nature of empathy is as "evenly hovering attention," a concept

expanded drastically from Freud's few references to psychoanalysis as an interpretive art of

"evenly suspended attention."[45] One of the most frequent stereotypes of the psychoanalytic

method emerging from Freud is of the cold and disinterested therapist. This emerges primarily

from Freud's concern over issues of counter-transference, where an analyst's prior cathexes

distort analytic interpretation.[46] Instead of making a strawman of Freud on this point, Kohut uses

his proprietary definition of empathy to clarify Freud's intention.[47] What simplistic critiques of

Freud's allegedly cold method fail to recognize is that retaining the greatest degree of objectivity

in therapy is not motivated by the fool's errand of being a perfectly robotic or mechanical

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[45] Kohut, Restoration of the Self, 251. See Freud's description of "evenly suspended attention" in two texts in particular: "Two Encyclopedia Articles," in The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVIII (1920-1922): Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Group Psychology and Other Works, ed. and trans. James Strachey, 233-260. London: Hogarth, 1955; "Recommendations to Physicians Practising Psycho-Analysis," The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XII (1911-1913): The Case of Schreber, Papers on Technique and Other Works, ed. and trans. James Strachey, 109-120 (London: Hogarth, 1958). In the former, Freud describes psychoanalysis as an interpretive art, where evenly suspended attention is key: "Experience soon showed that the attitude which the analytic physician could most advantageously adopt was to surrender himself to his own unconscious mental activity, in a state of evenly suspended attention, to avoid so far as possible reflection and the construction of conscious expectations, not to try to fix anything that he heard particularly in his memory, and by these means to catch the drift of the patient's unconscious with his own unconscious" ("Two Encyclopedia Articles, 239). In the latter work, Freud describes this process as "a very simple one. As we shall see, it rejects the use of any special expedient (even that of taking notes). It consists simply in not directing one's notice to anything in particular and in maintaining the same 'evenly suspended attention' (as I have called it) in the face of all that one hears. In this way we spare ourselves a strain on our attention which could not in any case be kept up for several hours daily, and we avoid a danger which is inseparable from the exercise of deliberate attention. For as soon as anyone deliberately concentrates his attention to a certain degree, he begins to select from the material before him; one point will be fixed in his mind with particular clearness and some other will be correspondingly disregarded, and in making this selection he will be following his expectations or inclinations. This, however, is precisely what must not be done" ("Recommendations to Physicians Practising Psycho-Analysis," 110-111).

[46] See Sigmund Freud, "Observations on Transference-Love (Further Recommendations on the Technique of Psycho-Analysis III)," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XII (1911-1913): The Case of Schreber, Papers on Technique and Other Works*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1958), 164. Freud writes, "Our control over ourselves is not so complete that we may not suddenly one day go further than we had intended. In my opinion, therefore, we ought not to give up the neutrality towards the patient, which we have acquired through keeping the counter-transference in check."

[47] Specifically, Kohut remarks, "The concept of the analyst's passivity, as Freud occasionally called the analyst's basic therapeutic attitude, is therefore in need of elucidation" (Kohut, *Restoration of the Self*, 251). Empathy as vicarious introspection, functioning as evenly hovering attention, provides this elucidation.

computer of psychological data. Rather, the motivation is the recognition that, in therapy, analysts are called to help analysands tend to their deficient self structures to the best of their ability. Kohut explains, "Evenly hovering attention, in other words, is the analyst's active empathic response to the analysand's free associations, a response in which the deepest layers of the analyst's unconscious from the area of progressive neutralization (Kohut, 1961; Kohut and Seitz, 1963) participate."[48] The analytic attitude of empathy as evenly hovering attention takes this psychological need seriously, and commits to being as diligent as possible in receiving what an analysand shares. That is, empathy's attunement to the relational demands of another in therapy actually requires more of the therapist than merely listening; it requires the analyst to be vigilant in tending to how their own self structures may prevent them from hearing significant psychological data, which may be crucial for psychological cure.

Though it runs counter to readings of Kohutian empathy as merely affective, Kohut makes it clear that empathy must thus be understood as epistemological[49] as well as empirical. Though he attempted to signal this distinction in the subtitle to his 1959 essay on "An Examination of the Relationship between Mode of Observation and Theory," he repeatedly stressed that even fellow analysts failed to acknowledge this important distinction.[50] He bemoans this point:

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[48] Kohut, *Restoration of the Self*, 251.

[49] "In order to prevent confusion let me stress here that during the first half of today's presentation I will be primarily talking about empathy in the context in which I had used it in my 1959 paper and in which I have continued to use it, until very recently (for exceptions see Kohut, 1975a, 1975b). I will, in other words, be talking about empathy in an epistemological context" (Kohut, "Introspection, Empathy, and the Semi-Circle of Mental Health, 541-542).

[50] "What does my 1959 essay discuss, what was its objective? The answer to this question was spelled out in its subtitle. It was to be "An Examination of the Relationship between Mode of Observation and Theory." I did not write about empathy as a psychic activity. I did not write about empathy as associated with any specific emotion such as, in particular, compassion or affection. It may be motivated by and used in the service of hostile destructive aims. I did not write about empathy as associated with intuition. As is the case with extrospection, it may, occasionally, be used seemingly intuitively by experts: that is, via high-speed mental processes of observation that identify complex configurations preconsciously and at great speed" (Kohut, "Introspection, Empathy, and the Semi-Circle of Mental Health," 540).

I cannot stress enough how important it is to separate conceptually (1) the experience-distant general principle of what is normal in development whether in early development or during the process that leads to cure—that is, what we should consider as functioning "in accordance with its design;" from (2) the experience-near empathic grasp of what our patients (or, with regard to early development, our children) experience at a given moment.[51]

Kohut found various ways of drawing this distinction in his career. Earlier in his career in *Analysis of the Self*, Kohut described this division as "the contrast between data-collecting empathy and the mental processes employed in the search for explanations [which] is related (but does not entirely correspond) to the commonly evoked antithesis between practice and theory."[52] Near the end of his career, Kohut would offer a starker and arguably more hierarchical division between these two modes of empathy in terms of epistemology and empiricism. "The low road is the empirical stance—data collection and experience-near theory—vis-à-vis the field that is investigated. The high road is the epistemological stance. It examines the relationship between the data already collected and, especially, the relationship between the experience-near theories that have already been formulated."[53] While it is easy to get lost in these many metaphors and descriptors that loosely graft on to one another, Kohut's broader point is that empathy is an essential process that structures our more intimate relational exchanges with others, as well as our interpretive reflections on those relationships. In its most technical sense, empathy is indeed an experience-distant epistemological process of vicariously cognizing the psychological states of others, yet it also includes the more experience-near empirical task of discovering these psychological states in the first place.[54] While one may engage the "low-road" of empirical

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[51] Kohut, *How Does Analysis Cure?*, 189.

[52] Kohut, *Analysis of the Self*, 303.

[53] Kohut, "Introspection, Empathy, and the Semi-Circle of Mental Health," 541.

[54] See Heinz Kohut, "Forms and Transformations of Narcissism," in *The Search for the Self: Selected Writings of Heinz Kohut: 1950-1978* (New York: International Universities Press, 1978), 450-451. Kohut explains, "Empathy is the mode by which one gathers psychological data about other people and, when they say what they think or feel, imagines their inner experience even though it is not open to direct observation. Through empathy we aim at discerning, in one single act of certain recognition, complex psychological configurations which we could

practice or the "high-road" of epistemological theory at different moments, both modes of empathy are required for psychoanalytic relation according to Kohut. Without experience-near empathy, one lacks the data from which to build meaningful interpretations. Without experience-distant empathy, the analyst is effectively a receptacle of psychological data but does nothing with it.

While empathy is an epistemological and empirical tool that defines the field of psychoanalysis, this is the case in part because it mimics the structures of interpersonal development and health more broadly. That is, empathy in psychoanalytic context is attuned to the fact that a person "can no more survive psychologically in a psychological milieu that does not respond empathically to him, than he can survive physically in an atmosphere that contains no oxygen."[55] In other words, it is not only that empathy is methodologically significant in structuring psychoanalytic theory and practice. More fundamentally, anyone with enough of a self structure to inquire into the meaning of empathy has already developed within a context of empathic relations. To extend Kohut's metaphor, one can investigate the ways that oxygen can

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either define only through the laborious presentation of a host of details or which it may even be beyond our ability to define. Empathy is an essential constituent of psychological observation and is therefore of special importance for the psychoanalyst, who, as an empirical scientist, must first perceive the complex psychological configurations that are the raw data of human experience before he can attempt to explain them. The scientific use of empathy, however, is a specific achievement of the autonomous ego since, during the act of empathy, it must deliberately suspend its predominant mode of operation which is geared to the perception of non-psychological data in the surroundings."

[55] Kohut, *Restoration of the Self*, 253. Kohut here builds on his earlier insight, "The child that is to survive psychologically is born into an empathic-responsive human milieu (of selfobjects) just as he is born into an atmosphere that contains an optimal amount of oxygen if he is to survive physically. And his nascent self 'expects'—to use an inappropriately anthropomorphic but appropriately evocative term—an empathic environment to be in tune with his psychological need-wishes with the same unquestioning certitude as the respiratory apparatus of the newborn infant may be said to 'expect' oxygen to be contained in the surrounding atmosphere" (Kohut, *Restoration of the Self*, 85).

be used in scientific and caring contexts, but without oxygen, one would never have lived long enough to design any meaningful experiments into the chemical utility of oxygen.[56]

Because this definition of empathy centrally describes the method and practice of psychoanalysis, Kohut argues consistently throughout his career that empathy defines the field of psychoanalysis itself. Speaking more closely in tone to a philosopher of science than a psychoanalyst per se, in 1959 Kohut declares, "Each branch of science has its natural limits, determined approximately by the limits of its basic tool of observation. […] Each science thus arrives at a small optimal number of basic concepts."[57] Unsurprisingly, Kohut posits that "[t]he limits of psychoanalysis are given by the limits of potential introspection and empathy."[58] By this, Kohut means that empathy and introspection are literally "definers of the field. That means that they are defining our field as the inner life of man [*sic*] and therefore that we are psychologists."[59] While there is room for flexible debate on many of Kohut's concepts and innovations, there is frankly no room for debate over the fact that he saw empathy as fundamentally defining psychoanalysis as a science.[60] Insofar as vicarious introspection is a tool

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[56] See also Kohut's brief commentary on the oxygen metaphor in *How Does Analysis Cure?*: "What is feared in both instances is the destruction of one's human self because of the unavailability of the psychological oxygen, the response of the empathic selfobject without which we cannot psychologically survive" (18).

[57] Kohut, "Introspection, Empathy, and Psychoanalysis," 481.

[58] Kohut, "Introspection, Empathy, and Psychoanalysis," 481.

[59] Heinz Kohut, "On Empathy," in *The Search for the Self: Selected Writings of Heinz Kohut: 1978-1981, Volume 4*, ed. Paul H. Ornstein (New York: International Universities Press, 1978), 528.

[60] It cannot be stressed just how frequently Kohut makes this claim about empathy defining the field throughout his corpus. In *Restoration of the Self*, he argues, "The theories of an empirical science are derived primarily from generalizations and abstractions that refer to the data of observation. In psychoanalysis they are derived from the data obtained by introspection and empathy" (Kohut, *Restoration of the Self*, 93). In *How Does Analysis Cure?*, he contends, "Empathy is the operation that defines the field of psychoanalysis. No psychology of complex mental states is conceivable without the employment of empathy" (Kohut, *How Does Analysis Cure?*, 174-175). In "Introspection, Empathy, and the Semi-Circle of Mental Health," he argues, "The sciences which explore the fields that are accessible via extrospection (plus vicarious extrospection, i.e., eyewitness accounts): the physical and biological sciences. And the sciences which explore the fields that are accessible via introspection (plus vicarious introspection, i.e., empathy, our ability to think ourselves into the inner life of another, e.g., the inner life of the analysand via his or her "eyewitness account" of his or her inner life): psychoanalysis par excellence" (Kohut, "Introspection, Empathy, and the Semi-Circle of Mental Health," 565).

that determines the potential and limits of psychoanalytic knowledge and practice, it defines the field of "psychoanalysis par excellence."[61]

The only caveat Kohut ever makes to the claim that empathy defines the field of psychoanalysis is to offer the seemingly contradictory though sensible caveat that the defining quality of empathy must also be understood within the broader context of psychoanalytic principles and theory. Like any science, psychoanalysis "cannot be defined by the tools it uses: not by its methodological tools, i.e., by the instruments it employs in its investigations," he writes.[62] Rather, Kohut insists, "It can only be defined by its total approach, which determines the aspect of reality to which we then refer as the subject matter of the science."[63] While one may view this nearly Gadamerian claim as undermining Kohut's more consistent position that empathy defines the field, Kohut's point is simply that empathy as a tool must be contextualized within the broader theoretical framework that necessitated empathy in the first place. Though there is no evidence of his having read the hermeneutic philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer, Kohut here is anticipating and sidestepping Gadamer's critique of so many theorists, that they "are so caught up in the methodologism of theory of science that all they can think about is rules and their application."[64] Just as psychoanalysis cannot survive without empathy, empathy must be understood within the theoretical context of psychoanalytic concepts. The fact that Kohut is

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[61] See Kohut, "Introspection, Empathy, and the Semi-Circle of Mental Health," 565. Kohut writes, "The sciences which explore the fields that are accessible via extrospection (plus vicarious extrospection, i.e., eyewitness accounts): the physical and biological sciences. And the sciences which explore the fields that are accessible via introspection (plus vicarious introspection, i.e., empathy, our ability to think ourselves into the inner life of another, e.g., the inner life of the analysand via his or her "eyewitness account" of his or her inner life): psychoanalysis par excellence."

[62] Kohut, *Restoration of the Self*, 305.

[63] Kohut, *Restoration of the Self*, 305.

[64] See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd ed, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 1975), 559.

attentive to and honest about the contextual relation of empathy to psychoanalytic theory more broadly does not discredit its legitimacy.[65]

As a closing word to this subsection, it is worth noting that in their ambitious and authoritative historical survey *Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory*, Jay Greenberg and Stephen Mitchell level a substantial and potentially damning critique of nearly Kohut's entire project, precisely on the methodological innovations that he made very closely in relation to empathy and introspection. Kohut's contribution to a theory of empathy in service of a more interpersonal model of psychoanalysis may be lauded, but he falls into the exact trap that Freud skirted in his reluctance to include empathy within the psychoanalytic project. Within their taxonomy of psychoanalytic object relations, Greenberg and Mitchell rightly note that Kohut's work is best understood as a "'mixed model' approach" insofar as it "attempts throughout to preserve the drive concept in its classical sense, arguing that drive theory is not displaced but complemented by his new formulations."[66] Yet in so doing, Greenberg and Mitchell make the case that "[t]he dimensions he proposes to integrate are not only not truly complementary, they are mutually exclusive."[67] That is, as easy as it is for late twentieth and early twenty-first century readers of Freud to ridicule him for not embracing empathy as an obviously central and defining tool for the field, Freud understood well what methodological inconsistencies were inherent in embracing it. Greenberg and Mitchell insist, "Once he has argued that drive follows relational failure, Kohut has embraced the fundamental premise of the relational model, and his use of the principle of complementarity becomes mere homage to a model which he himself has

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[65] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 559. Gadamer warns, "It is a naïve misunderstanding […] to fear that the hermeneutic reflection I practice will mean a weakening of scientific objectivity."

[66] Jay R. Greenberg and Stephen A. Mitchell, *Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 363.

[67] Greenberg and Mitchell, *Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory*, 363.

forsaken."[68] Namely, embracing empathy as an empirical and epistemological foundation for a more relational psychoanalysis supplants the psychic economy of a Freudian drive theory. Freud was reluctant to embrace empathy not because he saw no value in it; he was reluctant to embrace it because he understood how it fundamentally departed from the core insights that were the genesis of his new science.

Despite these critiques, it is clear that Freud considered empathy primarily through the lens of how such a concept would impact the disciplinary boundaries and credibility of his science, while Kohut approached empathy in terms of what psychoanalysis would look like without it. His answer to this question is simple yet far-reaching: Without empathy, psychoanalytic method and interpersonal relation are impossible.

Vicarious Introspection as Defining Psychological Acts

While Kohut makes it clear that he considers empathy methodologically appropriate and definitional for psychoanalysis as a field, inherent within his position is a less obvious though significant anthropological claim. Namely, insofar as psychoanalysis is targeted at the psychic lives of others, and empathy itself is the methodological tool that in part defines this field, then empathy holds tremendous sway over what are defined as psychological acts, and whom we identify as possessing them. At first glance, the claim that empathy defines psychological acts may seem ambitious, obscure, or perhaps even inconsequential. However, if one returns to the interpersonal impetus for empathy in Kohut, the origin and significance of this fact becomes clearer.

It is crucial in this discussion to keep in view the fact that, for Kohut, empathy is needed in psychoanalytic relation because psychoanalysis is a science that takes as its domain an

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[68] Greenberg and Mitchell, *Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory*, 363-364.

intellectual territory for which there is no direct empirical access. He explains, "The inner world cannot be observed with the aid of our sensory organs. Our thoughts, wishes, feelings, and fantasies cannot be seen, smelled, heard, or touched. They have no existence in physical space, and yet they are real, and we can observe them as they occur in time: through introspection in ourselves, and through empathy (i.e., vicarious introspection) in others."[69] Empathy is not a sensory organ. The inner world of others cannot be detected and recorded with sensory data.[70] To frame the impetus for empathy negatively: We rely on empathy because, in our pursuit to understand and relate to others, we reach a limit with the other sensory tools at our disposal. In Kohut's words, "We cannot see what's going on in him. We instruct him to report what's going on in his inner life."[71] Empathy thus invariably requires trust in the reality of the psychic lives of others, that there is more substance to their person than what we can gather with sense data. This is at once the radicality and common sense of empathic relation: We insist in vicarious introspection that there is something in others to be empathic with.[72]

Kohut anticipates critiques and misconstruals of his claim that empathy grants us access to the inner lives of others. He rhetorically asks himself, "But is it always true that introspection and empathy are essential constituents of every psychological observation? Are there not psychological facts that we can ascertain by non-introspective observation of the external

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[69] Kohut, "Introspection, Empathy, and Psychoanalysis," 459.

[70] Kohut extends the analysis of the relation between empathy and sensory data in *Restoration of the Self*, where he makes it abundantly clear that empathy delineates is scientific rigor from sensory observation. He asks, "How, then, do analysts arrive at a valid understanding of the material under their observation? Depth psychology, after all, cannot support its claims with the kind of evidence available to such sciences as physics and biology that study the external world via sensory observation. Valid scientific research in psychoanalysis is nevertheless possible because (1) the empathic understanding of the experiences of other human beings is as basic an endowment of man as his vision, hearing, touch, taste, and smell; and (2) psychoanalysis can deal with the obstacles that stand in the way of empathic comprehension just as other sciences have learned to deal with the obstacles that stood in the way of mastering the use of the observational tools-sensory organs, including their extension and refinement through instruments they employed" (Kohut, *Restoration of the Self*, 143-144).

[71] Kohut, "On Empathy," 528.

[72] Alternatively, the audacity of empathy and psychoanalysis is the conviction that there is something in others for us to vicariously introspect into.

world?"[73] Rather than avoiding it, Kohut here leans into the most radical version of his position, almost as if to corner himself into a *reductio ad absurdum* where empathy literally defines psychological life. Yet Kohut leaves no ambiguity over the fact that this is precisely the position he intends to construct and defend: "Only a phenomenon that we can attempt to observe by introspection or by empathy with another's introspection can be called psychological. […] Introspection and empathy thus play a role in *all* psychological understanding."[74] Though he carries out this exchange in a fictional dialogue, Kohut nonetheless names and refutes a plausible objection to his psychoanalytic innovation. One may be willing to concede that empathy grants us access to the psychological lives of others, but following the implication of this to its natural conclusion may feel extreme. It is one thing to say that empathy is psychologically useful; it is another to say that it defines psychological life.

It is for this reason that in *Restoration of the Self* Kohut addresses diminished readings of empathy as merely one useful tool among others for defining psychological life. He contends, "Empathy is not just a useful way by which we have access to the inner life of man [*sic*]—the idea itself of an inner life of man, and thus of a psychology of complex mental states, is unthinkable without our ability to know via vicarious introspection."[75] No more than we are able to conceptualize and think our own inner worlds without introspection are we able to think the lives of others. To reduce empathy simply to a useful tool or optional resource in psychoanalytic relation is to fundamentally misunderstand not only its ubiquity, but how it determines psychological life. Without empathy, we are all trapped in solipsism; without introspection, we are not even conscious.

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[73] Kohut, "Introspection, Empathy, and Psychoanalysis," 461.
[74] Kohut, "Introspection, Empathy, and Psychoanalysis," 462; 464. Emphasis original.
[75] Kohut, *Restoration of the Self*, 306.

Yet despite how forcefully Kohut insists that empathy defines psychological life and determines our access to the inner lives of others, he is decidedly more cautious regarding just how accurate we are in our empathy. In more strictly therapeutic contexts, Kohut insists that even the most expertly trained and supervised analyst will regularly be inaccurate in their use of empathy: "[N]o analyst's empathy can be perfect—not anymore [*sic*] than could be a mother's empathy vis-à-vis the needs of her child."[76] One might ask Kohut: If empathy is akin to oxygen, which sustains our development and health from childhood, how is it that we use it so imperfectly? If we are imperfect in our respiration, we quickly die. How can we consistently be imperfect in our empathy and still survive?

While there are many reasons why an analyst's empathy would be imperfect—such as narcissistic vulnerability[77]—there is for Kohut the more fundamental point that the idea of perfect empathy fails to understand how vicarious introspection functions within therapy. Empathy may be akin to oxygen that sustains our psychological development, but the psychoanalytic use of empathy remains scientific, epistemological, and empirical for Kohut: "Mostly, certainly in psychoanalysis, empathy is used nonintuitively, ploddingly, if you wish, by trial and error."[78] In this regard, empathy functions similarly to other forms of scientific hypothesis testing, a point that Kohut maintains in his early,[79] mid, and late career. Simply because empathy functions distinctly from other forms of sensory observation does not mean that

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[76] Kohut, *Analysis of the Self*, 137.
[77] Kohut, *Analysis of the Self*, 137.
[78] Kohut, "Introspection, Empathy, and the Semi-Circle of Mental Health," 540.
[79] In 1959, Kohut explains, "The mere fact that we see a pattern of movements leading to a specific end does not, by itself, define a psychological act […]. If there is a conscious or unconscious intent with which we can empathize, we speak of a psychological act" (Kohut, "Introspection, Empathy, and Psychoanalysis," 461-462).

empathy does not pursue its own data for interpretation. It just so happens that they are

psychological data, which are equally susceptible to misunderstanding and misperception.[80]

And just as with other scientific forms of exploration, the analyst must rely on an

established method in pursuit of truth. Kohut explains that "the depth psychologist pursues

psychological truth by three methods: by persistently examining empirical data via empathy from

as many different viewpoints as he can discover; by singling out the specific empathic stance that

allows him to see the data in the most meaningful way; and, last but not least, by removing

obstacles to empathy."[81] If we are to take the pursuit of psychological truth and life seriously,

then three things follow: empathy must be scrutinized through repeatability from multiple

vantage points; the observer must critique the position from which they deploy empathy; and the

scientist must identify and isolate confounding variables that inhibit data collection and

interpretation through empathy. Crucially, what is consistent in these perspectives is that all three

seek greater access to "psychological truth" through empathic means.[82] This makes for a

complex array of attitudes toward the imperfection of empathy, the control we have over

empathy, and the influence that empathy has in defining psychological life, which deserves

careful parsing.

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[80] Kohut continues his analysis in the quoted passage immediately above by describing the "trial and error" nature of empathy more explicitly in terms of the scientific process: "I did not write about empathy as being always correct and accurate. As is the case with extrospection and external reality, introspection and empathy may misperceive the psychic reality we scrutinize (already on the level of data collection). Misperception occurs either because we are guided by erroneous expectations, by misleading theories that distort our perception—our theories must, in other words, be open-ended and capable of change under the impact of new data—or because we are not sufficiently conscientious and rigorous in immersing ourselves for protracted periods in the field of our observation. We must, in other words, be able to tolerate uncertainty and to postpone our closures" (Kohut, "Introspection, Empathy, and the Semi-Circle of Mental Health," 540).

[81] Kohut, *Restoration of the Self*, 145.

[82] It is important to note that while Kohut is invested in the scientific method and the idea of objectivity, he also accepts the futility of pursuing objectivity more than Freud.

To put Kohut's position in the simplest terms possible: The fact that empathy is imperfect does not mean that we can abstain from using empathy in our pursuit of psychological truth. For Kohut, there is no denying the essential role of introspection and empathy in all psychological understanding. There is also no intellectually viable way of defending empathy as somehow perfect in its identification and interpretation of psychological acts. This means that we are forever forced to rely on a deeply imperfect tool as we define, identify, and interpret the psychological lives of others.

Though some may view Kohut's conclusion as tragic or fatalistic, he insists through his attention to method that the science of psychoanalysis is only as difficult or simple as other sciences. Having heard several of his colleagues express discontentment over what they perceive as his ambivalence over empathy, Kohut offers the following resolution:

> Twenty-five years ago in my paper on "Introspection, Empathy, and Psychoanalysis" I spelled out the application of this basic stance in the field of depth psychology—namely, that an objective reality is in principal unreachable and that we can only report the results of specific operations. I simply assumed that I shared this basic stance with all of my scientific colleagues and expected that they would, therefore, in their reactions to what I had to say not question the basic stance itself but only reject, approve, or partially reject and approve some of the detailed conclusions that I had drawn from my consistent application of the aforementioned basic principles. I had never seriously considered the fact that I would have to define or defend my "operationalism," my clearly established knowledge that reality per se, whether extrospective or introspective, is unknowable and that we can only describe what we see within the framework of what we have done to see it.[83]

Here one finds Kohut in a state of near exasperation that his colleagues have leveled so many critiques against him from a position of naive or direct epistemological realism. Insofar as Kohut sees empathy as a tool for his science, he is keenly aware of the fact that empathy provides neither a bridge to a metaphysics of personhood nor a perfectly realist inventory of everyone who counts as a person.

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[83] Kohut, "Introspection, Empathy, and the Semi-Circle of Mental Health," 552.

Kohut's explicit and befuddled commentary over the fact that he had to explain to fellow scientists "that an objective reality is in principal unreachable" reflects what might be either a phenomenological or critical realist approach to the philosophy of science in Kohut's thought. In *Restoration of the Self*, Kohut makes a similar remark over the limitation of empathy in knowing the "Self" in his self psychology: "We cannot, by introspection and empathy, penetrate to the self per se; only its introspectively or empathically perceived psychological manifestations are open to us. Demands for an exact definition of the nature of the self disregard the fact that 'the self' is not a concept of an abstract science, but a generalization derived from empirical data. Demands for a differentiation of 'self' and 'self representation' (or, similarly, of 'self' and a 'sense of self') are, therefore, based on a misunderstanding."[84] Almost as if to echo Kant's distinction between phenomena and noumena in his transcendental aesthetic, Kohut is thoroughly uninterested in naïve understandings of science that assume our tools give us things as they are in themselves.[85]

In addition to showing strong similarities with the transcendental idealist position that the substance of psychological life is "empirically real, but transcendentally ideal,"[86] Kohut's attitude toward the limited but necessary influence of empathy closely resembles the critical realism of philosopher of science and religion Ian Barbour. Barbour contends that "reality is inaccessible to us" and that we must rely on diverse scientific criteria to arrive at "conclusions [that] are always incomplete, tentative, and subject to revision." [87] This resonates very closely

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[84] Kohut, *Restoration of the Self*, 311

[85] Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. & ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (New York; Cambridge University Press, 1998), B294. Guyer and Wood's edition includes both the 1781 (A) and 1787 (B) editions. All of my following references are to the second edition and its original pagination.

[86] See Guyer and Wood's analysis of Kant's Transcendental Aesthetic in their introduction to *The Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant's transcendental idealism is notoriously scrutinized. See also Henry E. Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983); Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

[87] Ian G. Barbour. *Religion and Science: Historical and Contemporary Issues* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997), 110.

with Kohut's insistence that empathy must be used in diverse and critical ways to come closer to psychological truth. Yet also like Barbour, Kohut holds the position that though "the *meaning* of truth is correspondence with reality […] science does not lead to certainty."[88] This is noteworthy not simply so that we might label Kohut a particular kind of philosopher of science. Rather, this subtlety is noteworthy because it underscores the fact that, for Kohut, critiquing the imperfection of empathy for determining psychological life is akin to critiquing natural scientists for relying upon the senses.

For Kohut, not only does vicarious introspection define the field of psychoanalysis, but it defines psychological acts and life itself. No more than any other science, psychoanalysis is gifted with imperfect tools and methods to make the best approximations of its object of inquiry as possible. It just so happens that these objects are the inner lives and experiences of others, which can indeed feel more consequential than some other forms of scientific inquiry.

Kohut on the Ethical Potential of Empathy

Empathy broadly influenced both the scope of psychoanalysis and its ability to define and determine psychological life itself. Consequently, it should not come as a surprise that Kohut also viewed empathy as have significant potential for various forms of ethical practice. However, because Kohut viewed empathy as so prone to many forms of "sentimentalizing obfuscation," it should be stressed at the outset how intentional Kohut was in qualifying, balancing, and subduing expectations for what empathy could and could not accomplish.[89] So as to leave no ambiguity regarding Kohut's complex position, I will state it plainly at the outset of this section: while Kohut saw empathy as neither inherently good nor bad ethically speaking, he saw empathy

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[88] Barbour, *Religion and Science,* 110. Emphasis original.
[89] Kohut, *Restoration of the Self*, 305.

as essential both for psychoanalytic cure and informed ethical action. Late in his career, though, he would offer the significant caveat that empathy is relationally and therapeutically beneficial on its own because, even if used maliciously, the mere presence of empathy requires recognition of the "humanness" of others.[90] One constant through these contentions is Kohut's refrain that none of these ethical potentials and benefits should be understated or overstated.

A preliminary clarification on the ethical potential of Kohutian empathy also happens to be Kohut's most recurrent refrain to his various audiences: Empathy is not a fuzzy or mystical interpersonal phenomenon. Though empathy in Freud's time was a new and proprietary term, by the late 1950s, it had already become synonymous among some psychological circles—largely from the growing influence of Carl Rogers's work in and beyond the Chicago area—as an indiscriminate form of care or "intuition."[91] "There are those who might seize on the popular resonance evoked by the unscientific use of the term empathy—namely, on such fuzzily related meanings as kindness, compassion, and sympathy, on the one hand, and intuition, sixth-sense perception, and inspiration, on the other."[92] During a Kohut does not deny that positive sentiments and benevolent attitudes can coincide with empathy. However, if there is anything that Kohut was intent on clarifying, it was that equivocating relational positivity with empathy was, at best, a form of wishful thinking that originates from an insufficiently critical attitude toward interpersonal relation and introspection.[93] "We must thus be on guard about the

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[90] Kohut, "On Empathy," 530.

[91] "Occasionally empathy is considered to be the equivalent of intuition, leading to the setting up of a spurious contrast between (a) sentimental and subjective (i.e., nonscientific) intuitive-empathic reactions to the feelings of others; and (b) the sober and objective (i.e., scientific) assessment of psychological data. Intuition, however, is not in principle related to empathy." (Kohut, *Analysis of the Self*, 302).

[92] Kohut, *Restoration of the Self*, 304.

[93] On the specific theme of introspection, Kohut in 1959 denigrates less rigorous approaches rather forcefully, "Introspection can, of course, also constitute an escape from reality […] More under the control of the introspecting part of the ego, yet still under the sway of the pleasure principle, are the rationalized forms of introspection of mystical cults and pseudo-scientific mystical psychology" (Kohut, "Introspection, Empathy, and Psychoanalysis," 466).

possibility that our insights might be used as rationalizations for unscientific therapeutic activities," he implores.[94] Moreover, psychoanalysts must resist the impulse to allow these obfuscations of empathy to detract from its essential functions—therapeutically and relationally.[95]

Rather than simply dismissing claims that empathy is inherently positive, Kohut offers a more precise clarification on the interpersonal effect of empathy as "value neutral."[96] By this Kohut means that if one properly understands empathy as vicarious introspection, then one must appreciate it as "a value-neutral tool of observation which can lead to correct or incorrect results [and] can be used in the service of either compassionate, inimical, or dispassionate-neutral purposes."[97] There is nothing within the epistemological and empirical nature of empathic exploration that dictates how empathic insight will be used in response to the inner lives of others.

To drive home just how value neutral empathy is, Kohut in his final lecture provides an extreme though not exaggerated illustration of empathy used for purposes of "utter hostility" as a counterexample.[98] "If you want to hurt somebody, and you want to know where his vulnerable spot is, you have to know him before you can put in the right dig. That's very important. When the Nazis attached sirens to their dive bombers, they knew with fiendish empathy how people on the ground would react to that with destructive anxiety. This was correct empathy, but not for

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[94] Kohut, *Restoration of the Self*, 304-305.

[95] "Such abuses must not, however, be fought by repudiating empathy and introspection—a move that would abolish depth psychology—but by conceptual clarity concerning their definition in the theoretical field (see Kohut, 1971, pp. 301-305) and by the insistence on the rigorous observance of scientific standards in their employment in research and therapy" (Kohut, *Restoration of the Self*, 304-305).

[96] "[E]mpathy is value neutral—neither necessarily correct, nor necessarily in the service of affection or compassion. It is a mode of observation attuned to the inner life of man, just as extrospection is a mode of observation attuned to the external world" (Kohut, "Introspection, Empathy, and the Semi-Circle of Mental Health," 541-542).

[97] Kohut, *How Does Analysis Cure?*, 175.

[98] Kohut, "On Empathy," 529.

friendly purposes."[99] Empathy offers psychological understanding of the inner psychic lives of others. Strictly speaking, this means that every instance of exploitation and terrorization emerges from empathy. Kohut's claim regarding the value neutrality of empathy thus helps illustrate how empathy is present in far more situations that one might otherwise appreciate. Empathy can be used for good, ill, and otherwise.

But as intent as Kohut is to correct misunderstandings of empathy in a more Rogerian sense of unconditional positive regard, he also identifies a danger in overcorrecting our understanding of empathy's potential. In broad terms, Kohut insists that "introspection and empathy should be looked at as informers of appropriate action."[100] Simply because empathy is on its own a value neutral attitude does not mean that it is not essential for certain kinds of agreed upon social and ethical action. In Kohut's drastic example of the "destructive anxiety" of persons attacked by Nazi dive bombers, empathy may have alternatively been used to inform a response of care in which one worked to allay rather than exacerbate a situation of terror. That is, one must not confuse empathy being value neutral with being ethically impotent or ineffective. Simply because a hammer is a neutral tool does not mean it cannot be used to build shelter for those in need.

Yet Kohut goes several steps further than the mere contention that empathy is an informer of appropriate action. Particularly in his later writings on the nature of psychoanalytic cure, Kohut is adamant that empathy is not an optional informer of appropriate action, but "a necessary precondition to being successfully supportive and therapeutic."[101] This elaboration is

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[99] Kohut, "On Empathy," 529.

[100] Kohut, "On Empathy," 529. Kohut helpfully continues, "In other words, if you understand, 'put yourself into the shoes of,' think yourself appropriately into the inner life of another person, then you can use this knowledge for your purposes."

[101] Kohut, "Introspection, Empathy, and the Semi-Circle of Mental Health," 542-543.

in one regard a natural outgrowth of the fact that all psychological understanding relies upon introspection and empathy; again, without introspection and empathy, it would be impossible to make any informed decision about how to act in response to the inner psychic lives of others—or even one's own.

However, empathy is also a necessary precondition to being successfully supportive and therapeutic because of the mechanics of psychological cure itself. Psychopathology in a self-psychological framework emerges from deficiencies in self structure that are a consequence of traumatic narcissistic wounds in development.[102] For Kohut, this then means that "psychoanalysis cures by the laying down of psychological structure."[103] Kohut offers a less terse elaboration of this formulation later in *How Does Analysis Cure?*, describing the process of cure as a "three-step movement" involving defense analysis, processing dyadic patterns of transference, and "the third step—the essential one because it defines the aim and the result of the cure—is the opening of a path of empathy."[104] In other words, because psychopathology emerges from poor self structures and the analysand's inability to identify and respond to their our narcissistic needs, the analyst must be able to offer analytic interpretation of psychic data and experience.

Contrary to stereotypes of psychoanalysis, it is not sufficient for the analyst to merely listen to the analysand from afar. Instead, Kohut argues, "A good analysis […] leads to a cure only by its employment, in countless repetitions, of the basic therapeutic unit of understanding and explaining, that is, via interpretations, the analyst's only active function in the analytic

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[102] Much could be written on Kohut's larger theory of psychoanalytic diagnosis and the etiology of psychopathology vis-à-vis narcissistic needs. However, Greenberg and Mitchell summarize his position with great brevity: "The cause of psychopathology, as Kohut sees it, is chronic failure in empathy, attributable to parental character pathology, which undermines the healthy development of the child's self" (*Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory*, 355).
[103] Kohut, *How Does Analysis Cure?*, 98-99.
[104] Kohut, *How Does Analysis Cure?*, 65-66.

process."[105] Whether it be dream analysis or processing free association, analytic interpretations are not possible without empathy as a precursor. In fact, Kohut regularly theorizes that it is through failures in empathy that analysts are able to "optimally frustrate" analysands into building greater autonomy and self structures in analysis.[106] It is therefore not an exaggeration to say that psychological cure is only possible because of empathy for Kohut; without empathy, all interpersonal demands for cure and care in trauma would be impossible to meet and respond to ethically or interpersonally.

Lastly, while it was not until the very end of his life that he began to accept the position, Kohut reluctantly addressed what he felt was a subtle though significant ethical consequence of empathy. Even as he persisted in his conviction that empathy is value neutral, he did in his closing days accept that the mere presence of empathy with another has a positive therapeutic consequence. In a nearly confessional tone, he explains that he "must now, unfortunately, add that empathy per se, the mere presence of empathy, has also a beneficial, in a broad sense, a therapeutic effect—both in the clinical setting and in human life in general."[107] In his final lecture he elaborates upon this at length:

> Empathy serves also, and this is now the most difficult part—namely, that despite all that I have said, empathy, per se, is a therapeutic action in the broadest sense, a beneficial action in the broadest sense of the word. That seems to contradict everything I have said so far, and I wish I could just simply bypass it. But, since it is true, and I know it is true, and I've evidence for its being true, I must mention it. Namely, that the presence of empathy in the surrounding milieu, whether used for compassionate, well-intentioned therapeutic, and now listen, even for utterly destructive purposes, is still an admixture of something positive. In other words, there is a step beyond an empathy informed hatred

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[105] Kohut, *How Does Analysis Cure?*, 209.

[106] Kohut asks and answers, "And how does this accretion of psychological structure take place? The most general self psychological answer to this second question is also simple: psychological structure is laid down (a) via optimal frustration and (b) in consequence of optimal frustration, via transmuting internalization" (Kohut, *How Does Analysis Cure?*, 98-99). Earlier in the same text he explains, "Each optimal failure will be followed by an increase in the patient's resilience vis-a-vis empathy failures both inside and outside the analytic situation; that is, after each, optimal new self structures will be acquired and existing ones will be firmed" (Kohut, *How Does Analysis Cure?*, 69).

[107] Kohut, "Introspection, Empathy, and the Semi-Circle of Mental Health," 544.

that wants to destroy you; and an empathyless environment that just brushes you off the face of the earth. The dreadful experiences of prolonged stays in concentration camps during the Nazi era in Germany were just that. It was not cruelty on the whole. (The Nazis were not sadistic or cruel in those camps. There were exceptions of course, it couldn't be otherwise, there are always some exceptions; but that was clearly punished, that was clearly frowned on.) They totally disregarded the humanness of the victims. They were not human, either fully not human, or almost not human (there was a little shift between, I think, the Jews and the Poles, or something like that, in that respect). That was the worst.[108]

After spending his entire career militating against sentimental readings of empathy as inherently positive, Kohut offers a meaningful caveat that may easily be misunderstood as a concession to a more Rogerian understanding of empathy as unconditional positive regard, though he insists that "everything that I have said up to now remains fully valid" despite it.[109] But Kohut concedes that he may have neglected a lower ethical bar that empathy reaches that should not be ignored despite how low it is. Namely, although empathy can be used either for harm or for care, empathy's presence in any of these situations means that the inner psychic life of the other person has been recognized as such. One may rightly dispute Kohut over whether it is more therapeutic to have one's humanity ignored as opposed to identified and subsequently terrorized or manipulated; but he is, of course, not venerating the ethics of Nazis. Rather, his claim here builds upon the more fundamental contention that empathy is necessary for psychological development, like oxygen itself. If empathy is essential for the development of self structure and

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[108] Kohut, "On Empathy," 530.

[109] It is not dramatic to read Kohut as deeply pained and conflicted in even mentioning this subtle benefit of empathy, given his fear that empathy would be again misunderstood in sentimental and non-technical terms. Elsewhere he writes, "I wish that I could stop my discussion of empathy as a concrete force in human life at this point without having to make one further step which appears to contradict everything that I have said so far, and which exposes me to the suspicion of abandoning scientific sobriety and of entering the land of mysticism or of sentimentality. I assure you that I would like to avoid making this step and that it is not the absence of scientific rigor but submission to it that forces me to tell you now that even though everything that I have said up to now remains fully valid so long as we evaluate empathy as an instrument of observation and as an informer of supportive, psychotherapeutic and psychoanalytic action" (Kohut, "Introspection, Empathy, and the Semi-Circle of Mental Health," 544).

psychological wellbeing, then it is always in a certain degree better to have one's inner psychic life recognized than not.

Kohut on the Paradox and Freedom of Empathy

Kohut thus makes two related claims, although he does not make explicit how they inform one another. The first is that empathy has three potential benefits on the wellbeing of others: The most fundamental is that it provides oxygen for adaptive self structures in development. The second, which is closely related but more specifically tailored to analytic and adult scenarios, is that empathy is therapeutic since it identifies and acknowledges the psychological life of another. The third is that empathy is a necessary prerequisite to informed action, which includes analytic interpretation itself. Again, one should not overstate any of these benefits, but even in a restrained tone, they unquestionably mean that empathy has substantial ethical potential for cultivating human development, recognizing psychic life, offering cure for psychopathology, and serving as a baseline for informing other ethical action.

Yet as ethically promising as all of these potentials for empathy are, Kohut does not untangle how problematic these insights become in light of our limited ability to direct empathy accurately. In addition to Kohut's attention to the inaccuracy of empathy within the strict confines of the psychoanalytic dyad, he also identifies broader patterns of how our empathic abilities are conditioned or determined by the structure of recognition. Buried within a footnote in "Forms and Transformations of Narcissism," he draws greater attention to this than perhaps anywhere else in his corpus.

> The capacity to recognize complex psychological states through empathy has its analogy in the capacity to identify a face in a single act of apperception. Here, too, we do not, in general, add up details or go through complex theories of comparative judgment, and here, too, we are generally unable to define our certain recognition by adducing details. The similarity between the perceptual immediacy of the recognition of a face and the empathic grasp of another person's psychological state may not be only an incidental

one; it may well be derived from the significant genetic fact that the small child's perceptual merging with the mother's face constitutes simultaneously its most important access to the mother's identity and to her emotional state.[110]

In more abstract terms, Kohut here names empathy's limited scope in terms of the hermeneutic circularity of recognition. He begins by relating empathy to recognition as a mere analogy: Just as we may fail to recognize the face of another person due to our limits apperceptive experience, we may fail to empathically grasp another's psychological state. But there the analogy stops. The relation of empathy to recognition for Kohut "may not only be an incidental one," we learn, because of the "significant genetic fact" that as children we merge with those caring for us—in this case, a mother. Early on, the child develops an empathic grasp for the mother because she identifies and mirrors the needs of the child, and the child recognizes the mother's face not by adding up details like a nascent scientist, but rather through genetic recognition.

Put more forcefully, many of the limitations to empathy described by Kohut amount to a form of implicit bias. Writing in 1971 with different language than this, Kohut explains clearly, "The reliability of our empathy, a major instrument of psychoanalytic observation, declines the more dissimilar the observed is to the observer."[111] Not only is the scope of our empathic grasp conditioned by the genetic "perceptual merging" of ourselves with those who care for us; the reliability of our empathy is positively correlated with those we are more similar to.

Naturally, Kohut is not to blame for any of these observations about the limit and bias of empathy in relation to genetic recognition and similarity. He does not even want to suggest that any of us are to blame for the limits of our empathy, as if we can control who cared for us in childhood.[112] Yet given how clearly he lays out the ethical potential of empathy in human

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[110] Kohut, "Forms and Transformations of Narcissism," 451, fn16.
[111] Kohut, *Analysis of the Self*, 37.
[112] Kohut explains, "It may be advisable to stress here that there is no connotation of guilt or blame involved if the analyst acknowledges the limitations of his empathy. Empathy failures are unavoidable—indeed they

development, responding to pathology, and informing good action, it is surprising that he does not name what might be obvious: If we are incapable of extending empathy to certain persons and experiences because of certain forms of genetic bias and the structure of recognition, we are not merely committing a scientific error; we are withholding the ethical potential of empathy from these persons. Whereas confirmation bias or the tendency to interpret findings in a way that confirms one's biases may amount to inaccurate paradigms in other sciences,[113] in psychoanalytic relation, confirmation bias effectively amounts to tribalism.

As easy as it may be to become fixated on this particular problem regarding the limits of empathy as it relates to recognition, for Kohut this issue is symptomatic of a much larger and more perennial problem—one that leads us back to the strengths and limitations of Freud's psychic economy. In "Introspection, Empathy, and Psychoanalysis," the essay where Kohut first innovated empathy as vicarious introspection, he narrates this problem in a dramatic tone, "Psychology, and especially psychoanalysis […] has lately been confronted with a new edition of a paradox that has in various forms plagued theology, philosophy, and jurisprudence: how is our faculty of making a choice or of coming to a decision compatible with the law of psychic determinism?"[114] Kohut argues that, as a still young science, psychoanalysis has not yet come to terms with the true weight of the conundrum of freedom and determinism for itself. Said otherwise, the problem over the limit of empathy is itself a manifestation of the question of

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are a necessity if the empathy craving analysand is ultimately to form a firm and independent self" (Kohut, *Restoration of the Self*, 115).

[113] See Thomas S. Kuhn. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. 50th Anniversary ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012) 10-11. Kuhn contends that successful books in the history of science possess "two essential characteristics. [1] Their achievement was sufficiently unprecedented to attract an enduring group of adherents away from competing modes of scientific activity. [2] Simultaneously, it was sufficiently open-ended to leave all sorts of problems for the redefined group of practitioners to resolve. […] Achievements that share these two characteristics I shall henceforth refer to as paradigms, a term that relates closely to 'normal science'" (10-11).

[114] Kohut, "Introspection, Empathy, and Psychoanalysis," 479-480.

whether or not psychoanalysis is to adhere to a positivistic and deterministic understanding of itself.

It is on this dilemma that Kohut is, once again, both critical and charitable in his reading of Freud. Kohut does not make a caricature of the determinism of Freud's psychic economy. He sympathetically describes Freud's position as "neither uncomplicated not without discrepancies."[115] He concedes to Freud, "Determinism holds limitless sway so long as the observer conceives of man's psychological activities as being performed in analogy with the processes in the external world that are explainable with the aid of the laws of classical physics. This is mental-apparatus psychology, governed by the laws of psychic determinism—and it explains a great deal." In certain regards, if the task of psychoanalysis is to offer as coherent and explanatory of a system as possible, Kohut largely agrees that Freud's psychic determinism is a strong candidate to accomplish this—even if it also made Freud reluctant to accept the psychoanalytic validity of empathy to begin with.

But despite the heuristic advantages of Freud's psychic determinism, Kohut insists that there is a crucial hermeneutical point that Freud's system fails to address, which may explain Freud's deep ambivalence over the concept of freedom.[116] Kohut asks and answers a compelling question at length:

> Can we, by introspection, resolve the experience of making a choice into the components of compulsion and narcissism? The answer to this question is no, despite the emphasis that psychoanalysis puts on unconscious motivation and rationalization; for all that the persistent recovery of unconscious motivations and of rationalizations leads to is, under favorable circumstances, a wider and more vivid experience of freedom. […] What we experience as freedom of choice, as decision, and the like, is an expression of the fact that

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[115] Kohut, "Introspection, Empathy, and Psychoanalysis," 480.

[116] Kohut artfully describes Freud's ambivalence, "Freud's own contradictory position is perhaps best described by stating that he always, between the lines and as a personal opinion, subscribed to the conviction of an area of freedom, choice, and decision in human psychology, but that, on the other hand, he was for a long time extremely reluctant to incorporate this conviction wholeheartedly into the theoretical framework of his science" (Kohut, "Introspection, Empathy, and Psychoanalysis," 480).

the I-experience and a core of activities emanating from it cannot at present be divided into further components by the introspective method. They are, therefore, beyond the law of motivation, i.e., beyond the law of psychic determinism.[117]

Kohut's innovation from Freud is to point out that it is through empathy and introspection that we encounter our own experience of freedom. Structurally similar to his argument regarding the limits of drive theory, Kohut's point is that freedom is always encountered through empathy and introspection. This does not necessarily mean that the ego has unrestricted agency. However, it does make the more direct point that any attempts to eliminate freedom through a psychic economy of drives cannot succeed, because "the experience of making a choice" is in the most literal sense irreducible. Said otherwise, psychoanalytic concepts such as compulsion and narcissism are not more fundamental, but rather are more distant abstractions from the immediacy of freedom. Thus, by failing to appreciate the primacy of empathy and introspection in all psychological understanding, Freud failed to realize that one can only eliminate freedom in psychoanalysis by distancing oneself further from the data of interpretive experience—a self-defeating formulation for a rigorous and non-speculative science.[118]

Kohut's position on psychic determinism in relation to Freud creates complex implications for the ethical potential of empathy. Kohut's position on freedom does not negate the claim that empathy is imperfect. His position on freedom also does not negate his claim regarding the bias of empathy according to genetic recognition and similarity. We know that empathy is imperfect and biased. But, we also know that there is freedom of choice that is not precluded by psychoanalysis. The "paradox" described by Kohut might be distilled as follows: empathy is imperfect, biased, and determined by recognition, yet it also helps us identify and

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[117] Kohut, "Introspection, Empathy, and Psychoanalysis," 481-482.
[118] On this point, Kohut makes a succinct and sweeping claim, "And indeed I am not a nihilist" (Kohut, *How Does Analysis Cure?*, 93).

create a broader and more vivid experience of freedom. While the biases and limitations of empathy are clear, it is worth noting the specific ways that Kohut sees empathy creating greater freedom.

The first way that empathy creates a greater sense of freedom is for the analyst. In this setting, Kohut makes the clear assertion that the analyst's "greater freedom to respond with deeply reverberating understanding and resonant emotionality" relies not specifically on the increased use of empathy, but "rest[s] instead on the expanded scope of empathy that is the product of the self psychologist's expanded theoretical understanding."[119] This sense of the freedom enabled by empathy works closely alongside Kohut's description of empathy as "evenly hovering attention." It is not that the analyst is more habitual in their use of empathy; it is the analyst's "expanded scope of empathy" in using self psychological theory that grants them greater freedom to respond and understand the psychic and emotional states of analysands.

But as compelling as this advantage of empathy's freedom is for the analyst, this revelation may rightly be argued as a tautological reformulation of what has already been said: Of course an expanded scope of empathy gives one greater freedom in one's evenly hovering attention; these are effectively two ways of saying the same thing—an equivocation.

Yet the way that empathy expands freedom becomes a bit clearer in Kohut's more focused illustration on the analysand. In this setting, Kohut returns to the context of cure, and how it is that empathy relates to the building of self structure. In *How Does Analysis Cure?*, Kohut offers a slightly modified definition of the cure within the psychoanalytic lineage as given "not only in terms of expanded knowledge but also in terms of the expanded terrain over which the ego operates."[120] To connect this claim to what Kohut has previously said about the nature of

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[119] Kohut, *How Does Analysis Cure?*, 82.
[120] Kohut, *How Does Analysis Cure?*, 95.

cure: For the analysand or anyone suffering from psychopathology in the form of deficient self structures, empathy as a necessary component to cure grants "expanded terrain" for the ego, and a less confined purview for its thinking. Whether in childhood development or in analysis through optimal frustration, empathy is what allows for the creation of stronger self structures, which in turn is what creates a broader and more vivid experience of freedom, which in turn allows us to broaden the scope of our empathy further.

In far simpler terms, one might simply put Kohut's position this way: If there are indeed tribal instincts in us, they are exacerbated by threats to our self structures. Empathy is what allows us to ameliorate those threats and resist impulses to tribalism and the determinism of in-group recognition for our definitions of psychological life. Thus, while it would be accurate to abbreviate this into the pithier formulation: "Empathy begets more empathy," this glosses over the subtlety of empathy's developmental and psychotherapeutic function. Because empathy is essential for psychological development and cure, then we effectively see a reciprocal relationship between empathy, the cultivation of self structure, and freedom.

What this may mean is that there is some truth to the idea that we should "be more empathic." But it is not that we must dig our heels in. Rather, we must cultivate broader and less inhibited self structures, which are both enabled by and enabling of empathy.

Conclusion and Summary

It is easy to misunderstand the significance of Kohut's gentle evolution from and subsequent critique of Freud. On the surface, one may see a petty debate over disciplinary methods and how we are to understand empathy. Yet Kohut's rather sophisticated engagement with both the philosophy of science and hermeneutic critique makes a compelling case that

psychoanalysis's understanding of empathy is far more consequential than may originally meet the eye.

I began this chapter by showing how Freud held a reluctant attitude toward empathy in psychoanalysis, primarily because it was not clear to him how a concept like empathy could respect the methodological limits of psychoanalysis as a nascent science. I looked to Kohut's definition of empathy as vicarious introspection as response to Freud's concerns over the methodological limits of psychoanalysis; I outlined how Kohut felt that centralizing empathy in analytic practice both returned psychoanalysis to its more fundamentally interpersonal nature, and that empathy defines psychoanalysis as a field. I traced Kohut's insistence that empathy not only defines the field of psychoanalysis, but that—because all psychological understanding requires either empathy or introspection—empathy actually defines psychological life itself. I then looked to the more specific ways that Kohut saw ethical potential for interpersonal relation in empathy: as oxygen for development; as the foundation for analytic interpretation and cure; as an informer of appropriate action; and as recognition of the inner lives of others. Lastly, I analyzed how it is that empathy for Kohut challenges Freud's psychic determinism by creating a "wider and more vivid experience of freedom," despite various biases and limitations to the structure of our social recognition.

For the moment, whether or not one agrees with Kohut's insistence on the freedom of empathy is beside the point. To speak explicitly, I acknowledge just how radical of a position this is for Kohut to take. My argument at this stage is not that one must accept Kohut's position on the freedom of empathy. Rather, my central claim in this chapter is that, as Kohut saw it himself, the innovation of vicarious introspection emerging from Freud is only possible because of what he viewed as its freedom, which resists Freud's commitment to psychic determinism.

In subsequent chapters of this dissertation, one of the recurrent tasks will be to analyze more precisely how it is that subsequent authors orient themselves to this contentious relation between empathy and freedom. While many theorists may be eager to side with Kohut against Freud's determinism and psychic economy, they may not always be willing to accept the theoretical possibility of empathy functioning freely as Kohut suggests, that "the more one knows, the greater one's freedom."[121] The scholarly contribution of this chapter is to make this conundrum clearer, particularly for those who see Kohut as a resource on empathy.

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[121] Kohut, "On Empathy," 534.

RELATIONAL PSYCHOANALYTIC REVISIONS OF KOHUTIAN EMPATHY

Introduction

While there is danger in overstating the significance of a single theorist on as broad of a body of literature as psychoanalysis, it is difficult to dispute how influential Kohut's research on vicarious introspection proved to be. In the little over two decades between Kohut's seminal 1959 article and his premature death at the age of 68 in 1981, empathy went from a seldom discussed concept in psychoanalysis to one commonly viewed as foundational and definitional to the field as a whole.

For the sake of this dissertation, it does not matter whether or not Kohut is to be credited for this trend. Any effort to support a claim like this will invariably be a fool's errand, with little payoff even if successful. Moreover, this is not a project on Kohut or his legacy. Rather, insofar as this dissertation hopes to understand the ethical function of empathy in contemporary relational and intercultural pastoral theology, the more productive task at this stage is to trace how Kohutian empathy was both received and scrutinized within relational psychoanalysis. The reason for this, quite simply, is that subsequent literature on empathy in pastoral care and theology draws heavily from both Kohut and relational psychoanalysis.[1]

More specifically, this chapter argues that one of the defining features of relational psychoanalytic revisions of Kohutian empathy was to critique any tacit sense of individualism or uninhibited freedom in vicarious introspection. It makes this case, first, by situating relational

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[1] This analysis of the pastoral care and theology literature on empathy is the task of chapter four.

psychoanalysis's emergence in the 1980s in relation to Kohut's enduring legacy on empathy. Second, it looks to critiques of Kohutian empathy by relational psychoanalysts such as Jessica Benjamin and Nancy Chodorow, who contend vicarious introspection retains much of the individualism that they hoped to abandon. Third, it more closely examines Benjamin's critique of self-psychological empathy as predicated on social recognition. Fourth, it turns to relational theorists who foreground the importance of subject positionality when understanding the dangers of empathy and the limits of empathic freedom. Finally, it returns to Kohut's idea of empathic freedom as essential to psychoanalytic healing, and notes how psychoanalysts such as Donna Orange and Benjamin resolve this conflict not by rejecting the ethical and healing potential of empathy, but rather by clarifying the more muted sense of empathic freedom as limited by subject position.

Through this analysis, one finds a peculiar tension at the heart of Kohutian empathy's legacy within relational psychoanalysis: While it was the desire for a more intersubjective psychoanalysis that drew relational analysts to Kohutian empathy in the first place, it was this same desire that ultimately created division among psychoanalysts over whether vicarious introspection was relational enough. Interpretive debates regarding Kohut's intentions for selfobject relations and empathy continue today. However, one thing that achieved scholarly consensus among this literature is that empathy cannot be conceptualized in purely intrapsychic terms, where empathy operates freely across differences and structures of recognition. Some scholars now claim that this was evident or obvious from Kohut's corpus at the outset, yet the considerable disagreement in the two decades following Kohut's death indicate that this was not so.

Relational Psychoanalysis's Adoption of Kohutian Empathy

Before proceeding to explain the ways that relational psychoanalysts critiqued and revised Kohut's understanding of empathy as vicarious introspection, it is crucial to trace why relational psychoanalysts gravitated to Kohut's claims about empathy in the first place. From a historical standpoint, it is impossible to determine whether relational psychoanalysis emerged as a consequence of Kohut's contributions, or whether it simply dialogued with Kohut because of the historical timing of his death. Regardless, one finds that many central scholars in early relational psychoanalysis viewed Kohut's insights on empathy and selfobject relations as indispensable for their work. In short, there is no disputing that relational psychoanalysts broadly view Kohutian empathy as a key concept in their self understanding.

Because relational psychoanalysis is not a discrete school of thought but rather a heuristic description of a body of literature, firm efforts to explain the historical moment of its emergence are misguided.[2] However, several leading figures in what is now known as relational psychoanalysis point to the publication of Jay Greenberg and Stephen Mitchell's 1983 *Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory* as a text that laid the theoretical foundation for the movement. In their ambitious work, Greenberg and Mitchell famously offer a detailed taxonomy for situated post-Freudian object-relation theorists vis-à-vis classical drive theory: "The most significant tension in the history of psychoanalytic ideas has been the dialect between the original Freudian model, which takes as its starting point the instinctual drive, and an alternative

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[2] See Stephen A. Mitchell and Lewis Aron, "Preface," in *Relational Psychoanalysis: The Emergence of a Tradition*, edited by Stephen A. Mitchell and Lewis Aron [Hillsdale, NJ: Analytic Press, 1999], xvii). Mitchell and Aron write, "Greenberg pointed out that, in recent years, some analysts had been using the term relational as a designation for a contemporary school of psychoanalysis. The current claim is that there is a school of thought defined by common principles and shared tenets and that one might identify an analytic writer or clinician as a member of such a relational school, or not. Greenberg pointed to the danger of individuals feeling pressure to adhere to certain tenets as the price of belonging. Once a school is defined and organized, criteria for inclusion and exclusion are formulated, and thinking and practice become doctrinaire."

comprehensive model […] which evolves structure solely from the individual's relations with other people. Accordingly, we designate the original model the *drive/structure model* and the alternative perspective the *relational/structure model*."[3] Though much of Greenberg and Mitchell's labor in this text was to outline the variety of ways early object-relation theorists tried to accommodate drive theory, their most enduring contribution for relational psychoanalysis was to begin articulating the concept of the "relational model analyst," for whom the dyadic character of the psychoanalytic relation is more fundamental than drive and neurosis.[4]

Though pointing to Greenberg and Mitchell's text as a founding source for relational psychoanalysis may be contested, there is relative consensus that relational psychoanalysis first coalesced in the early to mid-1980s around a collection of scholarship that increasingly challenged conventional understandings of psychoanalysis they deemed to be insufficiently relational in focus. In 1990, relational psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin narrates that "[i]n recent years analysts from diverse psychoanalytic schools have converged in the effort to formulate relational theories of the self."[5] Writing even more explicitly on the emergence of the tradition in their appropriately titled 1999 anthology, *Relational Psychoanalysis: The Emergence of a Tradition*, Stephen Mitchell and Lewis Aron corroborate this historical timeline noting, "Over the past two decades, a distinctly new tradition, generally associated with the term relational psychoanalysis has emerged within American psychoanalysis through a convergence of a number of important factors."[6] Moreover, Aron and Mitchell—both through their introduction

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[3] Jay R. Greenberg and Stephen A. Mitchell, *Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 20. Emphasis original.

[4] See Greenberg and Mitchell, *Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory*, 389. Greenberg and Mitchell write, "For the relational model analyst the psychoanalytic situation is inherently dyadic; events within the analysis are not understood as preset and unfolding from within the dynamic structures of the patient's neurosis."

[5] Jessica Benjamin, "An Outline of Intersubjectivity: The Development of Recognition," *Psychoanalytic Psychology* 7 (1990), Supplement: 34.

[6] Mitchell and Aron, "Preface," x. Naturally, one must be cautious and critical of Mitchell's narration of his own significance in the emergence of the relational psychoanalytic tradition.

and the contents of the anthology itself—make the compelling case that the 1983 description of a "relational" psychoanalytic theory would prove instrumental in the development of several contemporary strands of psychoanalytic theory.[7] Thus while there is debate over the identity of relational psychoanalysis—as this chapter will partially explore—there is less debate over its approximate historical timing.

But while it may be sensible to attribute the emergence of relational psychoanalysis in part to the nearly encyclopedic 1983 work of Greenberg and Mitchell, early relational psychoanalysts—including Mitchell himself—argue that the timing of *Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory* one year after the final contributions of Kohut is no coincidence. Mitchell and Aron explain that, particularly in the wake of Kohut's final contributions, Kohut's work "broke off" from much of object relations theory and ego psychology, and grew into "a powerful presence within American psychoanalysis in two different respects: self psychology became a distinct school unto itself, with devoted adherents and a comprehensive theoretical and clinical framework, and self psychology operated as a more general sensibility that has influenced the thinking and clinical practice of analysts of virtually all other persuasions."[8] This commentary, published sixteen years after Greenberg and Mitchell's original collaboration, is particularly noteworthy given the trenchant criticisms leveled against Kohut's corpus—as outlined in the previous chapter of this dissertation.

However, whereas Greenberg, Mitchell, and Aron merely observe the fact that Kohut's work was instrumental in the emergence of relational psychoanalysis around the time of his

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[7] See Mitchell and Aron, "Preface," xi-xii: "Greenberg and Mitchell (1983) used the term relational pointedly to bridge the traditions of interpersonal relations, as developed within interpersonal psychoanalysis and object relations, as developed within contemporary British theorizing. But the term grew and began to accrue to itself many other influences and developments: later advances of self psychology, particularly intersubjectivity theory; social constructivism in its various forms; certain currents within contemporary psychoanalytic hermeneutics; more recent developments in gender theorizing."

[8] Mitchell and Aron, "Preface," xi.

death in 1982, early relational and intersubjective psychoanalysts Donna Orange, Robert

Stolorow, and George Atwood go to greater length to explain specifically why Kohut's work was

essential for their core movement. At the height of their collaborative work together, Orange,

Stolorow, and Atwood write,

> The original authors of psychoanalytic intersubjectivity theory, influenced as well by
> personology theory (Murray, 1938) and by their own researches into the subjective
> origins of personality theories (Atwood and Stolorow, 1993), recognized in Kohut's work
> the more radical perspective needed. Though he welcomed and promoted exchange
> between psychoanalysis and the other humanistic disciplines, Kohut (1959) insisted that
> the entire domain of psychoanalytic inquiry is subjective experience. He implicitly
> rejected drive theory, along with metapsychological constructs generally. The only data
> for psychoanalytic understanding, Kohut believed, are those that are accessible by
> introspection and empathy. Intersubjectivity theory does criticize particular aspects of
> self-psychological theory, such as the concepts of transmuting internalization via optimal
> frustration and a preexisting nuclear self. Nevertheless, it completely accepts self
> psychology's most fundamental tenet, its definition of the sources of psychoanalytic
> inquiry and understanding as well as its conviction that self-experience is radically
> context-dependent—that is, rooted in specific contexts of relatedness.[9]

It would be ungenerous to Freud to suggest that he lacked awareness of the epistemological

limits of his psychoanalytic project, or that he failed to engage other humanistic disciplines.[10]

Yet for Orange, Atwood, and Stolorow, Kohut provided the "more radical perspective needed"

for relational psychoanalysis by making the fundamentally subjective and perspectival nature of

all psychological understanding a central point of emphasis throughout his work. It is for this

reason that relational analyst Judith Guss Teicholz describes Kohut as "launching […] two

overlapping and interconnected revolutions: a modern and partial revolution, carried out at a

theoretical level, by replacing Freud's drives with self and relational motivations and by shifting

the focus of the psychoanalytic exchange from the intrapsychic to the relational; and also a

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[9] Donna M. Orange, George E. Atwood, Robert D. Stolorow, *Working Intersubjectively: Contextualism in Psychoanalytic Practice* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 6.

[10] Perhaps no greater evidence of this is the depth to which Freud's many psychoanalytic innovations were derived from and named after literature itself—for example, the Oedipus complex.

postmodern and more complete revolution, which Mitchell (1993) has called the revolution at a metatheoretical level."[11] That is, not only does Kohut decenter the dominance of drive theory within psychoanalysis, but by drawing greater attention to the fundamentally interpretive nature of all psychoanalytic knowledge, he makes it impossible to ignore the social and hermeneutic context of all psychological theory. In effect, Kohut precludes the possibility of thinking psychoanalysis in non-relational terms.

It is on this point of Kohut's allegedly more radical perspective that the centrality of empathy in the evolution of relational psychoanalysis becomes clearer. As early as 1979, Atwood and Stolorow describe Kohut's "unwavering application of the empathic-introspective stance as defining both the empirical and theoretical domains of psychoanalytic inquiry" as the first of his many contributions worth adopting, adding that his "invaluable ideas are seamlessly integrated into our own viewpoint."[12] The primary reason for this, they explain, is that adopting a Kohutian understanding of empathy as vicarious introspection is crucial for supplanting an outdated vision of psychoanalytic subjectivity as overly abstracted or "supraordinate." "From our perspective, the metapsychological problem of the supraordinance of the self is replaced by empathic inquiry into the question of whether a particular person at a particular juncture experiences himself as a supraordinate center of volition, this experienced supraordinance, or its absence, being a product of a constitutive intersubjective context."[13] Once one appreciates the fact that all psychological claims are either introspective or empathic (i.e., vicariously

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[11] Judith Guss Teicholz, *Kohut, Loewald, and the Postmoderns: A Comparative Study of Self and Relationship* (Hillsdale, NJ: The Analytic Press, 1999), 28. Teicholz extends this analysis further to say, "It is possible to argue, therefore, that Kohut's work contains the seeds of much of the creative ferment in psychoanalysis today."

[12] George E. Atwood and Robert D. Stolorow. *Faces in a Cloud: The Intersubjective Foundations of Psychological Life* (Hillsdale, NJ: The Analytic Press, 1979), 186.

[13] Atwood and Stolorow, *Faces in a Cloud*, 186.

introspective), the idea of a psychoanalytic subject as divorced from relational context is no longer viable.

Though Orange, Stolorow, and Atwood are particularly sympathetic to the contribution of Kohut, they are not alone in tracing the influence of vicarious introspection into the framework of relational psychoanalysis. In her aptly titled 1987 article, "Self Psychology as Feminist Theory," Judith Gardiner points to Kohutian empathy as solving many problems plaguing psychoanalytic and feminist theory. In particular, Gardiner argues that "[s]elf psychology may offer a potentially more flexible and realistic approach to the matter than does feminist object relations theory, valuing empathy but holding a less sentimental view of it than in some feminist theories."[14] Among the many consequences of this less sentimental understanding of empathy, Gardiner makes the same case as Orange, Atwood, and Stolorow that Kohut's theory of vicarious introspection does not venerate "individuation and autonomy," and instead values healthy and non-abusive forms of relational dependence—including models that resist compulsory heterosexuality and femininity.[15]

Pointing particularly to Kohut's later work in *How Does Analysis Cure*, Teicholz echoes the assessments of Gardiner, Orange, Storolow, and Atwood on vicarious introspection's importance for the relational psychoanalytic project. First, she affirms the contention of Orange, Atwood, and Stolorow that prioritizing empathy invariably rejects the guise of objectivity in

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[14] Judith Kegan Gardiner, "Self Psychology as Feminist Theory," *Signs* 12 (1987): 779.

[15] See Gardiner, "Self Psychology as Feminist Theory," 770. Gardiner writes, "Self psychology does not share these problems. (1) Although it stresses the preoedipal over the oedipal stage in the development of the self, it is a whole life psychology in which change is normal throughout adulthood. (2) Self psychology does not use the concept of "symbiosis" for the mother-child bond. (3) Its model of maturity is not organized around the goals of individuation or autonomy. (4) Because it detaches self-esteem from sexual object choice, its model for healthy development is not necessarily hetero-sexual. (5) It does not view femininity as compensatory. (6) Its concept of selfobjects provides the means through which cultural and historical forces can shape the individual psyche."

psychoanalysis.[16] However, Teicholz also argues that Kohut's methodological approach to vicarious introspection "underscore[s] empathy's potential for creating an affective bond between two individuals on the basis of their shared experience" that is not possible otherwise.[17] "Therefore," Teicholz adds, "although we might say that, for Kohut, therapeutic empathy involved the selective use of the analyst's subjectivity in the service of highlighting the experiential commonality between herself and her patient, true empathy could never bypass or transcend the subjectivity of its author."[18] For Teicholz as much as her relational psychoanalytic predecessors, Kohut's contention that vicarious introspection structures all social psychological understanding proves highly consequential not only for understanding the psychoanalytic method, but also for understanding the fundamentally relational constitution of subjectivity itself.

Despite the strong consensus among many early relational psychoanalysts over the importance—or at the very least, compatibility—of Kohutian empathy for a relational psychoanalytic understand of the therapeutic process and self, one must be careful not to overstate this causal connection. That is, while even Greenberg and Mitchell concede that "Kohut's emphasis on introspection and empathy goes hand in hand with his shift in conceptual focus from drive to relational issues," there do remain significant questions over why the intellectual terrain appeared to be as receptive as it was for the theoretical and practical significance of empathy.[19] Did Kohut's idea that empathy and introspection structures all psychological understanding truly move the psychoanalytic paradigm forward? Did it merely capture a collective sensibility permeating American psychoanalysis in particular? Or, worse, did

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[16] See Teicholz, *Kohut, Loewald, and the Postmoderns*, 27: "In 1982, Kohut clearly rejected classical psychoanalysis and its claim to objectivity, while explicitly offering in its place a subjective mode of participation for the analyst. […] In fact, by 1982, it was this very characteristic of empathy—its subjective rather than its objective basis—that made it, for Kohut, the only acceptable mode of observation in the psychoanalytic endeavor."

[17] Teicholz, *Kohut, Loewald, and the Postmoderns*, 27.

[18] Teicholz, *Kohut, Loewald, and the Postmoderns*, 27.

[19] Greenberg and Mitchell, *Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory*, 360.

Kohut perhaps even recycle antiquated philosophical insights about the contextual and perspectival nature of social knowledge?

Though answering this definitively is as tentative as it was at the start, Orange, Atwood, and Stolorow helpfully narrated this trend themselves in 1999 in their essay titled, "Kohut and Contextualism: Toward a Post-Cartesian Psychoanalytic Theory." There, they explain the adoption of Kohutian empathy for relational psychoanalysis in slightly more philosophical terms than elsewhere:

> In our view, the progression from phenomenology to contextualism was also a central feature in the development of Kohut's thought. Whereas we came to a phenomenological conception of psychoanalysis by examining the subjective origins of psychoanalytic theories, Kohut (1959/1978), unbeknownst to us, had earlier arrived at a similar conception by examining the relationship between mode of observation and theory in psychoanalysis. Beginning with the assumption that a scientific theory should be consistent with a science's method of investigation, Kohut reasoned that because the psychoanalytic method always included introspection and empathy as its central constituents, only that which was in principle accessible to introspection and empathy belonged within the domain of psychoanalytic theory.[20]

Taken at their word, Orange, Atwood, and Stolorow describe their own adoption of Kohut's principles around empathy as a near historical accident, with the four of them somewhat independently arriving at the same philosophical and psychoanalytic conclusions. From this vantage point, Kohut's psychoanalytic method ended up allying itself with a phenomenological approach insofar as empathy and introspection provided a psychoanalytic framework for tending to how phenomena appear to consciousness itself.[21] Meanwhile, Orange, Atwood, and Stolorow—all of whom share a more explicit interest in phenomenological philosophy and psychology—searched for psychoanalytic resources to help elaborate their phenomenological

[20] Robert D. Stolorow, George G. Atwood, and Donna M. Orange, "Kohut and Contextualism: Toward a Post-Cartesian Psychoanalytic Theory," *Psychoanalytic Psychology* 16 (1999): 382.

[21] For only two examples of the comparative secondary literature on Husserl and Kohut, see Bruce Reis, "Reading Kohut Through Husserl," in *Psychoanalytic Inquiry* 31 (2011): 75-83; Marilyn Nissim-Sabat, "Kohut and Husserl: The Empathic Bond," in *Self Psychology: Comparisons and Contrasts*, ed. Douglas W. Detrick and Susan P. Detrick (Hillsdale, NJ: The Analytic Press, 1989), 151-174.

sensibilities. It was for this reason that "Kohut was a transitional figure in the movement of psychoanalytic thought from a Cartesian to a post-Cartesian epistemology," and that they so readily found Kohut and his insights on empathy so thoroughly compatible with their burgeoning work on relational psychoanalysis throughout the 1980s and 1990s.[22]

Whether or not one trusts the self testimonies of Mitchell, Orange, Atwood, Stolorow, and other early relational psychoanalysis, the review of early relational psychoanalytic literature makes it difficult to refute the importance of Kohutian empathy for the emergence of this new tradition. For them, "Freud's intrapsychic determinism gives way to a thoroughgoing intersubjective contextualism."[23] And for them, the concept of vicarious introspection as foundational for psychoanalytic understanding helped these theorists name that "psychoanalysis is a science of the intersubjective, grounded in empathic dialogue between two persons."[24] For the likes of Orange and others, not only does their "version of intersubjectivity theory liv[e] comfortably with self psychology,"[25] but "Kohut's conceptualizations of the selfobject transferences and of the central role of the analyst's empathic understanding in the establishment and working through of these transferences have brought the intersubjective context of psychoanalytic therapeutic action into particularly bold relief."[26] Quite simply, in the years following Kohut's death, the endurance of empathy as vicarious introspection proved to have a

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[22] Stolorow, Atwood, Orange, "Kohut and Contextualism," 385.

[23] Stolorow, Atwood, Orange, "Kohut and Contextualism," 382.

[24] George E. Atwood and Robert D. Stolorow, *Structures of Subjectivity: Explorations in Psychoanalytic Phenomenology* (Hillsdale, NJ: The Analytic Press, 1984), 25.

[25] See Donna M. Orange, *Emotional Understanding: Studies in Psychoanalytic Phenomenology* (New York: Guilford Press, 1995), 8-9. Orange writes: "On the other hand, my version of intersubjectivity theory lives comfortably with self psychology, another relational theory and my original psychoanalytic home. By speaking of selfobject experience or selfobject relatedness, self psychology explains how a patient can use the special intersubjective field of treatment to form or heal self-experience. In treatment, we offer patients a developmental "second chance" at a secure emotional attachment. Within such a bond they can experience the primary selfobject relatedness needed to develop a strong and valued sense of self."

[26] Atwood and Stolorow, *Structures of Subjectivity*, 48.

substantial legacy in the identity of relational psychoanalysis—however loose that identity may be.

Relational Psychoanalytic Critiques of Vicarious Introspection as Individualistic

On first glance, foregrounding empathy as the fundamental tool for psychoanalysis may seem to mitigate the idea that human psyches are far removed from one another. That is, as a tool for social and relational understanding, empathy may help relational psychoanalysis's shift away from more individualistic understandings of the analytic process. Yet the early enthusiasm of figures such as Stolorow, Atwood, and Orange was not universal among relational psychoanalysts. For other scholars in the tradition, this enthusiasm is premature in assuming that empathy successfully rejects the atomism of Freudian drive theory. Put simply, this assumption would prove unacceptable for several relational psychoanalysts.

One finds this particularly in the analysis of psychoanalytic sociologist Nancy Chodorow in her seminal essay, "Toward a Relational Individualism"—a text also included in Aron and Mitchell's anthology *Relational Psychoanalysis: The Emergence of a Tradition*. Far from romanticizing the psychoanalytic tradition, Chodorow names the fact that, "Even though Freud radically undermined notions of the unitary and autonomous individual, we can also see psychoanalysis, in its endless, reflexive involvement with self-investigation, as a particularly intense scrutiny of the individual, the apogee of the development of individualism in Western culture."[27] Nonetheless, Chodorow gravitates to psychoanalytic theory precisely because of the potential she sees in it for critiquing ideals of autonomous individuality.[28] In a tone of optimism

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[27] Nancy J. Chodorow, "Toward a Relational Individualism: The Mediation of the Self through Psychoanalysis," in *Reconstructing Individualism: Autonomy, Individuality, and the Self in Western Thought*, ed. Thomas C. Heller, Morton Sosna, and David E. Wellbery (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986), 112.

[28] See Chodorow, "Toward a Relational Individualism," 120: "Psychoanalytic theory radically challenges our understanding of ourselves as whole, autonomous individuals, then seeks to reconstruct that wholeness and autonomy."

verging on teleology, Chodorow explains that "when we investigate psychoanalytic theory and practice, we see a historical progression from a view favoring a pure, differentiated individuality, based on rigid notions of autonomous separateness, toward a relational individualism."[29] For Chodorow, the history of psychoanalysis is indeed riddled with issues of individualism and unrealistically atomistic understandings of selfhood. Yet her optimism stems from the belief that, with time, the psychoanalytic method is refining itself and effectively troubleshooting many of the missteps made in the early twentieth century. We may not be there yet, but "the therapeutic setting can, finally, produce knowledge and self-knowledge only of a relational self."[30]

Though they are often at odds with one another, Orange and Benjamin resoundingly echo Chodorow's charge on the direction in which psychoanalytic theory must head—especially if it desires to call itself a "relational" psychoanalysis. Commenting on an earlier essay by her colleagues Stolorow and Atwood, Orange argues in explicit terms, "An adequate psychoanalytic epistemology must eschew individualism and the myth of the isolated mind, and it must move toward both subjective and intersubjective conceptions of understanding."[31] One of Orange's primary tasks throughout her 1995 *Emotional Understanding: Studies in Psychoanalytic Epistemology* is to flesh out the case that there is no coherent way to conceptualize a psychoanalytic theory of social knowledge that retains an individualistic theory of psychic selfhood.

Benjamin agrees with this core analysis and contributes a further layer of cultural critique by suggesting that the impulse to individualism in psychoanalysis—and elsewhere—is a symptom of gender domination in Western rationality. She argues in *Bonds of Love*, "As a

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[29] Chodorow, "Toward a Relational Individualism," 120.
[30] Chodorow, "Toward a Relational Individualism," 112.
[31] Orange, *Emotional Understanding*, 4.

psychological principle, autonomous individuality derives from the male posture in

differentiation; that is, from the repudiation of the primary experience of nurturance and identity

with the mother."[32] Benjamin is explicit in tracing her critique of autonomous individuality to the

analysis of Chodorow in *The Reproduction of Mothering*. There, Chodorow argues that gender

identity and the psychic impulse of mothering (i.e., women's desire to have children) is

constituted in their relational attachments to their own mothers, particularly through

identification with them and their parental tasks. Yet girls are not clearly told what their sexual

and gendered identity is, but rather are left to figure this out in relation to their mothers. Boys,

however, do not identify with their fathers, but develop their heterosexual desire in neglecting

the identity of their mothers, which in turn fosters a relationally detached sense of

individualism.[33] As such, individualism is itself a rejection or, worse, repression of the

fundamentally relational and dependent structure of psychic subjectivity—a deluded male

fantasy. Fortunately, by her 1995 *Like Subjects, Love Objects*, Benjamin remarks that "relational

psychoanalysis has arrived at its own form of this questioning of the subject as absolute. The

challenge to the assumption of a unitary subject is currently vital to psychoanalysts concerned

with the two-person view."[34] Thus, along with Chodorow and Orange, Benjamin is resolved at

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[32] Jessica Benjamin, *Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), 188.

[33] See Nancy J. Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1978), 208. Chodorow summarizes much of her text's argument when she writes, "The reproduction of women's mothering is the basis for the reproduction of women's location and responsibilities in the domestic sphere. This mothering, and its generalization to women's structural location in the domestic sphere, links the contemporary social organization of gender· and social organization of production and contributes to the reproduction of each. That women mother is a fundamental organizational feature of the sex-gender system: It is basic to the sexual division of labor and generates a psychology and ideology of male dominance as well as an ideology about women's capacities and nature."

[34] Jessica Benjamin, *Like Subjects, Love Objects: Essays on Recognition and Sexual Difference* (New York: Yale University Press, 1998), 14.

the need to relational psychoanalysis to decenter individualism as the telos of psychoanalytic

theory and believes the field is well on its way toward this future.

Despite the precedent of relational psychoanalytic theorists using empathy precisely

toward this end of decentering the autonomous subject of a more classically Freudian drive

theory, there are several theorists for whom Kohut's understanding of empathy does not fully

satisfy the demands of a post-individualistic psychoanalysis. Even with her general optimism for

the trajectory of psychoanalytic theory to throw off the baggage of individualism and embrace a

fundamentally relational understanding of the self, Chodorow is deeply conflicted about

Kohutian theory's ability to contribute to this end. Writing six years after his death, Chodorow

offers one of her more sustained reflections on Kohut in a footnote,

> Kohut is somewhat paradoxical in terms of the antinomy I am trying to develop here. On
> the one hand, he is seen as an object-relations theorist par excellence, who locates
> disorders of the self squarely in early failures of the mirroring and idealizing relationship
> to mother and father. He is contrasted (and contrasts himself) with the classical theorists
> in his focus on the self and the self's disorders, as opposed to the classical concern with
> conflict. Yet on the other hand, his goals for the self-ambitions and ideals mediated by
> skills and talents—could not be more individualist. In his version, the object-relations
> route is to lead to individual fulfillment of individual goals. Where Freud, Hartmann, and
> others assume that harmonizing internal conflict will somehow harmonize relations with
> the external world, Kohut seeks to harmonize external relations to enable internal
> resolution.[35]

The greatest reason why relational theorists might be drawn to Kohut, Chodorow insists, is

because of his innovations in conceptualizing and prioritizing relational processes within a

psychoanalytic framework.[36] But this neglects the fact that his focus on vicarious introspection,

mirroring, and transmuting internalization all are in service of fortifying the self against

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[35] Chodorow, "Toward a Relational Individualism," 113, unnumbered footnote.

[36] While there are disagreements over whether Kohut is properly understood as an object-relations theorist, in this context Chodorow unquestionably intends this moniker as an asset for Kohut. Elsewhere in this essay, Chodorow explains that "the object-relations perspective gives us a very different notion of the construction of individuality than does the classical analytic account," and contends that "Object-relations theory does not need to idealize a hyperindividualism; it assumes a fundamental internal as well as external relatedness to the other" (Chodorow, "Toward a Relational Individualism," 115, 117).

narcissistic wounds that threaten its individualistic constitution. The "paradox" for Chodorow is that Kohut truly does succeed in both of these dimensions: expanding the relational theory of psychoanalytic processes, but also solidifying the narrative that psychoanalysis is always in service of an individual self and its interior or internal dynamics. Kohutian empathy may only function as a balm to an irredeemably individualistic understanding of psychic relation.

Benjamin is far less sympathetic to Kohut's contribution to a relational psychoanalytic theory, and is even more overt in calling out Kohutian empathy as an insufficient remedy for psychoanalysis's individualistic heritage. Focusing on infant research around social development, she charges that "self psychology, which has placed such emphasis on attunement and empathy and has focused on the intersubjectivity of the analytic encounter, has been tacitly one-sided in its understanding of the parent-child relationship and the development of intersubjective relatedness."[37] By this Benjamin means that, despite the fact that the theoretical framework for empathy is nominally dyadic, the purview of a self-psychological analysis of empathy as vicarious introspection is always from the narrower phenomenological limits of a single self's consciousness. This more abstract theoretical observation manifests more concretely with the parent-child dyad: "Kohut defined the necessary confrontation with the other's needs or with limits in a self-referential way—optimal failures in empathy (parallel to analysts' errors)—as if there were nothing for children to learn about the other's rights or feelings."[38] As a consequence, Benjamin contends that "[a]lthough Kohut's goal was to enable individuals to open 'new channels of empathy' and 'in-tuneness between self and selfobject' (1984, p. 66), the self was always the recipient, not the giver, of empathy."[39] In other words, Kohut's fixation on

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[37] Benjamin, *Like Subjects, Love Objects*, 32.
[38] Benjamin, *Like Subjects, Love Objects*, 32.
[39] Benjamin, *Like Subjects, Love Objects*, 32.

cultivating empathy as a means for building self structure in therapy ends up precluding a truly

intersubjective understanding of therapeutic processes. While Benjamin later tempers this

indictment slightly, she does so only by affirming the fact that her critique applies more

forcefully to Kohut's earlier work, where his theory of vicarious introspection originated.[40] That

is, she favors relational psychoanalytic revisions of Kohutian empathy over Kohut himself.

Though these critiques from Chodorow and Benjamin emerged in the late 1980s to mid

1990s, one finds remarkably similar warnings about the relational deficiencies of Kohutian

empathy from Greenberg and Mitchell in 1983. Given what they view as the theoretical

incoherence of Kohut's mixed-model, one might anticipate that Greenberg and Mitchell would at

least grant that Kohut's diverse methods lead to a broad or generously open interpretive

framework for understanding intersubjective relation. Yet they charge, "A final weakness of

Kohut's psychology of the self is the narrowness of its interpretive focus."[41] They justify this

claim by arguing that Kohut's self-psychological framework is only able to conceptualize parent-

child relations in particular in terms of desires for empathy or idealization.[42] That is, like

Benjamin, Greenberg and Mitchell view vicarious introspection as a concept that appears to be

relationally rich yet is ultimately one-sided. Thus, in one of the most damning statements on

Kohut's work, they conclude, "*There is never any actual engagement* between the parent and the

child, any encounter between real as opposed to inflated and idealized people."[43]

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[40] See Benjamin, *Like Subjects, Love Objects*, 33: "My remarks are more apt for Kohut and early self psychology. Later writings show some tendency to correct this one-sidedness, to include the evolution of difference (e.g., Lachmann 1986) and the relationship to the object as other (Stolorow 1986)."

[41] Greenberg and Mitchell, *Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory*, 371.

[42] See Greenberg and Mitchell, *Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory*, 371. Greenberg and Mitchell write, "The complexities of the child's wishes and feelings concerning his parents are uniformly arranged in two categories: the desire for empathic mirroring and the opportunity to idealize the parent. As a consequence, developmentally significant persons often appear in Kohut's case descriptions as somewhat schematic and shadowy figures, important principally in terms of their role as narcissistic gratifiers or frustrators."

[43] Greenberg and Mitchell, *Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory*, 371. Emphasis original.

By the late 1990s, even Kohut's earliest advocates Orange, Atwood, and Stolorow came

to accept some of these broad indictments of Kohutian empathy as a vestige of now antiquated

psychoanalytic models of self and social epistemology. In one of their most thorough analyses of

the enduring contribution of vicarious introspection for the future of relational psychoanalysis,

they write,

> Despite these significant advances, remnants of a Cartesian, objectivist epistemology
> persisted in Kohut's thinking, specifically in his conceptualizations of analytic empathy.
> Felicitously defining the proper analytic stance "as the responsiveness to be expected, on
> an average, from persons who have devoted their life to helping others with the aid of
> insights obtained via the empathic immersion into their inner life" (Kohut, 1977, p. 252),
> he unfortunately also claimed that such empathy "is in essence neutral and objective"
> (Kohut, 1980, p. 483), thereby decontextualizing it. The empathic stance could never be a
> neutral one because, like the traditional precepts of abstinence, anonymity, and
> equidistance, it is embedded in a theoretical belief system—one emphasizing the role of
> emotional responsiveness in facilitating the development of the sense of selfhood
> (Stolorow & Atwood, 1997). Furthermore, as Kohut (1980) himself well understood, "a
> situation in which one person has committed himself for prolonged periods to extend his
> 'empathic intention' toward another" (p. 487) is surely not experienced by the patient as a
> neutral one, meeting as it does deep longings to be understood.[44]

Though Stolorow and Atwood earlier claim they developed their intersubjective concept of

empathy from existing theories of countertransference,[45] here they reflect that Kohutian empathy

ultimately falls prey to the same problem that countertransference faced in Freud: there is too

strong of an ideal to remain neutral and objective in deploying vicarious introspection.[46] Orange

elaborates elsewhere on this problem elsewhere by noting that "self psychologists at times can be

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[44] Stolorow, Atwood, Orange, "Kohut and Contextualism," 385-386.

[45] See Atwood and Stolorow, *Structures of Subjectivity*, 38: "The intersubjectivity concept developed in this chapter is a direct outgrowth of the psychoanalytic understanding of transference and countertransference. The concept of transference may be understood to refer to all the ways in which the patient's experience of the analytic relationship becomes organized according to the configurations of self and other that unconsciously structure his or her subjective universe."

[46] See also Robert D. Stolorow, Donna M. Orange, and George G. Atwood, "Cartesian and Post-Cartesian Trends in Relational Psychoanalysis," *Psychoanalytic Psychology* 18 (2001): 469. Stolorow, Atwood, and Orange make a very similar statement on epistemology of post-Kohutian relational psychoanalysis, claiming that "despite the important efforts of Mitchell, Aron, and other relational thinkers to recast psychoanalytic theory as a contextual psychology, relational psychoanalysis has, in significant ways, remained caught in the grip of the very Cartesianism it has sought to subvert."

so involved in and devoted to getting and staying close to the patient's experience that we may

forget that we are there too."[47] That is, the peculiar irony that these intersubjective theorists come

to see about vicarious introspection is that the intense fascination and commitment to

empathizing with others can easily become a form of disembodied voyeurism. In effect, Orange,

Stolorow, and Atwood learn to become more critical of what they see as the individualism of

Kohutian empathy.

Many of the relational psychoanalytic critiques of Kohutian empathy point to problems of

individualism and objectivism by situating vicarious introspection within the broader framework

of self psychology. However, Teicholz views the increasing association of self psychology with

antiquated problems in psychoanalysis as a fundamental mischaracterization of Kohut's

relational theory. After tracing Atwood and Stolorow's growing discontentment with Kohut in

great detail, Teicholz makes a convincing textual case that these relational psychoanalysts are

only able to arrive at such criticisms by attributing the insights of secondary literature—

particularly from Mitchell—on Kohut to Kohut himself.[48] She writes, "If Stolorow and Atwood

had instead turned directly to Kohut's own words, they would have found ample and repeated

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[47] Orange, *Emotional Understanding*, 66. In this passage, Orange continues, "Thus, our cherished effort to understand our patients from their vantage point may prevent us from recognizing and remembering our contribution to shaping the patient's experience (the influence of the observer on the observed). It may also interfere with our seeing that we can understand another's experience only through our own equally subjective experience."

[48] Here Teicholz's analysis is worth quoting at length: "In their elaboration of intersubjectivity theory, Stolorow and his colleagues (1987; Stolorow and Atwood, 1992) have made an invaluable contribution to Kohut's self psychology, to relational theory, and to psychoanalysis. In the years from 1987 to 1992, however, Stolorow and Atwood seem to have moved further away from Kohut's actual text and to have become more identified with relational critics of Kohut's concept of self. For instance, Stolorow and Atwood (1992) include Kohut among those who had hung on to a 'remnant of the myth of the isolated mind' (p. 17). They justify this categorization of Kohut by referring to what they describe as his notion of the 'nuclear program or inherent design {of the self}… locate{d}… in the prenatal or genetic prehistory of the individual' (p. 17). But Kohut never located the nuclear program of the self in the prenatal or genetic prehistory of the individual. To the contrary, he characterized himself as an analyst 'who thought of genetic factors almost exclusively in terms of childhood experiences' (Kohut, 1984, p. 132). Strangely, in making their claim that Kohut perpetuated a myth of the isolated mind, Stolorow and Atwood (1992) refer their readers not to Kohut's own writings, but to Mitchell's (1988) comments about Kohut's ideas!" (Teicholz, *Kohut, Loewald, and the Postmoderns*, 104-105). Note that the unconventional use of the brace or curly-style brackets are Teicholz's own.

evidence that Kohut (1984, p. 49, p. 52, p. 61) harbored no such 'myth' of an isolated mind, plagued with objectivist epistemology and individualism."[49] Even if Kohut was unsuccessful in fully undoing an individualist orientation in his self psychological theory, Teicholz's interpretive argument of Kohut is so detailed that it is difficult if not impossible to refute.

Whether or not Kohut actually falls victim to these charges of being overly individualistic in his theory of empathy, by the early 1990s it becomes clear that relational psychoanalysts share a broad concern with how empathy can be thought and practiced in more explicitly relational terms. Said otherwise, the source of dissent among relational analysts is not over whether to abandon a strictly individualist view or subjectivity; rather, the debate among them is how to situate empathy within a psychoanalytic framework without unrestrained autonomy and the pervasive myth of isolated minds.

Social Recognition as Foundational to Empathy

While the critiques raised by Chodorow, Benjamin, and others reveal a lack of consensus among relational psychoanalysts over the utility of empathy, for Jessica Benjamin, the structural limitations of prioritizing empathy for psychic relation and ethics goes even further than charges of individualism. Even if one grants Kohut and his sympathetic intersubjective theorists a charitable reading, Benjamin contends that fixating on empathy as a resource for social and political empowerment is myopic at best. That is, even if one accepts the healing function of empathy, the psychoanalyst still must question how the structure of psychic recognition conditions empathy's gaze.

In her now seminal 1988 *Bonds of Love*, Benjamin makes a common intellectual move of suggesting that her field has overlooked a ubiquitous and organizing concept. For her, this

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[49] Teicholz, *Kohut, Loewald, and the Postmoderns*, 105.

overlooked concept is recognition. She writes, "Recognition is so central to human existence as to often escape notice; or, rather, it appears to us in so many guises that it is seldom grasped as one overarching concept."[50] In a way that is not completely distinct from Kohut's original insistence that empathy structures all psychological knowledge, Benjamin here insists that recognition is so ubiquitous in relational processes that we have lost sight of it. Toward this end, Benjamin resorts further back intellectually than even Freud to G. W. F. Hegel's mastery and servitude dialectic in his 1807 *Phenomenology of Spirit* to begin articulating what she means by "recognition."

In the context of this project, Hegel builds his theory of recognition on the terse but pregnant claim, "Self-consciousness is *desire*."[51] By this he means that for a self to be in a state of desire is to be in a state of self-consciousness. In more concrete terms, we as persons only become mindful of ourselves as contingent and precarious whenever we are in a state of need. For example, to be hungry (i.e., to be in a state of desire for food) is to be viscerally aware of the fact that we dwell in organic bodies that need sustenance, and that we will die if we do not receive this need.

Being in a state of self-conscious desire reveals to us just how fragile we are. For this reason, Hegel argues that, when we are in a state of self-consciousness, we constantly try to satisfy our desires, thereby turning our self-consciousness into what he calls self-certainty. Again, in simpler terms, whenever we are hungry, our decision to eat is a decision to eliminate the desire of hunger. To be "self-certain" is to be assured of ourselves that we are not in a state of precarity. The fact that we prefer to be fed, well-rested, and hydrated is evidence of the fact that

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[50] Benjamin, *Bonds of Love*, 15.

[51] G.W.F Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit,* trans. Terry Pinkard (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 107 [¶174]. Emphasis original. This and all subsequent citations to the *Phenomenology* include the original paragraph numbering in brackets.

we constantly strive to convert our self-consciousness into a state of self-certainty. In more dramatic terms, to be in a constant state of self-consciousness is to lead a perpetually vulnerable and fragile existence.

Though seemingly abstract, Hegel's phenomenological discussion of desire helps explain a number of concrete relational scenarios involving interpersonal dependence and vulnerability. This becomes particularly clear when a person in a state of self-consciousness realizes they cannot satisfy all of their desires in isolation; or, in Hegel's terms, "*Self-consciousness attains its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness.*"[52] More specifically, the dynamic that Benjamin picks up from Hegel in parsing intersubjective relation is the moment when one realizes that, though the world is full of objects that usefully satisfy one's desires, there are also phenomena in one's world that harbor their own desires. "Self-consciousness, which is utterly *for itself* and which immediately marks its object with the character of the negative, or is initially *desire*, will instead thus learn from experience about this object's self-sufficiency [*Selbständigkeit*]."[53] That is, try as we might to satisfy all of our needs by ourselves and remain forever in a state of self-assurance, we learn very early in life that we are thoroughly incapable of surviving—let alone fully mastering our desires—without the help of others. Hegel thus defines recognition [*die Anerkennung*] as the process of "spiritual unity" across consciousnesses, where we not only

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[52] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit,* 107 [¶175]. Emphasis original.

[53] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit,* 104 [¶168]. Emphasis original. While Terry Pinkard's translation of Hegel's *Phänomenologie des Geistes* is generally superior and will almost surely be the standard translation for the foreseeable future, A. V. Miller's more straightforward translation of *Selbständigkeit* as "independence" captures the ethical quality of this social relation more clearly. The original reads, "Das Selbstbewußtsein, welches schlechthin *für sich* ist, und seinen Gegenstand unmittelbar mit dem Charakter des Negativen bezeichnet, oder zunächst *Begierde* ist, wird daher vielmehr die Erfahrung der Selbständigkeit desselben machen" (*Phänomenologie des Geistes* [Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970], 139 – 140). In context, Miller translates this remark, "Self-consciousness which is simply *for itself* and directly characterizes its object as a negative element, or is primarily a *desire*, will therefore, on the contrary, learn through experience that the object is independent" (*Phenomenology of Spirit,* trans. A.V. Miller (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 106 [¶168]). What Hegel is discussing is the fact that another object in one's phenomenological purview is its own subject or person, and does not need me. "Self-sufficiency" has an oddly survivalist connotation, whereas "independence" connotes relational autonomy.

appreciate that satisfying our desires is contingent and insecure, but that there are others with whom we share this precarity of desire: "Self-consciousness is *in* and *for itself* while and as a result of its being in and for itself for an other; i.e., it is only as a recognized being [*ein Anerkanntes*]."[54]

Benjamin is intensely aware of the trapping of methodological mistranslation. For this reason, she is careful to argue why it is methodologically responsible to consult Hegelian phenomenology in the context of psychoanalysis in the first place. "Now we can see how Hegel's notion of the conflict between independence and dependence meshes with the psychoanalytic view," she explains.[55] "Hegel posits a self that has no intrinsic need for the other but uses the other only as a vehicle for self-certainty. This monadic, self-interested ego is essentially the one posited in classical psychoanalytic theory."[56] That is, it does not take much theoretical translation to see how the Hegelian notion of desire and the Freudian notion of drive very closely mirror one another. While she does not cite them for support, Benjamin is in strong company on this methodological claim alongside philosophers Clark Butler[57] and Paul Ricoeur. Ricoeur in particular points to the significance of Hegel's mastery and servitude dialectic for understanding contemporary relational theory in psychoanalysis, especially in relation to Freud. "[T]he movement to self-consciousness through reduplication of desire in desire, the education of desire in the struggle for recognition the inauguration of that struggle in a nonegalitarian situation—all these Hegelian themes appear to have more analogies with psychoanalytic themes than does Husserl's labored theory of perceptual intersubjectivity," Ricoeur claims in *Freud and*

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[54] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit,* trans. Pinkard, 108 [¶178]. Emphasis original.
[55] Benjamin, *Bonds of Love*, 33.
[56] Benjamin, *Bonds of Love*, 33.
[57] See Clark Butler, "Hegel and Freud: A Comparison," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 36, no. 4: 506-522.

Philosophy. "There is an obvious similarity between the Hegelian struggle of master and slave and the Freudian Oedipus complex."[58] In short, Benjamin's justification for turning somewhat anachronistically to Hegel stands on its own, but is also corroborated by existing literature in phenomenological psychoanalysis.

It is on this roadblock to self-certainty that Benjamin turns to Hegel in order to help us understand the complex challenge of theorizing intersubjective relation in psychoanalysis. Benjamin both adopts and helpfully interprets Hegel's process of recognition early on in *Bonds of Love*: "The need of the self for the other is paradoxical, because the self is trying to establish himself as an absolute, an independent entity, yet he must recognize the other as like himself in order to *be* recognized by him."[59] More poignantly on the issue of coming to see others as having their own desires, Benjamin succinctly translates Hegel, "The essence of the intersubjective perspective is, 'where objects were, subjects must be.'"[60] That is, prior even to a discussion of empathy, Benjamin turns to Hegelian recognition because, more than other available psychoanalytic concepts, it captures the paradoxical task of acknowledging that another phenomenon in one's world is a subject on their own.

Yet more specifically for Benjamin, attention to the structure of recognition in relational processes is the defining conceptual marker for the development of intersubjectivity in relational psychoanalysis. She states this rather plainly both in *Bonds of Love* and her most influential early article, "An Outline of Intersubjectivity: The Development of Recognition."[61] In the former, she narrates, "In my view, the concept that unifies intersubjective theories of self development is the

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[58] Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. Denis Savage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 387-388.
[59] Benjamin, *Bonds of Love*, 32. Emphasis original.
[60] Jessica Benjamin. *Shadow of the Other: Intersubjectivity and Gender in Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1998), xii.
[61] This claim is based on the number of citations of this work, as indexed in Google Scholar.

need for recognition."[62] In the latter, she makes the disciplinary significance of this relational concept even clearer in arguing, "Intersubjective theory postulates that the other must be recognized as another subject in order for the self to fully experience his or her subjectivity in the other's presence. […] In a sense, the point of a relational psychoanalysis is to explain this fact."[63] Whereas relational psychoanalysts heavily influenced by Kohut were claiming for nearly a decade that vicarious introspection is the foundational concept for relational theory in psychoanalysis, Benjamin's claim is that the entire reason for the existence of relational psychoanalysis is to elaborate upon the fundamental human need to be recognized and to recognize others.

While Benjamin's scholarship is known for its emphasis on recognition, what is less obvious across her corpus is the proximity in which she relates empathy to this process of recognition. In 1988, Benjamin nearly equivocates recognition and empathy when she claims that, among other things, "to recognize is to affirm, validate, acknowledge, know, accept, understand, empathize, take in, tolerate, appreciate, see, identify with."[64] In her 1995 *Like Subjects, Love Objects*, she parenthetically elaborates "countertransference recognition [as]—empathy, attunement, and identification with the patient."[65] As recently as 2017, she explains that "in psychoanalytic theory recognition pertains to what makes someone's independent subjectivity qua other mind apparent. For example, the analyst's empathic acknowledgment of the patient's unique suffering becomes an opportunity for the patient's recognition that the analyst is not identical with his (feared) mental object who has failed to empathize."[66] From her

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[62] Benjamin, *Bonds of Love*, 21.
[63] Benjamin, "Outline of Intersubjectivity," 35.
[64] Benjamin, *Bonds of Love*, 15-16.
[65] Benjamin, *Like Subjects, Love Objects*, 155-156.
[66] Jessica Benjamin, *Beyond Doer and Done To: Recognition Theory, Intersubjectivity and the Third* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 13.

first major work in *Bonds of Love* through her most recent project *Beyond Doer and Done To*, Benjamin consistently relates the theoretical and clinical significance of recognition to empathy, sometimes in ways that make the distinction between them unclear.

Despite perennially relating recognition—what she sees as the core concept for relational psychoanalysis—to empathy, we have already seen that Benjamin holds a rather consistently critical attitude toward Kohut's contributions regarding vicarious introspection and self psychology more broadly. In addition to her trenchant critique already cited—that Kohutian empathy is "one sided" in its ability to conceptualize interpsychic relation—Benjamin offers the even more substantial indictment that Kohutian empathy is not able to theorize the process whereby we recognize another person as a consciousness warranting our empathy. In 1990 she writes that "neither Fairbairn's (1952) insistence on the need for the whole object nor Kohut's (1977) declaration that selfobjects remain important throughout life addresses directly the difference between object and other."[67] She elaborates on this point further with what might be described as a backhanded compliment of Kohut by claiming that the "unfortunate tendency to collapse other subjects into objects cannot […] be dismissed as a terminological embarrassment, that could be dissolved by greater linguistic precision (see Kohut, 1984). Rather, it is a symptom of the very problems in psychoanalysis that a relational theory should aim to cure."[68] That is, Benjamin effectively charges Kohut with trying to use detailed self-psychological taxonomies around selfobject use to disguise the deeper problem of self psychology's inability to treat others as subjects and not objects.[69]

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[67] Benjamin, "Outline of Intersubjectivity," 34.
[68] Benjamin, "Outline of Intersubjectivity," 34.
[69] See Benjamin, *Bonds of Love*, 251. Benjamin also tackles Kohut on this point, "Self psychology argues that we need to use other people as "selfobjects" in the service of self-esteem and cohesion throughout life, and criticizes what it sees as psychoanalysis's erroneous inflation of independence as the goal of maturity. As Greenberg and Mitchell point out (*Object Relations*), this critique exaggerates the psychoanalytic disparagement of

As with the original critiques outlined against a Kohutian model for empathy and its significance in a relational psychoanalytic theory, there is also notable resistance to Benjamin's charges that self-psychological theory pays insufficient attention to the process of recognition as foundational for intersubjectivity. In a more recent article that prompted a special issue of *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* to unpack its significance, Orange pushes back against Benjamin's longstanding readings of Kohut on matters of recognition. She writes,

> Although self psychology rarely uses the word recognition, much less "mutual recognition," Kohut's (1971, 1977) description of the "narcissistic transferences" placed the spotlight on developmental processes of mirroring and idealizing that created opportunities for the parent to recognize the unique qualities and talents of the child, and thus to participate in bringing them into being. Originally, it is true, Kohut applied his concept of mirroring to the early grandiose self. Still, like the Hegelian dialectic of recognition in its commonest reading, this "selfobject" function of mirroring developed the double aspect of seeing/recognizing the "always already" being of the other, and of bringing this being potential to life.[70]

Orange, originally trained as a philosopher with substantial training in Hegel, here doubles down on the claim that writing off Kohut as inattentive to the complex psychological task of differentiating subjects and objects can only be accomplished by failing to acknowledge his robust psychological nomenclature that is designed precisely to capture this. In particular, Orange contends that the language of recognition simply was not common in Kohut's circles, and as a consequence he found other language—particularly around the narcissistic needs—to describe this process. Moreover, she signals that Kohut's significant innovation of the concept "selfobject"—which attempts to capture the simultaneously intrapsychic and interpersonal quality of all psychological relation—debunks such ungenerous readings.

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dependency. It also fails to distinguish between using others as ''selfobject" and recognizing the other as an outside subject, missing the key point of the intersubjective view."

[70] Donna Orange, "Recognition as: Intersubjective Vulnerability in the Psychoanalytic Dialogue," *International Journal of Psychoanalytic Self Psychology* 3 (2008): 180-181.

Making a remarkably similar response, Teicholz also takes Benjamin to task over the misreading of Kohut on recognition vis-à-vis his concepts of mirroring and twinship. On this point she elaborates,

> Benjamin pays brief tribute to Kohut's contribution while emphasizing its limitations for relational psychoanalytic theory. In several contexts, Benjamin (1988, 1995a) offers only one-sentence summaries of his contribution; in another context Benjamin (1991) uses one of his case vignettes to illustrate a child's turn from a disappointing, hurtful, and mentally ill mother to a more emotionally responsive father. Benjamin, offering her own addendum to Kohut's case discussion, suggests that his vignette also reflects the "developmentally appropriate wish [of a child] to be seen by the father . . . as like him" (pp. 291-292, italics added). Benjamin does not acknowledge that the wish to be recognized in one's similarity to one's parents is subsumed in Kohut's twinship concept. I also see Benjamin's (1988, 1990) central concept of recognition as conceptually and experientially related to Kohut's mirroring; throughout her work there are both acknowledged and unacknowledged resonances with this and other self-psychological ideas.[71]

Not only does Teicholz accuse Benjamin of being a reckless and dismissive reader of Kohut's corpus, but she subsequently implies that Kohut's core insights around narcissistic needs have "unacknowledged resonances" with Benjamin's major contributions herself.

Whether or not Benjamin faithfully reads Kohut's theory of empathy as vicarious introspection, her work on recognition notably shifted the focus of relational psychoanalysis in a way that no longer took for granted how empathy is bounded in important ways to the process of recognizing other persons in our world as independent consciousnesses. Benjamin does not deny the importance of empathy. Quite the contrary, she insists, "Without concrete knowledge, empathy, and identification with the other subject-with the other's needs, feelings, circumstances, and history, the self continues to move in the realm of subject and object, untransformed by the other."[72] Elsewhere she even goes so far as to suggest that "[t]he ability to provide recognition depends not only on empathy or attunement, her ability to connect with what

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[71] Teicholz, *Kohut, Loewald, and the Postmoderns*, 67.
[72] Benjamin, *Bonds of Love*, 195.

she can identify as 'the same,' but also upon her ability to do this while distinguishing their very different bodily states and capacities for self-regulation and soothing, to name only one category," which further blurs the boundary over whether she sees recognition as preceding empathy, or vice versa.[73] Yet one of Benjamin's enduring contributions is to solidify for relational psychoanalytic theory that it is impossible to fully tend to and understand empathic processes without thinking them in close terms to recognition.

Subject Position and the Limits of Freedom in Empathy

Even with Benjamin's substantive contributions on the significance of social recognition vis-à-vis empathy, one thing that is important to clarify from this analysis is not that empathy is necessarily any less effective in its prospects for healing. In fact, one of the most enduring and affirmed insights from this is that what is necessary to cultivate the possibility of empathy is a greater intersubjective attunement or, as Orange frequently describes, emotional availability. Yet the literature from Benjamin and Orange importantly underscores just how profoundly the literature in relational psychoanalysis deviated from the tacit assumption that empathy was objective. Benjamin writes, "Doubtless the clinical impracticality of holding the position of objective knower as well as the influence of postmodern challenges to objectivist epistemologies have led to a profound revision in contemporary psychoanalytic thought, sometimes designated as intersubjective theory."[74] For those hoping to use empathy as an emotional and interpersonal resource for combatting apathy toward marginalized forms of suffering, relational psychoanalysis foregrounds one's social location and the structure of recognition as a limiting factor for empathy's free reign.

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[73] Benjamin, *Beyond Doer and Done To*, 82.
[74] Benjamin, *Shadow of the Other*, 23.

Building from the sociological theories of Michel Foucault and Diana Fuss, Benjamin sees this revision in psychoanalytic theory as supplanting the "objective knower" with the subject who lives and dwells within a particular social and political identity. "Equally important, critical theory and poststructural thought have questioned the objective standpoint of knowledge as absolute and privileged, in favor of recognizing the 'subject position' from which that theory is developed."[75] It may seem obvious that we must resist individualism in psychoanalysis, but insofar as empathy is foundational to this science, we must also become more critical of the fact that empathy only ever emerges intersubjectively and within a particular social location.

Philosopher and psychoanalytic theorist Kelly Oliver echoes Benjamin's diagnosis of the need for psychoanalysis to tend more closely to subject position in its social theory. "While traditional psychoanalytic theory has been instructive in formulating a theory of subjectivity, it has neglected subject position and social context and thereby sacrificed not only its social, political, and historical relevance but also its truth."[76] Oliver helpfully distinguishes "subjectivity" from "subject position" in terms of one's agency. Whereas subjectivity more classically refers to the psychoanalytic sense of being an "I" or an agent with phenomenological intentionality, subjectivity refers to "one's social position in relation to the dominant values of one's culture"[77] or "one's position in society and history as developed through various social relationships […] the particular sense of one's kind of agency, so to speak, that comes through one's social position and historical context."[78]

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[75] Benjamin, *Like Subjects, Love Objects*, 10.
[76] Kelly Oliver, *The Colonization of Psychic Space: A Psychoanalytic Social Theory of Oppression* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press), 126.
[77] Oliver, *Colonization of Psychic Space*, 130.
[78] Oliver, *Colonization of Psychic Space*, 72-73.

This idea of a "subject position" does not negate the significance of psychoanalysis's long-standing investigations of the structures of subjectivity. Rather, subject position importantly supplements the idea of agency that we might develop if we solely analyze subjectivity in social relation. More concretely, Oliver offers the contrasting examples: "[I]f you are a black woman within a racist and sexist culture, then your subject position as oppressed could undermine your subjectivity, your sense of yourself as an agent. If you are a white man within a racist and sexist culture, then your subject position could shore up your subjectivity and promote your sense of yourself as an agent."[79] Quite simply, an intersubjective analysis of another person's agency remains insufficient if it refuses to see how that other person's social and political situation is shaped within a social and political world. While it may have been easy for early psychoanalytic theory—which was perhaps not coincidentally dominated by white men—to attempt to focus narrowly on the clinical dyad in a confined and apolitical way, a truly clinical understanding of therapy must tend to the subjectivity and subject position of both analyst and analysand.[80]

While the idea of taking subject position and context into consideration for contemporary relational psychoanalysis may seem obvious, the consequences of this discussion on agency for empathy are less so. For both Benjamin and Orange, appreciating the social location and subject position of psychoanalytic social knowledge means a necessary relinquishment of the freedom of empathy to transgress boundaries of psychic difference.

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[79] Oliver, *Colonization of Psychic Space*, 73.
[80] While she does not explicitly use the language of "subject position," Chodorow makes a very similar point to Benjamin and Oliver, "Engagement with others as subjects (an engagement moderated by objectivity) is central to clinical practice, as opposed to metapsychology. In fact, this practical activity, empathetically involved with and taking account of another's interests, while objectively assessing the other and the self, in some ways illustrates a desirable sociality in general. A clinically derived view of the self also seems to require a historical as well as a social view of the self because of this concretely based engagement. Thus, a clinical perspective on the self seems to require engagement with the other, no matter what your theory" (Chodorow, "Toward a Relational Individualism," 118).

One primary reason for this, Benjamin explains, is that disparities in subject position—

sometimes understood as psychic difference—can result in error-prone attempts to empathize, as

Kohut noted. "From a feminist point of view," Benjamin argues, "the missing piece in the

analysis of Western rationality and individualism is the structure of gender domination. The

psychosocial core of this unfettered individuality is the subjugation of woman by man."[81] But

moreover, the very use of empathy across differences in subject position can themselves pose a

threat to the identity of an other. "Viewed from one angle, identification contributes to empathy

and the bridging of difference. From another angle, it stands opposed to recognizing the other:

the self engaged in identification takes the other as fantasy object, not as an equivalent center of

being. In this sense, recognizing the other as like subject constitutes the opposite of

identification, which incorporates or assimilates what is other to self."[82] That is, the task of

vicariously introspecting into the psychological phenomena of another person's unconscious life,

then empathizing requires a transgression of subject position that closely resembles gender

domination itself—most often by the analyst. "Despite the appearance of gender neutrality and

the freedom to be whatever we like, gender polarity persists. And it creates a painful division

within the self and between self and other; it constantly frustrates our efforts to recognize

ourselves in the world and in each other."[83]

In her masterful *Scenes of Subjection*, literary theorist Saidiya Hartman renders vivid this

danger of empathy overstepping the bounds of its subject position, particularly with regard to

disparities in subject position around race and gender. To do so, Hartman—writing from the

subject position of a black woman in America—looks to the writings of nineteenth-century

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[81] Benjamin, *Bonds of Love*, 188.
[82] Benjamin, *Like Subjects, Love Objects*, 7-8.
[83] Benjamin, *Bonds of Love*, 172

abolitionist John Rankin—writing from the subject position of a white Presbyterian minister—who spoke out against the abuses of slavery "by bringing suffering near" with vivid accounts to other whites of events that even Rankin confesses "far exceed the power of description."[84] Yet Hartman takes great lengths to explain just why such an empathic effort may be problematic, which is worth quoting at length.

> While this flight of imagination enables a vicarious firsthand experience of the lash, excoriates the pleasure experienced by the master in this brutal exercise of power, and unleashes Rankin's fiery indignation and resentment, the phantasmic vehicle of this identification is complicated, unsettling, and disturbing. Although Rankin's fantasy culminates in indignant outcries against the institution of slavery and, clearly, the purpose of this identification is to highlight the crimes of slavery, this flight of imagination and slipping into the captive's body unlatches a Pandora's box and, surprisingly, what comes to the fore is the difficulty and slipperiness of empathy. Properly speaking, empathy is a projection of oneself into another in order to better understand the other or "the projection of one's own personality into an object, with the attribution to the object of one's own emotions." Yet empathy in important respects confounds Rankin's efforts to identify with the enslaved because in making the slave's suffering his own, Rankin begins to feel for himself rather than for those whom this exercise in imagination presumably is designed to reach. Moreover, by exploiting the vulnerability of the captive body as a vessel for the uses, thoughts, and feelings of others, the humanity extended to the slave inadvertently confirms the expectations and desires definitive of the relations of chattel slavery. In other words, the ease of Rankin's empathic identification is as much due to his good intentions and heartfelt opposition to slavery as to the fungibility of the captive body.[85]

Hartman's analysis of Rankin is not ungenerous. She appreciates and even elevates Rankin's good intentions and nominal solidarity with the abolition of slavery. If scholarship in critical race theory is correct that being a responsible white person in a white supremacist context requires whites to become "race traitors,"[86] belying the assumption among other whites that they are for the propagation of white supremacy, then Rankin's empathic efforts and testimony appear to make him a race traitor *par excellence.* Yet the good intentions behind Rankin's empathic "flight

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[84] Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 17.

[85] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 18-19.

[86] See George Yancy, *Black Bodies, White Gazes: The Continuing Significance of Race* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008); Lisa Heldke, "On Being a Responsible Traitor: A Primer," *Daring to Be Good: Essays in Feminist Ethico-Politics*, ed. Bat-Ami Bar On and Ann Ferguson, 41-54 (New York: Routledge, 1998).

of imagination," as Hartman puts it, conceals the exploitation of a vulnerable subject position by a subject position in power. The captive black body, restricted in its agency by the forces of chattel slavery, is "fungible" in the sense that they are not in a position to resist the empathic gestures of free white men, who have the luxury to decide whether or not they would like to become abolitionists. "Put differently," Hartman explains, "the effort to counteract the commonplace callousness to black suffering requires that the white body be positioned in the place of the black body in order to make this suffering visible and intelligible."[87] Rankin's impulse to empathy may emerge from a distant recognition of agency of a subject position that is not sufficiently recognized, yet the empathic gesture itself usurps the very agency it hopes to elevate.

While Hartman is particularly invested in exploring what she describes as the "slipperiness" or "precariousness of empathy" in the context of nineteenth century American slavery, she contends that scenarios such as Rankin's reveal the true ethical and interpersonal character of empathy.[88] She contends, "The ambivalent character of empathy—more exactly, the repressive effects of empathy—as Jonathan Boyarin notes, can be located in the 'obliteration of otherness' or the facile intimacy that enables identification with the other only as we 'feel ourselves into those we imagine as ourselves.' And as a consequence, empathy fails to expand the space of the other but merely places the self in its stead."[89] Her extensive examination of testimony on black suffering leads Hartman to conclude that empathy is always "double-edged" in this way.[90] Alongside the impulse to understand and recognize this other person, empathy

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[87] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 19.
[88] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 4.
[89] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 19-20.
[90] See Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 19. Hartman writes, "Yet if this violence can become palpable and indignation can be fully aroused only through the masochistic fantasy then it becomes clear that empathy is double-edged, for in making the other's suffering one's own, this suffering is occluded by the other's obliteration."

invariably includes this obliteration of otherness, particularly the subject position of another person. In her studies, this most often manifests as the obliteration of blackness by whiteness, particularly by well-intentioned liberal whiteness.

While Hartman does not write from a self-psychological perspective, her discussion of empathy in terms of its vicariousness, projection, and identification make her analysis harmonious with discussions of empathy operationalized as vicarious introspection. In their introduction to a special issue of the *International Journal of Psychoanalytic Self Psychology* on the topic of empathy and recognition, self psychologists William Coburn and Estelle Shane offer a similar formulation of Hartman's contention regarding the "obliteration of otherness" in empathy. After noting that, in self psychology, "recognition depends on empathic understanding," Coburn and Estelle take up the issue of how empathic recognition affects the difference of identity in intersubjective context.[91] "What is lost, for example, in being recognized by (an)other as an identifiable, intelligible person may be in some instances the very essence of one's felt sense of self, whether viewed through the lens of gender, culture, race, or some other dimension of identity."[92] Like Hartman, Coburn and Estelle note that there are advantages and disadvantages with this loss of identity. In contexts of political and social marginalization, they note that "one may choose to bear that loss in favor of gaining or sustaining a connection with the larger community."[93] That is, despite its inevitable incorporation of otherness into sameness, empathic recognition may still be desirable because of what it enables in terms of social relations and a sense of belonging with others. Yet it is equally reasonable, they contend, to reject this impulse to recognition for the sake of sustaining the individual differences of one's subject

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[91] William J. Coburn and Estelle Shane, "Recognizing Recognition in Self Psychology," *International Journal of Psychoanalytic Self Psychology* 3 (2008): 154.
[92] Coburn and Shane, "Recognizing Recognition in Self Psychology," 155.
[93] Coburn and Shane, "Recognizing Recognition in Self Psychology," 155.

position.[94] "In this view," Coburn and Estelle conclude, "recognition comes at considerable cost."[95]

Hartman remains cautious and generous in her critique of Rankin, white liberals, and empathy more generally. She is careful not to overstate what is problematic for her about empathy. Tempering her critique only slightly, she writes, "This is not to suggest that empathy can be discarded or that Rankin's desire to exist in the place of the other can be dismissed as a narcissistic exercise but rather to highlight the dangers of a too-easy intimacy, the consideration of the self that occurs at the expense of the slave's suffering, and the violence of identification."[96] Hartman does not want the takeaway from her analysis to be that empathy must be abandoned. The problem, more specifically, is that empathy often operates without regard to the limiting factors on agency imposed by one's subject position. This is what is meant by a "too-easy intimacy" in empathy. While it may seem that the decision to empathize already requires considerable effort to decenter oneself as the center of one's phenomenological universe, this self-lauding neglect the presumed freedom to empathize whenever and with whomever one desires. It is thus not that empathy is not free, but rather that—like the material manifestations of political freedom itself—empathic freedom is commodified, monopolized, and selectively deployed.

It is precisely this insight on the unequal access to agency in empathy that drives relational analysts like Benjamin to denounce the idea of freedom in intersubjective relation as a dangerous fantasy. Specifically within the analysis of disparate subject positions of men and

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[94] See Coburn and Shane, "Recognizing Recognition in Self Psychology," 155. They write, "Alternatively, one may choose to embrace and celebrate in isolation one's individual differences—to the extent that one can in the context of opposition, if not tyranny—and hence suffer the loss of communal connection."

[95] Coburn and Shane, "Recognizing Recognition in Self Psychology," 155.

[96] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 20.

women, Benjamin concludes in *Bonds of Love* that gender domination is symptomatic of this delusional will to envision oneself as without a subject position. "The individual's abstractness," Benjamin writes, "lies in the denial not merely of the nourishing and constraining bonds that engage him in society, as Marcuse argues, but also of the primary emotional bonds, conscious and unconscious, that foster and limit his freedom."[97] That is, the will to retain a sense of unfettered freedom in psychoanalytic relation manifests not only in the denial of one's relation to structures of political power, but the refusal to accept that one's agency has been cultivated by the care of others. "Ironically, then, the ideal of freedom carries within it the seeds of domination—freedom means fleeing or subjugating the other; autonomy means an escape from dependency. The ideal of individual power and freedom is all the more seductive once the breakdown of mutual recognition has locked the self in the vacuum of zero tension."[98] As true here as it is for Hegel and Hartman, freedom for Benjamin can only be preserved through the domination of others. This is not only ethically problematic from a number of ethical frameworks,[99] but it simply neglects the truth of subject positionality itself.

Relational Psychoanalytic Vicarious Introspection: Empathy Without Freedom?

Hartman and Benjamin's critiques of empathy as a free and boundless resource that is able to extend beyond the limits of subject position and social recognition pose a serious challenge to understanding empathy as a coherent concept for relational psychoanalysis. The last chapter illustrated how Kohut saw the prospect of empathy creating a "wider and more vivid experience of freedom" as central not only to empathy's ethical potential to heal, but to

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[97] Benjamin, *Bonds of Love*, 188.
[98] Benjamin, *Bonds of Love*, 221.
[99] Suffice it to say, whether one is a deontologist, consequentialist, virtue ethicist, or phenomenological ethicist, this ideal of freedom through oppression is not tenable.

psychoanalysis's ability to wrest itself from the grips of Freudian drive theory and psychic determinism.[100] This chapter began by illustrating the deep influence of Kohutian vicarious introspection on early relational psychoanalytic thinkers, some of whom saw the emphasis on empathy within the psychoanalytic method as essential for defining the subsequent movement of relational psychoanalysis. But now we have seen a sustained critique, approaching consensus, that empathy cannot extend freely beyond pre-existing structures of social recognition, which are determined by subject position and cultural formation. To put the conundrum bluntly: If Kohut is correct that a non-deterministic and healing psychoanalysis depends on freedom in empathy, and relational psychoanalysts themselves have rejected the concept of freedom in empathy, then can psychoanalysis retain empathy as a significant relational concept without this freedom? And, if Atwood and Stolorow are correct in claiming that empathy is crucial in distinguishing relational psychoanalysis, then how does the fate of post-Kohutian empathy impact the identity of relational psychoanalysis?

As one might expect, the answers to these questions in the literature are mixed. Broadly speaking, however, relational psychoanalysts do not see critiques of empathic freedom as critiques of psychoanalysis itself. This is perhaps because relational analysts view freedom as a residual element of the individualistic and classical model of psychoanalysis, which is peculiar given the fact that the essence of a psychic determinism is precisely that there is no freedom to be found therein.

For Benjamin, this limitation of freedom and the curtailing of the presumption to unrestricted empathy is exactly what the intersubjective perspective requires. In her most recent work, she explains, "From an intersubjective perspective, analysts can accept the ways we do not

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[100] Heinz Kohut, "Introspection, Empathy, and Psychoanalysis: An Examination of the Relationship between Mode of Observation and Theory," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 7 (1959): 481.

always know ourselves or the other, but rather surrender to the process of discovery by accepting

the limits of our abilities to know ahead of the process itself."[101] Put simply, the death of

freedom in psychoanalysis is only as painful as the death of a false god or idol that licenses one's

voyeuristic or colonialist impulses. Unlike Rankin—whom Hartman critiques for assuming he is

freely able to empathize across even the most profound differences in subject position—

Benjamin understands the future of psychoanalysis as depending on this constant attention to the

limits of our social knowledge. This means both refusing to assume that one will be able to

empathize with another and, even if one can, refusing to predict what one will find therein.

Influenced heavily by the hermeneutics of Dilthey and Gadamer, Orange also embraces

the idea that empathy must be seen as a deeply limited interpretive process. In *Emotional*

Understanding, Orange specifically cites Kohut's 1959 article on vicarious introspection as a

foundational resource for developing her own resolution to the problem of psychoanalytic

interpretation. This culminates in her concept of "emotional availability," which closely parallels

or conceivably replaces empathy. Orange writes,

> For Kohut (1959), the only kind of knowing that could count as psychoanalytic was
> knowledge from within, understanding gained by introspection and empathy (or vicarious
> introspection). While we can know something about human beings through social
> psychology or neuropsychology, according to Kohut, understanding can only be achieved
> through empathy. Intersubjectivity theory (Stolorow, Brandchaft, & Atwood, 1987)
> refines this view by clarifying the notion of "within." Psychoanalytic understanding is
> knowledge gained from inside the intersubjective field formed by the intersection of two
> differently organized subjectivities. In dialogue, both participants attempt to expand their
> original subjective perspectives to take in, comprehend, and understand more of the
> other's experience. We do this, as Kohut and other self psychologists have shown, by
> placing ourselves, as consistently as we can, in the other's shoes, both cognitively and
> emotionally. We understand by attempting to participate in the emotional experience, in
> the being, of the other. The older psychoanalytic notion of interpretation fails to capture
> the intersubjective nature of this ordinary clinical process, and it underestimates the
> influence of the observer's capacities and assumptions on the extent and kind of
> understanding reached. An analyst must be Gadamer's "person with understanding," able
> and willing to enter the patient's suffering and share the painful history, able and willing

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[101] Benjamin, *Beyond Doer and Done To*, 179.

to "undergo the situation" with the other. I will call this combination of capacity and willingness "emotional availability."[102]

Bridging the critical perspectives from relational psychoanalysis with Kohut's theory, Orange narrates the contribution of intersubjectivity theory as very much a harmonious and fluid continuation of self psychological theory on empathy. From this vantage point, the necessity of introspection in empathy is not a matter of narcissistic projection, but rather a way of scrutinizing the limits of one's interpretation by methodically taking an inventory of one's own psychic life from "within" one's subject position. Orange's concept of "emotional availability" signals the fact that relational psychoanalytic empathy must always be used from a position of openness to the need and desire of others to share the content of their psychic experience—out of their own volition.

Thus, Orange's solution to the problem of Kohutian freedom in vicarious introspection is to insist that Kohut never intended empathy to ignore the limits of one's subject position or, in more phenomenological terms, the fore-structure of one's hermeneutic horizon. A clinician, Orange perhaps does not even find it worth noting just how extensively Kohut roots his analysis of empathy and freedom within the case study structure of texts such as *How Does Analysis Cure?*, always reminding himself and others that empathy must be rooted in personal context. In the appropriately titled article, "There Is No Outside: Empathy and Authenticity in Psychoanalytic Process," Orange "conclude[s] that empathy is not vicarious introspection if this means exclusion of one's own perspective, and that authenticity is not insistence on recognition by the other of one's own otherness. Authentic participation in an intersubjective system is being within that system in a way that is faithful to one's sense of the system."[103] Said otherwise, the

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[102] Orange, *Emotional Understanding*, 4-5.
[103] Donna M. Orange, "There is no Outside: Empathy and Authenticity in the Psychoanalytic Process," *Psychoanalytic Psychology* 19 (2002): 687.

critique of unbridled individualistic freedom only becomes a problem for relational

psychoanalysis by misreading Kohut in the first place.

The consummate defender of Kohut from misrepresentation, Teicholz strongly echoes

Orange's contention that relational analysts have largely misunderstood what Kohut meant by

the freedom of empathy. To anyone suggesting that Kohut would have endorsed the kind of

empathy used by Rankin in Hartman's analysis, Teicholz argues, "Kohut never implied an easy

and unobstructed road to the analyst's empathy, and, above all, he always granted to the patient

the final word on whether the analyst had succeeded or failed in his empathic undertaking."[104]

One need look no further than Kohut's valuation of transmuting internalization through empathic

failures to see just how open Kohut was to the idea that empathy is not uninhibited. It is for this

reason that Teicholz bemoans how vicarious introspection is conceptualized as a neutral or

objective psychoanalytic tool.[105]

Doubling down on the resilience of vicarious introspection to critique, Teicholz insists

that Kohutian empathy does not fall victim to these critiques of freedom, but rather enabled a

more radically relational understanding of ourselves in intersubjective context. "Although

postmodern analysts may have legitimate concerns about what they see as this limitation on the

use and expression of the analyst's subjectivity in Kohut's self psychology, they often seem not

to recognize at all Kohut's insistence on the analyst's ongoing contact with, and use of, his

subjectivity on the patient's behalf."[106] Teicholz thus holds a rather blasé attitude toward

pugnacious relational psychoanalysts who want to build a straw man of Kohutian empathy as

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[104] Teicholz, *Kohut, Loewald, and the Postmoderns*, 131.
[105] Teicholz writes that "although in his later writings Kohut (1982; 1984) was explicit about the subjective basis of the analyst's empathy, empathy is now often classified with Freudian neutrality and anonymity as a mode of analytic participation that contrasts with the articulation and expression of the analyst's subjectivity" (Teicholz, *Kohut, Loewald, and the Postmoderns*, 132).
[106] Teicholz, *Kohut, Loewald, and the Postmoderns*, 27-28.

unrestrained in its freedom. Her conclusion is that Kohut more accurately "prepared the way for the postmodern attention to the far-reaching implications of the analyst's subjectivity" in his work, meaning there is no conflict to resolve.[107]

However, even if Orange and Teicholz are correct in their apologetic readings of Kohut, the most this accomplishes is a redemption of Kohut's legacy for relational psychoanalysis today. These defenses do not defend the idea of empathic freedom. They simply insist that Kohut never intended empathy to be free or unrestrained. Moreover, Teicholz and others neglect the significant fact that, although Kohut accepted the inevitability of empathic failures, he seldom if ever explained them as functions of his own social location. In other words, Kohut may have been correct about the limits of vicarious introspection, but he did not sufficiently theorize how subject position is a key factor in that limitation.[108]

Yet Kohut was rather explicit that the analyst's "greater freedom to respond with deeply reverberating understanding and resonant emotionality" enables an "expanded scope of empathy" that enables a "wider and more vivid experience of freedom" in others, which in turn makes healing possible through the building of self structures.[109] That is, none of these relational psychoanalysts dispute the importance of empathy for intersubjective care, yet they also appear to have removed the core element that Kohut saw as making healing—particularly with trauma and narcissistic wounds—possible in the first place: freedom.

The way that Orange and Benjamin resolve this problem is perhaps the simplest and least climactic: Empathy as vicarious introspection survives the critiques of freedom, but it does so by

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[107] Teicholz, *Kohut, Loewald, and the Postmoderns*, 28.

[108] In the next chapter, the work of womanist pastoral theologians Phillis Sheppard and Stephanie Crumpton take up this issue with Kohut at great length. See Phillis Isabella Sheppard, *Self, Culture, and Others in Womanist Practical Theology* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Stephanie Crumpton, *A Womanist Pastoral Theology against Intimate and Cultural Violence* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014).

[109] Heinz Kohut, *How Does Analysis Cure?*, ed. Arnold Goldberg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 82.

confining the agency of empathy within the context of subject position. That is, when we read

Kohut insisting that empathy creates a "wider and more vivid experience of freedom," we must

view this in progressive, gradual, or developmental terms. Orange describes this clarified

understanding of vicarious introspection in saying, "Empathy, I believe, is emotional knowledge

gained by participation in a shared reality.[110] Yet this shared reality must be understood as

limited and tentative. Benjamin shares this vision of a far more muted sense of freedom,

contending that "[t]he intersubjective analyst's idea of freedom—the analyst's freedom—is to

make use of one's emotional responses, one's subjectivity, in a knowing way."[111] Thus, in

intersubjective terms, the effect of empathy is one contingent and precarious relational subject

dialogically using their very limited freedom to the best of their ability, so that another may

willingly experience themselves and their own identity as recognized—as limited as that may be

by their subject position.

Conclusion and Summary

For as much conflict and transition as one saw in Kohut's transition away from a

Freudian drive model, one finds as much if not more conflict and development in adoption and

critique of Kohutian empathy in relational psychoanalysis. Unlike with the transition from Freud

to Kohut on the centrality of empathy in the psychoanalytic method, one must remain cautious

not to overstate any consensus emerging from this diverse body of literature. The only clear trend

is the increasing emphasis on the importance of foregrounding subject position in understanding

the limits of empathic freedom and social recognition.

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[110] Orange, *Emotional Understanding*, 21.
[111] Benjamin, *Shadow of the Other*, 23.

I began this chapter by showing how many influential relational psychoanalysts—particularly Atwood, Stolorow, and Orange—saw Kohut's work on empathy as providing the more intersubjective or even "radical" perspective necessary to make relational psychoanalysis possible. I then reviewed a counteracting trend among other prominent relational theorists such as Chodorow and Benjamin, who argued that vicarious introspection was not an asset to relational psychoanalysis, but rather a liability because of the antiquated individualism it still harbored. To understand Benjamin's critique of empathic individualism in greater detail, I outlined her contention that recognition is foundational to self-psychological theories of empathy, including its origins in Hegel and its refutation in Orange and Teicholz. Building on this conflict in the literature, I turned to psychoanalytic theories of subject positionality in empathy. Looking to analyses from Oliver and Hartman, I argued that the importance of subject position reveals the violence of overextending empathy and the limits of empathic freedom. Lastly, I revisited the idea of empathic freedom in Kohut in light of these relational psychoanalytic critiques of empathy, noting this has left relational psychoanalysis with a more muted or restrained understanding of the freedom of empathy as limited by subject positionality.

What remains to be seen from this evolution of empathy in relational psychoanalysis is how this newer and more subdued understanding of its freedom might change our understanding of the ethical potential of empathy, particularly in responding to marginalized suffering. With Hartman's illustration in particular, one already sees a glimpse of how it may be counterproductive for well-intending liberals to use empathy as a resource for advocacy. Not only may empathy be unhelpful for broadening our ethical consciousness as we once desired, but the impulse to empathize from a subject position of safety onto someone in a position of

vulnerability may reveal a fundamental problem with how liberal Protestant caregivers understand their ethical obligation.

In the remaining chapters of this dissertation, the task will become increasingly pastoral and theological in character. That is, while the relational psychoanalytic literature on empathy continues to evolve today, in recent decades we also see a blending of ethical and psychoanalytic sensibilities within pastoral theological literature around empathic caregiving, which borrows in various ways from Freud, Kohut, and relational psychoanalysis. The scholarly intention of this chapter has been to further clarify the theoretical landscape from which this pastoral and theological literature borrows, particularly on the freedom and limits of empathy.

CHAPTER IV:

PASTORAL THEOLOGICAL USES OF EMPATHY IN INTERCULTURAL AND

INTERSUBJECTIVE CONTEXT

Introduction

As an interdisciplinary field in perennial conversation with the social sciences, pastoral theology has been heavily influenced by later twentieth-century psychological research on empathy emerging from Kohutian and relational psychoanalysis examined in the prior two chapters. Particularly after Kohut's death, pastoral theological scholarship on empathy showed a clear turn away from previously dominant Rogerian models of empathy as communicative attunement and unconditional positive regard toward a more technically specific Kohutian model of empathy as vicarious introspection. While there are exceptions to this trend, one also sees pastoral theologians mirroring and sustaining dialogue with many of the post-Kohutian relational psychoanalysts who both critiqued and extended empathy into a more intersubjective and intercultural concept.

As before, I must be careful in this chapter not to overstate its argument. It is neither necessary nor productive to make essentializing claims as to how pastoral theology as a false collective views empathy; there is as much intellectual diversity within this discipline as there is in relational psychoanalysis. More modestly, the task of this chapter is to trace the influence of relational psychoanalytic revisions of empathy on intersubjective and intercultural pastoral theology, with a particular eye toward the shifting ethical ambitions that pastoral theology attached to empathy as a resource for healing and caregiving.

More specifically, this chapter argues that while early pastoral theologians showed great hope in the ethical transformation that would be enabled by empathic caregiving, post-Kohutian pastoral theologians such as Bonnie Miller-McLemore, Phillis Sheppard, Melinda McGarrah Sharp, and Pamela Cooper-White have grown increasingly critical of the limits of empathy across subject positionality. It does this, first, by offering a brief examination of early pastoral theological literature's adoption of empathy from Rogerian and Kohutian theories, which began slowly and increasingly moved toward the consensus in the 1980s that empathy is the essence of pastoral care. Second, it follows the development of this literature in the wake of substantive feminist and relational pastoral theological research in the early 1990s, focusing particularly on the critical insight by pastoral theologians that empathy is limited in its ability to traverse personal difference. Third, the chapter outlines the innovations in intercultural pastoral theology that largely inherit the feminist pastoral theological conviction regarding the limits of empathy, but revise empathy more specifically as a form of intercultural understanding in relation to race and culture. Fourth, the chapter traces the influence of both pastoral theological and Kohutian theories of empathy on the intersubjective pastoral theological anthropology of Pamela Cooper-White. The chapter concludes by examining the practical ethical potential of empathy within Cooper-White's paradoxical claim that empathy is a form of kenosis, where empathy's greatest theological and ethical potential is in its capacity for chaos, self-emptying, and a willingness to not know the other.

Through this analysis, one finds pastoral theology at present with an ambivalent relationship with empathy as an ethical practice within intersubjective and intercultural contexts. Pastoral theologians today remain deeply committed to the ethical potential that empathy can serve in healing and in working toward reconciliation, yet they have grown increasingly attentive

to the many ways that subject position limits empathy's grasp. In that regard, this chapter makes a structurally similar argument to that made in chapter three regarding relational psychoanalytic receptions of Kohutian empathy. However, there is a noteworthy point of distinction between relational psychoanalysis and pastoral theology that is important to track in what follows. Namely, pastoral theology's investment in empathy extends further than psychoanalysis's more restrained dyadic clinical interests, and it includes a more unabashed normative ethical commitment to marginalized suffering. It is on this point that one again encounters a challenging methodological question regarding the limits of the psychoanalytic method—with which Brentano, Freud, and Kohut wrestled at the outset.[1] This is significant insofar as pastoral theology's intersubjective and intercultural uses of empathy are more attuned to its ethical payoff for tending to healing and marginalized suffering. This makes empathy for pastoral theology both more promising in its successes and more tragic when it falls short in caregiving practices.

Early Receptions of Vicarious Introspection in Pastoral Theology

In the same way one may argue that empathy existed and was a regular part of human existence before the term was coined in the late nineteenth century, it is reasonable to contend that pastoral care and theology have always been fundamentally empathic disciplines—even if they did not understand themselves in those terms. From a conceptual and intellectual vantage point, however, the reception of empathy into the contemporary discipline of pastoral theology was at first slow and variegated. After a long delay in its early history to adopt empathy as a significant part of its practice, pastoral theology quickly changed courses with the rising

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[1] See chapter two of this dissertation for this analysis. More specifically, see Franz Brentano, *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, trans. Antos C. Rancurello, D. B. Terrell, & Linda L. McAlister (New York: Routledge, 1995); Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, trans. & ed. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton, 1960); Heinz Kohut, *How Does Analysis Cure?*, ed. Arnold Goldberg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

popularity of Carl Rogers's scholarship and teaching. Among other things, this influence gave pastoral theology particularly high ambitions for the ethical potential that empathy could bring for both healing and social transformation. One must be careful not to construct a "straw man" of early pastoral theologians such as Seward Hiltner, Don Browning, and Archie Smith Jr. in what they believed empathy might accomplish. At the same time, it is crucial to note how the most illuminating way to understand early receptions of empathy in pastoral theology is as a shift primarily from a Rogerian to a Kohutian understanding of empathy. This shift aligns with the gradual tempering of many theorists' ambitious tones regarding how possible and how potent empathy is for pastoral caregiving more broadly.

In his groundbreaking 1936 *The Exploration of the Inner World*, Anton Boisen quite clearly deploys what might be described as a fundamentally empathic mode of inquiry.[2] Boisen's work serves as the foundation for twentieth-century research in chaplaincy and pastoral care, particularly in the context of clinical pastoral education. While he was not the first to synthesize religious and psychopathological methods, this text and his work creates the precedent for approaching clinical settings practically and theoretically through religious interpretation. A bit undifferentiated, his ethnographic, statistical, and even biographical analyses of countless persons and "living documents" also lay the groundwork for more developed methods of practical and pastoral theology, particularly pastoral theology's pathos-centeredness.[3]

Despite the fact that empathy had already been established in psychological parlance for several decades, one finds that, like many seminal figures in the early twentieth-century history of pastoral care and theology, Boisen did not adopt the concept into his discourse. He does not

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[2] Anton Boisen, *The Exploration of the Inner World* (New York: Willett, Clark and Company, 1936).
[3] More tangentially, Boisen's many reflections on the liberalization of the church and social ministry poses enduring political challenges to the status of practical theology.

even make a superficial use of the term—as well as the related and often conflated term "sympathy"—in his entire text. This is again not to be confused with an argument that Boisen's method was not empathic, but rather that the concept did not explicitly structure his text, which would prove highly influential in American pastoral care circles.

One finds a remarkable paucity of references to empathy in several other key mid-century texts in pastoral care and theology. In his 1951 *A History of the Cure of Souls*, religious historian John T. McNeil makes no mention of empathy and only offers passing and somewhat unrelated engagements with "pastoral wisdom and human sympathy" in characterizing the work of the Church Fathers, as he describes them.[4] That same year in the foundational text for a generation of pastoral clinicians, *Pastoral Counseling: Its Theory and Practice*, pastoral counselor Carrol Wise also makes no mention of empathy. Moreover, he espouses an openly hostile attitude toward what he describes as the "sentimental sympathy" of some pastoral counselors, describing it as "an expression of anxiety and overidentification within the counselor."[5] Wise also offers the rather firm indictment that "[s]entimental sympathy, though well-meaning, is vitiating."[6] In their slightly later but no less ambitious 1964 *Pastoral Care in Historical Perspective*, religious historians William Clebsch and Charles Jaekle make the peculiar decision of titling an entire chapter on Bernard of Clairvaux, "Passionate Empathy," yet they offer no reference or coherent engagement with empathy therein. They only offer one superficial reference to empathy in their entire text when they describe the pastoral practices of the nineteenth-century Anglican church leader and poet John Keble.[7] Published five years after Kohut's famous 1959 essay

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[4] John T. McNeill, *A History of the Cure of Souls* (New York: Harper Collins, 1951), 266.
[5] Carrol Wise, *Pastoral Counseling: Its Theory and Practice* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1951), 49.
[6] Wise, *Pastoral Counseling*, 204.
[7] William A. Clebsch and Charles R. Jaekle, *Pastoral Care in Historical Perspective* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1994), 311. On Keble's caregiving practices, Clebsch and Jaekle write, "Yet the counselor is kindly tolerant of failure and remains in a warm and empathic relationship with his troubled clients. Keble's letters form a picture of counseling by moral exhortation at its best—if not a fully modern, certainly not an unattractive picture."

"Introspection, Empathy, and Psychoanalysis," Clebsch and Jaekle's text makes no reference to Kohut, and only mentions Rogers in one brief footnote where the focus is on the innovation of client-centered therapy.[8]

One notable exception to this trend in mid-century pastoral care and theology is found in a brief 1951 essay by Seward Hiltner titled, "Empathy in Counseling," found in the first-ever volume of the now prominent journal *Pastoral Psychology*.[9] In what may be the earliest sustained treatment of empathy in pastoral care and theology—predating the major influence of both Rogers and Kohut—Hiltner echoes Wise's concerns that "psychotherapeutic workers have been suspicious of empathy as of sympathy, and with some reason," adding that "though empathy may not have so many sentimental overtones as sympathy, it is still a dangerous notion."[10] Like Wise, Hiltner's suspicion of empathy is closely aligned to classic psychoanalytic concerns about regulating countertransference and projective identification of the therapists in a clinical setting. But Hiltner ultimately departs from other pastoral counseling theorists at the time, arguing that "in a sound sense we can feel our way into the experience of another only to the extent that we have felt ourselves at home with our own experience."[11] Rather than denigrating all empathy as a sentimental indulgence, Hiltner argues that, insofar as we labor to feel "ourselves at home with our experience," we are in fact able to offer empathy as an effective form of care in a pastoral counseling setting.[12] Thus, while Hiltner does not reference either

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[8] On the influence of Rogers, Clebsch and Jaekle write, "Carl R. Rogers has become a widely known spokesman for this type of [client-centered] therapeutic counseling, which recently has exerted an almost normative influence upon pastoral counseling in American Protestant circles" (*Pastoral Care in Historical Perspective*, 9n5).

[9] Seward Hiltner, "Empathy in Counseling: We Can Feel Our Way into the Experience of Another Only to the Extent that We Have Felt Ourselves at Home with Our Experience," *Pastoral Psychology* 1 (1951): 25-30.

[10] Hiltner, "Empathy in Counseling," 25.

[11] Hiltner, "Empathy in Counseling," 30.

[12] Hiltner, "Empathy in Counseling."

Rogers or Kohut in this early work, he does make a strong claim within a prominent pastoral

theological venue that the field should look to empathy as a key resource.[13]

It is not until roughly three decades after Boisen's groundbreaking work that one finds

discourse on empathy making a fuller entrance into the field of pastoral theology.[14] In a truly

remarkable testament to the growing popularity of Rogers's 1961 work *On Becoming a Person*,

just five years in 1966, three major works by three leading pastoral theologians were published,

all of which argued for the importance of empathy and Rogerian client-centered therapy within

pastoral care: Howard Clinebell's *Basic Types of Pastoral Care and Counseling*; Thomas Oden's

Kerygma and Counseling; and, Don Browning's *Atonement and Psychotherapy*.[15]

In his monumental contribution to the field of pastoral care and counseling, Clinebell's

pragmatically-oriented work in *Basic Types of Pastoral Care and Counseling* offered as close to

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[13] What is perhaps oddest in Hiltner's advocacy of empathy in his 1951 *Pastoral Psychology* essay is that the case he makes there does not impact his other scholarship more. Just three years later, Hiltner would deliver the 1954 Ayer Lectures at Rochester Theological Seminary, which in 1958 would become his monumental *Preface to Pastoral Theology*. Despite having just made a strong case for the importance of empathy in pastoral counseling, Hiltner in *Preface to Pastoral Theology* makes no mention of empathy in his argument that, as an operation-oriented branch of theology, pastoral theology provides theological answers and care to human needs from the perspective of shepherding. See Seward Hiltner, *Preface to Pastoral Theology: The Ministry and Theory of Shepherding* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1958).

[14] Carl Rogers, *On Becoming a Person: A Therapist's View of Psychotherapy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961). This correlation is substantiated by at least two major contemporary figures in pastoral theology. First, pastoral theologian Pamela Cooper-White reflects rather explicitly, "In the 1960s, most pastoral authors turned to Carl Rogers and the human potential movement for inspiration" (*Shared Wisdom: Use of the Self in Pastoral Care and Counseling* [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004], 28). Before her, practical and pastoral theologian Bonnie Miller-McLemore writes, "For a brief period in the 1960s and '70s Carl Roger's *Counseling and Psychotherapy* was a standard text, and the fundamentals of empathic, reflective listening were a staple of introductory pastoral care courses" ("The Human Web: Reflections on the State of Pastoral Theology," *The Christian Century* [April 7, 1993], 366).

[15] With 17 years of hindsight, historian E. Brooks Holifield speculated about the cultural reason for this transition to Rogers's work within pastoral care and theology: "In the background of the new pastoral style stood the American psychologist Carl Rogers, who for more than a decade exercised enormous influence on pastoral theologians. But why the change in pastoral style? And why Rogers? On one level the answer is simple: The pastoral theologians were men and women of goodwill, seeking better ways to respond to pain and hurt. On another, the answers are multilayered: a theological revolt against legalism, the recovery of older Protestant doctrines, a white-collar economy, a burgeoning cultural preoccupation with psychology, postwar affluence, the constraints of seminary training, a critique of mass culture, and an ethic of self-realization. All of those pieces fit together in a larger picture of religious adaptation to new cultural demands" (*A History of Pastoral Care in America: From Salvation to Self-Realization*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1983), 259 – 260.

a systematic overview of pastoral caregiving practice to a generation of scholars. In a straightforward fashion, Clinebell embodied an educative approach to empathy as he asked and answered, "What skills are required to develop healing relationships? They grow as caregivers listen actively and respond with caring empathy, thus focusing on really being with burdened care receivers."[16] Though it would be an overstatement to suggest that Clinebell viewed empathy as the hallmark of pastoral caregiving practice, he returns to the "healing power of empathic listening" dozens of times in his text as he reviews countless cases and scenarios that pastoral caregivers will face.[17]

Leaving no mystery about the influence of Rogerian client-centered therapy on his turn to empathy, Clinebell's history of the pastoral care movement narrates this methodological transition in an explicit fashion. He writes,

> The focus on counseling surged with the strong wave of interest in psychology and psychotherapy after World War II. The pathology orientation of early psychoanalysis and the treatment settings within which most CPE occurred caused pastoral counseling to be heavily pathology oriented during its early years. However, the influence of Carl Rogers during this period gave it some balance through an emphasis on growth centeredness. Both the psychoanalytic and Rogerian influences tended to make the formal psychotherapeutic interview with intrapsychic insight the dominant goal normative in the early years of pastoral counseling.[18]

For Clinebell, the growing influence of Rogerian client-centered treatment and the power of empathy was a welcome antidote to the dominance of classical psychoanalytic theory in pastoral care and counseling. More accurately, one might say that Clinebell's narration of pastoral care and counseling's historical movement toward Rogerian empathy is a bit of a self-fulfilling

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[16] Howard Clinebell, *Basic Types of Pastoral Care and Counseling: Resources for the Ministry of Healing and Growth*, updated and revised ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2011), 70.

[17] Clinebell, *Basic Types of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, 72.

[18] Clinebell, *Basic Types of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, 34

prophesy, insofar as he was largely responsible for disseminating it to a generation of pastoral care practitioners and theologians.

In contrast, the other two 1966 texts—Browning's *Atonement and Psychotherapy* and Oden's *Kerygma and Counseling*—largely championed Rogerian empathy for pastoral theology, but also offered more substantive moral critiques of Rogers's potential contribution to the field. In Browning's effort to correlate a theory of therapeutic processes that correlates to his own fourfold taxonomy of theories of atonement, he turns client-centered therapy as one of the most viable analogues within psychotherapeutic theory. Approaching Rogers with a cautious and evaluative framework, Browning notes Rogers as "the leader of this movement," and does not contest the therapeutic efficacy of Rogers's client-centered vision of empathy.[19] In the same historical moment, Oden in *Kerygma and Counseling* makes a similar assessment as both Browning and Clinebell, arguing that "[u]nlike psychoanalysis, which involves an advanced diagnostic ability that can only be the fruit of extensive training, client-centered therapy has proven itself easily adaptable by pastors and priests in the pastoral situation."[20] Though their use of Rogerian theory and empathy differs in the broader contexts of their works, the 1966 contributions of Clinebell, Oden, and Browning all confirm that empathy was the way of the future for pastoral care and counseling.

Yet Oden's and Browning's acknowledgment of Rogerian empathy's importance to the fields of pastoral care and theology were also tempered by a shared concern over what they saw as the "ontological" limitations of his theory of unconditional positive regard.[21] They express this

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[19] Don S. Browning, *Atonement and Psychotherapy* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), 95. Browning notes, "

[20] Thomas C. Oden, *Kerygma and Counseling: Toward a Covenant Ontology for Secular Psychotherapy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 36.

[21] Perhaps because of the historical moment in 1966, when phenomenological and existential philosophy was at the height of its popularity in the United States, both Oden and Browning use the language of "ontology" to describe the moral and philosophical territory that pastoral care and theology are concerned. I significantly disagree

with remarkable similarity in their texts. Oden explains, "Our principal critique […] is that Rogers has sought no ontological understanding of the total frame of reference of the therapeutic process. […] It is our conviction, however, that if his therapeutic insight is understood and elaborated in its deepest dimension, it will necessarily move in the direction of ontology."[22] Simultaneously, Browning critiques client-centered therapy as championing social acceptance, but being thoroughly inattentive to social environment in which acceptance occurs. He argues, "That this larger ontological structure of acceptance is a hidden presupposition of most secular therapy can be seen in the thought of Carl Rogers."[23] From slightly different vantage points, Oden and Browning offer the same critique of Rogerian empathy: though it may be therapeutically expedient for healing in pastoral care and counseling, it fails to offer a moral analysis of the larger ontological framework in which therapy occurs. To be more concrete, Rogerian empathy may help restore a white supremacist to psychological health, but it is incapable of analyzing the ethics of unconditionally accepting an unapologetic racist for who they are. Oden and Browning are in general agreement that this ontological, moral, and ethical territory is always present in psychotherapeutic discourse, and that Rogerian empathy is not adequately suited to address it.

More so than his teacher Hiltner, Browning would later stress both the therapeutic and theological significance of empathy as a means for understanding human relation to God: "[A]s God undergirds me and gives me the power to be, he [*sic*] also stands beyond me, transcending me and confronting me as a Supreme Being who heightens my awareness of my own subjectivity

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with their use of the term in this way, as it conflates metaphysics with ontology and neglects the problem of ontological difference raised by Martin Heidegger's extensive treatment of the issue in *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: SUNY Press, 2010). In the context of this literature review, this issue is noteworthy, but does not derail the broader trajectory.

[22] Oden, *Kerygma and Counseling*, 109.

[23] Browning, *Atonement and Psychotherapy*, 151

by experiencing me with unconditioned positive regard and empathy."[24] In what would later prove to be a common refrain within pastoral theological reflection on the doctrine of God, Browning early on inferred that there is an analogical similarity between God's love for humanity and humanity's empathic care for others.

The centrality of empathy within Browning's pastoral theological corpus would only grow with time. Though he would more frequently reference the work of Rogers and Kohut in relation to empathy in texts such as his 1976 *The Moral Context of Pastoral Care*, by his 1986 *Religious Thought and the Modern Psychologies* he showed strong preference for the psychoanalytic specificity of Kohut's work, particularly for elucidating the connection between psychology as a science and the demand for religion to articulate moral and ethical judgments. Browning critiques the ethical potential of Kohutian self psychology in a very similar fashion to how he critiqued Rogers ten years prior in *Atonement and Psychotherapy*, arguing in this later text that if Kohut comes to any truly ethical formulation, he does not "arriv[e] at his ethical conclusions on strictly psychological grounds."[25] That is, Browning observes the delicate balance that Kohut faced in theorizing empathy while also respecting the limits of the psychoanalytic method. Browning's critical and hermeneutical observation about Kohut's method is that "when a psychology unwittingly lapses into ethical or metaphysical judgments it is no longer strictly science."[26] Kohut undeniably would agree with this conclusion. But Browning is not willing to stop with the blunt reality one must accept regarding the limits of the psychoanalytic method. For him, what abides outside of psychoanalysis's grasp is something for

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[24] Don Browning, "Analogy, Symbol, and Pastoral Theology in Tillich's Thought," *Pastoral Psychology* 19 (1968): 51.

[25] Don Browning and Terry D. Cooper, *Religious Thought and the Modern Psychologies*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2004), 182.

[26] Browning and Cooper, *Religious Thought and the Modern Psychologies*, 17.

which one is still responsible. "The metaphysical and ethical judgments may not be strictly psychological not strictly scientific, but they may still be correct," he contends.[27]

Yet in his ambitious 1991 *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, Browning came to see empathy as even more essential to the task of practical theology. More specifically with regard to "descriptive theology"—the first of his four overlapping sub-movements of a fundamental practical theology—Browning argues, "Descriptive theology attempts this deep understanding of others, their situations, and their identities. Descriptive theology is an act of empathy expressed within the limits of a historically situated dialogue."[28] Insofar as Browning believes theology must maintain a critical but open relationship with the social sciences in a fundamentally hermeneutic way to invite quality social research that is not simply dominated by theory, empathy becomes crucial for the pastoral theological task of "thick description of religious and cultural practices."[29] He later elaborates that the "listening and empathy so fundamental to pastoral counseling also should be understood under the rubric of descriptive theology. When we listen, we do not simply receive information passively. We listen in order to describe, and the description comes from a particular perspective. We hear, listen, and empathize out of a particular social and historical dialogue."[30] Said otherwise, Browning contends that pastoral theology cannot move past superficial forms of hearing and description without empathy.

What is particularly noteworthy about this claim is that Browning's scope of theological inquiry is decidedly not limited to clinical contexts. One of the greater ambitions of Browning's work is to conceptualize how theology can bring about broad ethical change. He makes this clear

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[27] Browning and Cooper, *Religious Thought and the Modern Psychologies*, 17.
[28] Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1991), 284.
[29] Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, 58.
[30] Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, 286.

in his motivation for pursuing a fundamental practical theology: "I find it useful to think of fundamental practical theology as critical reflection on the church's dialogue with Christian sources and other communities of experience and interpretation with the aim of guiding its action toward social and individual transformation."[31] Perhaps Browning's most central claim in this text is that if theology is going to enact dialogue and transformation within and beyond Christian communities, it must examine how moral thinking is structured in dimensions from our most basic visions of the world to the most minute rules reflected by that vision. Empathy, he stresses, is an irreplaceable tool for the descriptive theological submovement to bring this about.

By the early 1980s, focus on empathy in pastoral care and theology went from being an aberration to being the norm in much of the literature. Though Wise did not deploy empathy in his 1951 *Pastoral Counseling*, by his 1980 *Pastoral Psychotherapy*, he revises his clinical instruction considerably to include the conceptual emphasis on empathy. "The pastor must be able to enter into the experiences and feelings of a person in an empathetic manner and respond in a healing manner," he argues.[32] Citing both Rogers and Kohut in his updated text, Wise repeatedly describes empathy not as an optional method in pastoral psychotherapy, but as a necessary and essential resource for healing.[33]

In the most extensive treatment of empathy within pastoral theology in the 1980s, pastoral theologian Ralph Underwood's *Empathy and Confrontation in Pastoral Care* raised expectations considerably for what empathy might be able to accomplish in caregiving settings. While Underwood is careful not to offer an unimaginative or antiquated vision of empathy—akin

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[31] Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, 36.
[32] Carroll A. Wise, *Pastoral Psychotherapy: Theory and Practice* (New York: Jason Aronson, 1980), 300.
[33] Elsewhere, Wise argues that "there is no substitute for a deep sense of confidence on the part of the pastor. Such confidence should help him relax and listen attentively to the person. He needs to sense empathically what the person is experiencing. He should be alert for denials and displacements, and also for reaction formations" (*Pastoral Psychotherapy*, 228).

to the "sentimental sympathy" described by Wise in 1951—it is also difficult to overstate how much stock he places in empathy's potential. Underwood describes empathy as "fundamental to pastoral work" and contends that any impulse to move "beyond empathy" must ultimately be met with efforts "to gain a richer vision of empathy," particularly in its respect for others in clinical pastoral settings.[34] Insofar as pastoral care is predicated on an attitude of enduring respect[35]—which also applies to moral confrontation—Underwood speculates, "The variety of ways in which respect can be communicated through listening and empathy may be endless."[36] Because of this boundless potential, Underwood concludes his text with what may have been the highest praise for empathy within pastoral care to date: "Empathy is the pristine form of pastoral care in its eductive mode."[37] Underwood's citations make it clear that by "eductive," he is referring to Clebsch and Jaekle's taxonomy of *"eductive guidance"* and "*inductive guidance*," where the former refers to the pastoral function of attending to individual experience itself.[38]

Echoing the more explicitly theological tone of Browning, pastoral theologians such as Herbert Anderson as early as 1984 began conceptualizing empathy as a paradigmatic way to understand core Christian doctrines such as the incarnation and kenosis. In the journal *Pastoral Psychology*, Anderson writes, "The incarnation is a paradigm for care in the sense of empathy

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[34] Ralph Underwood, *Empathy and Confrontation in Pastoral Care* (Eugene, OR: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1985), 117; 119.

[35] Underwood makes this presumption clear in his most central articulation of his text's purpose: "My thesis is that respect is the theological and moral value that relates empathy and confrontation as ways of communicating the gospel in pastoral care. The effectiveness of empathy in helping persons depends on its promise of communicating respect for persons, a respect or positive regard that is analogous to God's valuing of persons and that therefore may become the occasion for the person's discovering or 'hearing' God's care and acceptance at a deeper level" (*Empathy and Confrontation in Pastoral Care*, 36).

[36] Underwood, *Empathy and Confrontation in Pastoral Care*, 88.

[37] Underwood, *Empathy and Confrontation in Pastoral Care*, 121.

[38] Clebsch and Jaekle, *Pastoral Care in Historical Perspective*, 9. Emphasis original. They explain, "The pastoral function of guiding consists of assisting perplexed persons to make confident choices between alternative courses of thought and action, when such choices are viewed as affecting the present and future state of the soul. Guidance commonly employs two identifiable modes. *Eductive guidance* tends to draw out the individual's own experiences and values the criteria and resources for such decisions, while *inductive guidance* tends to lead the individual to adopt an *a priori* set of values and criteria by which to make his decision."

and embodied presence. It also provides a model for setting aside our needs for the sake of the other. It might be said that all care—whether human or divine—moves from emptying to embodying, and so to empathy."[39] Because pastoral caregiving is modeled after God's care for creation through Jesus's incarnation and sacrificial emptying of himself, empathy becomes the logical end for all interpersonal pastoral caregiving. That is, if pastors are to aspire to God's compassionate vision upon a creation in need of salvation, then they must embrace an empathic mode of considering the suffering of those around them. Anderson's appeal to the kenosis of empathy may be the first within pastoral theology, but it is far from the last.[40]

While much of this pastoral theological turn to empathy in the early 1980s may well be attributed to the lingering influence of Rogers, one also finds an explicit turn to Kohut's work on empathy as vicarious introspection at this time. Most visibly, pastoral counselor and self psychologist Robert Randall made a clear case through a series of writings starting in 1980 and continuing throughout his career that Kohut's work offers key insights for theology. In a boldly titled 1980 essay on the "Soteriological Dimensions in the Work of Heinz Kohut"—written while Kohut was still living—Randall argues that Kohut's "psychology of the self is no mere description of a theory or technique; it is a purposed prescription for 'salvation'—individually and culturally. Whether he has fully intended it or not, Kohut has woven an image of man's essential nature, of the brokenness of his essential self, and of the essential way in which he is to be restored."[41] For Randall, Kohut's work on narcissistic wounding and the prospect for fortifying self structures via vicarious introspection and psychoanalytic interpretation offers an

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[39] Herbert Anderson, "Incarnation and Pastoral Care," *Pastoral Psychology* 32 (1984): 246.

[40] The intellectual task at this moment is not to make a theological argument about the soteriology of claims like Anderson's, which allude to a theory of substitutionary atonement.

[41] Robert L. Randall, "Soteriological Dimensions in the Work of Heinz Kohut," *Journal of Religion and Health* 19 (1980): 90.

essential framework for understanding how redemption and salvation must operate within

pastoral theology. Shortly after Kohut's death, Randall later adds, "The call for broadened

empathic awareness directs psychology to look outward and religion to look inward. […]

Religion, for its part, is urged to look inside itself with the aid of self psychology insights in

order to understand those narcissistic dimensions that give shape to its identity and power to its

functioning."[42] At a burgeoning moment for American psychology of religion, Randall's

contention was that religion has a profound need for the corrective insights of Kohut's theory of

empathy vis-à-vis narcissistic needs. Randall's mission was largely to make the case that Kohut's

self psychology was fundamentally compatible with and elucidatory for Christian pastoral

theological praxis.[43]

Though not as devout an acolyte of Kohut as Randall, pastoral theologian Charles Gerkin

nonetheless made a strong case for the importance of Kohut's thought within the history of

clinical pastoral theory in his 1984 The Living Human Document. He argues in his text that

pastoral counseling should be understood as the reinterpretation of human experience in the

context of the Christian narrative. Having studied directly under Boisen in clinical pastoral

education, Gerkin adopts the language of the "living human document" to capture the fact that

the pastoral counselor uses theological language in caregiving, but they must also be bearers of

mythic and parabolic understandings of the Christian world in their interpretations. Yet it is from

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[42] Robert L. Randall, "The Legacy of Kohut for Religion and Psychology," *Journal of Religion and Health* 23 (1984): 107.

[43] Randall met personally with Kohut to interview him on topics related to religion and psychology. From those interactions, Randall made rather pointed claims about the compatibility of Kohut's work and religion: "Although Kohut did not elaborate upon it in this way, the programmatic directions he offered, along with the corollary projects, can be interpreted as efforts to assist religion and psychology in the development of a healthy mirroring relationship, a healthy alter-ego relationship, and a healthy idealizing relationship. Psychologically healthy individuals, Kohut noted, are in need of supporting self objects their whole life long. No individual can exist without a matrix of mirroring, alter-ego, and idealizing responses" ("Legacy of Heinz Kohut for Religion and Psychology," 113).

this intimate experience with Boisen that Gerkin draws a strong connection between the founder

of CPE and Kohut:

> From Kohut's work we derive another psychological correlate to the hermeneutical image of the life of the self taken from Anton Boisen. The life of the self forms an interpretation, a narrative story whose central task is to hold in coherence and continuity the relationships of the self within itself and with the object world beyond. I shall call this work of the self's life the hermeneutics of the self or, in more traditional theological language, the life of the soul, a construct to be developed […]. It is this life to which the pastoral counselor is called and privileged to attend.[44]

Both here and in his 1986 *Widening the Horizons*,[45] Gerkin's contention is that Kohut's

grounding of psychoanalysis in an empathic interpretive mode of inquiry is precisely what is

called for in a fundamentally hermeneutic approach to pastoral care and its task of reinterpreting

human experience through a theological lens. Evoking and re-narrating the human story in light

of suffering and transition requires seeing the human story as a pilgrimage of enlarging

preunderstanding within the context of a broader Christian community, and pastoral counseling

itself is only one small piece of the collective care offered by communities.

Even with the palpable influence of vicarious introspection in pastoral theology in the

1980s, the growing momentum of Kohut's work for the field arguably reaches its apex near the

end of the decade in the work of pastoral theologian Chris Schlauch, who studied under

Browning and trained near the epicenter of Kohut's geographic influence at Chicago's Center for

Religion and Psychotherapy. In an essay fittingly titled, "Empathy as the Essence of Pastoral

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[44] Charles V. Gerkin, *The Living Human Document: Re-Visioning Pastoral Counseling in a Hermeneutical Mode* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1984), 93.

[45] Charles V. Gerkin, *Widening the Horizons: Pastoral Responses to a Fragmented Society* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1986), 93. The continuity in Gerkin's approach to empathy across these texts is made clear when he writes, "We cannot hope to be pastorally helpful if we seek to confront the situation from some outside position that does not share the stake the people involved have in it or the stake that God's care involves. Here our appropriation of the past, present, and future dimensions of the Christian narrative takes on crucial significance, since by the fusion of the horizon of our understanding of Mr. C's situation and our pastoral involvement in it with that larger narrative horizon we are reminded both of the importance of our full and empathic presence in the situation and of the limits of our responsibility."

Psychotherapy," Schlauch offers the most explicit argument that Kohut's specific work on empathy as vicarious introspection offers a groundbreaking insight for pastoral psychotherapy to properly understand its disciplinary scope. "Along with Don Browning, James Lapsley and Robert Randall, to name a few," Schlauch writes, "I believe that Heinz Kohut's psychoanalytic psychology of the self can contribute to the theory and practice of pastoral counseling in general and to articulating dimensions of the person and the relationship in particular."[46] More specifically, Schlauch clarifies that Kohut's scholarship contributes so substantially to the field of pastoral counseling because of the way that empathy functions as an interdisciplinary concept that methodologically grounds both psychoanalysis and pastoral psychotherapy. Schlauch argues, "The proposition that empathy is the essence of pastoral psychotherapy is an extension of Kohut's claim that empathy is the essence of psychoanalysis. I am regarding pastoral psychotherapy as an inherently interdisciplinary enterprise and, correlatively, empathy as an inherently interdisciplinary concept."[47] Schlauch is so persuaded by Kohut's claim that empathy is essential to interpersonal understanding that he ultimately argues empathy is too foundational to be monopolized by psychoanalysis as its method.

Schlauch thus contends that empathy is not only the foundational tool of pastoral psychotherapy, but its essence. He intends this in the broadest terms. For Schlauch, the necessity of empathy in pastoral psychotherapy is raised to the level of an ethical maxim: "I have outlined an ethical reading of the empathic stance as a style of care expressed in the maxim, Act Empathically (or Be Empathic)."[48] Similar to Anderson's contention that empathy offers pastoral counselors a model for God's compassionate incarnation, Schlauch's maxim that pastoral

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[46] Chris R. Schlauch, "Empathy as the Essence of Pastoral Psychotherapy," *The Journal of Pastoral Care* 44 (1990): 3.
[47] Schlauch, "Empathy as the Essence of Pastoral Psychotherapy," 14.
[48] Schlauch, "Empathy as the Essence of Pastoral Psychotherapy," 16.

caregivers "Be Empathic" is rooted in the belief that empathy is both the trace of the Imago Dei in us, and that this calls us to recognize the Imago Dei in others.[49] He adds, "From a Christian standpoint, I might affirm that Jesus Christ incarnated God's empathic stance, God's *agape* for us, and in so doing modeled how we are to relate to others and to God."[50] For all Christians, but pastoral caregivers in particular, empathy is an ethical imperative because one cannot answer the call to Christian discipleship without embracing Jesus's desire to be united with humanity in and through the incarnation. Pastoral caregivers cannot expect to bring about the salvation that Jesus brought, but the closest approximation is healing, which is only possible through empathic understanding of others in a pastoral mode.

One must be careful not to impose too clean a narrative upon the early pastoral theological literature on empathy, though a few unobjectionable observations can be made. First, with the exception of Hiltner's very early essay, pastoral theologians were relatively slow to adopt empathy as a key concept in understanding its clinical practice. Second, when pastoral theologians began focusing more on empathy in the 1960s and 1970s, very few if any of them referenced Kohut and his 1959 definition of empathy as vicarious introspection, instead favoring Rogers's theory of empathy as communicative attunement related to unconditional positive regard. Third, around the time of Kohut's death in 1981, pastoral theological interest in empathy grew considerably. In the ensuing decade, there was a clear shift in the literature from citing the work of Rogers to citing the work of Kohut.[51] This alone is not particularly insightful given the

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[49] See Schlauch, ("Empathy as the Essence of Pastoral Psychotherapy," 17. Schlauch writes, "The empathic stance, as a style of care, is an expression of the Imago Dei."

[50] Schlauch, "Empathy as the Essence of Pastoral Psychotherapy," 17.

[51] On this trend, pastoral theologian James Lapsley offers a fascinating and informative anecdote about the overlapping institutional influence of Rogers and Kohut: "It is tempting here to speculate on the unacknowledged influence of Carl R. Rogers, who headed the Counseling Center of the University of Chicago until 1956. Rogers, a psychologist, had developed the concept of empathy to its acme at the time […] as a prime, indeed, only, therapeutic tool. But the Department of Psychiatry of the Medical School, with which Kohut was affiliated, was at dagger point with Rogers in a boundary dispute over turf rights to helping disturbed persons within the institutional structure. So

fact that Kohut's work became more broadly recognized at this time—not just within pastoral

care. However, fourth, this trend is also correlated significantly with a chorus of pastoral

theologians insisting not only that empathy is helpful for pastoral care, but also that it is ethically

and theologically "essential." Pastoral theologians like Anderson and Schlauch make the

reasoning for this explicit: Insofar as empathy is required for the interpretive task of building self

structures in others, and insofar as pastoral theologians are called to embody the incarnation, then

empathy is non-negotiable in bringing about psychological healing and theological wholeness.

Lastly, while several of these figures acknowledged how difficult empathy is and how empathy

must be supplemented by other pastoral practices such as confrontation, the overall trend at the

time was clear: unlike sentimental sympathy, empathy is to be wholeheartedly embraced.

Relational Critiques of Empathy in Pastoral Care and Theology

Though subtle at first, the whispery concern among pastoral theologians of the difficulty

of cultivating empathy grew into a different form of critique in the few years following

Schlauch's essay in the early 1990s. More specifically, what one finds in the early 1990s is a

growing relational critique among pastoral theologians that, despite its pastoral and theological

potential, empathy is far more limited in its ability to traverse personal difference than many

theorists in the 1980s may have appreciated.

In a pair of closely related essays in 1992 and 1993 on the topic of empathy and diversity,

pastoral theologian Marie McCarthy—who was both a fellow classmate of Schlauch's at the

University of Chicago and clinical member at the Center for Religion and Psychotherapy in

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it is unclear whether Kohut had any direct knowledge of Rogers as a person or his theories. He never acknowledged any. If there was no contact, this circumstance must be regarded as one of the supreme ironies in the modern history of the helping professions" (James N. Lapsley, "The 'Self,' Its Vicissitudes and Possibilities: An Essay in Theological Anthropology," *Pastoral Psychology* 35 (1986): 43-44n24.

Chicago—raises a series of challenges and questions for the prospect of empathy in religious

caregiving. At the core of her concerns is the issue of reconciling empathy with interpersonal

difference. Using a slightly more philosophical tone than pastoral theorists of empathy in the

prior decade, McCarthy claims, "I am far more skeptical about the possibility of empathy when I

am the one reaching across into an alien world."[52] This might lead one to believe that McCarthy

understands empathy as sometimes reaching into an "alien world" and sometimes reaching into a

more familiar one. Yet she is quick to clarify that the foreignness of the other world in empathy

only occurs across a spectrum:

> [T]here are really two points I am trying to illustrate. The first is that the question of
> empathy is a question about epistemology. Empathy is fundamentally a way of knowing.
> The second is that empathy employs a cross-cultural methodology. The processes and
> dynamics which enable us—insofar as it is possible—to cross over into another culture,
> to engage and enter into diversity, are the same processes and dynamics which govern
> empathic responding.[53]

Though McCarthy does not cite Kohut in this work, her explicitly epistemological language in

describing the interpersonal function of empathy makes it clear that she embraces a more

Kohutian than Rogerian understanding of empathy. Her insights may seem uncontroversial in

retrospect, but McCarthy here is signaling a drastic methodological shift in the field of pastoral

care around the nature of interpersonal understanding. From a more overtly relational

epistemological framework, McCarthy argues that prior pastoral theological work on empathy

had not sufficiently tended to the context of cultural subject position.[54]

The temptation in reading McCarthy's contribution to the pastoral theological literature is

to read her argument as not truly departing from the insights of her predecessors Browning,

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[52] Marie McCarthy, "Empathy Amid Diversity: Problems and Possibilities," *Journal of Pastoral Theology* 3 (1993): 15.

[53] McCarthy, "Empathy Amid Diversity," 16.

[54] McCarthy summarizes this position, "In our endeavors to be empathic with diversity, context is everything" ("Empathy Amid Diversity," 17).

Gerkin, Anderson, or Schlauch—all of whom acknowledge that empathy is not easy, and that pastors must tend to the particularities of the human situation. Yet, in her work that stemmed from an invited keynote address alongside A. J. van den Blink at the 1992 annual meeting of the Society for Pastoral Theology,[55] McCarthy goes much further than this. For McCarthy, taking interpersonal difference seriously requires us not merely to suggest that empathy is difficult; it requires us to question, "Is empathy possible at all?"[56] Like Anderson and Schlauch before her, McCarthy looks to the incarnation in helping pastors to understand the call to empathy. However, the context of her theological pivot to the incarnation raises a more challenging insight. "I want to conclude by suggesting that the mystery of Incarnation provides a powerful metaphor for both the possibilities and the limits of empathy," McCarthy writes. "The mystery of Incarnation points to God's deep and enduring engagement with humankind. […] Incarnation represents the possibility of crossing over fully, of genuinely entering another world."[57] In this claim, McCarthy's theological skepticism for the prospect of empathy comes into greater focus. Anderson, Schlauch, and McCarthy all look to the incarnation as a metaphor that helps us conceptualize the necessity of empathy in theological caregiving. She is not distinct in this regard. What sets McCarthy apart is her courage to draw attention to the fact that the incarnation is an incomprehensible mystery, a fact that may be attributable to her Catholic Christology.

Stated more directly, McCarthy signals the fact that the incarnation may be a metaphor for empathy, but that metaphor is at best an absurd paradox. For the incarnation to represent the possibility of empathy is not necessarily to claim that empathy is impossible—though it

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[55] For an account of the context of the June 1992 meeting of the Society for Pastoral Theology and its theme on "Empathy Amid Diversity," see "Preface," *Journal of Pastoral Theology* 3 (1993): v. The executive committee of the Society for Pastoral Theology contextualizes the occasion, "Both McCarthy and van den Blink are sensitive to issues of culture and sub-culture because of their own personal experiences, especially in contrast to the Protestant, U.S.-dominated field of pastoral theology."

[56] Marie McCarthy, "Empathy: A Bridge Between," *The Journal of Pastoral Care* 46 (1992): 128.

[57] McCarthy, "Empathy: A Bridge Between," 128.

unquestionably draws attention to the absurdity of the proposition. In effect, McCarthy's pastoral theological analysis of empathy hones the insights of Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments* on the absurdity of the "Absolute Paradox" of the incarnation.[58] That is, the incarnation of God is not to be approached as any sort of heuristic. First and foremost, Kierkegaard helpfully clarifies, the proper response to the incarnation is one of offense at the thought of the paradox: "[P]recisely because offense is a suffering in this manner, the discovery, if it may be put in this way, does not belong to the understanding but to the paradox."[59] It is true that we are prone to confusion or even suffering in our attempt to comprehend the idea of God becoming human, but this is not because of deficiencies of reason. This misunderstanding or "acoustical illusion," as Kierkegaard describes it, is an attempt to reconcile the absurdity of the incarnation by attributing its incomprehensibility to human intellect.[60] Like Kierkegaard, McCarthy does not allow the absurdity of the incarnation to dissuade her from looking to it in her pursuit of understanding empathy. The insight of *Philosophical Fragments* is not that we are to reject the incarnation, but rather that we must sustain and cultivate the sense of offense we feel at its sight. To do anything else is to distance ourselves from the radicality of God's love for creation.

The insight of the incarnation is not simply that we are to be called to empathy, but rather that it is the apparent impossibility of empathy that makes it worth pursuing. McCarthy explains, "Empathy is inherently about crossing over between worlds, whether those worlds are close or distant. It is always concerned with difference and diversity—diversity of peoples, cultures, ways of thinking, personalities, disciplines. If there were no differences, there would be no need for,

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[58] Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments. or, a Fragment of Philosophy*, trans. and ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), 37.

[59] Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 50.

[60] See Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 51. Kierkegaard claims that one is inclined to "hear" the source of the offense in one's understanding, "nevertheless it is the paradox that resounds in it, and this indeed is an acoustical illusion."

nor any possibility of, empathy."[61] Similar to the way that relational psychoanalysis began

centralizing subject position within its analysis of empathy and intersubjectivity in the late

1980s, with McCarthy we see a notable shift in pastoral theology toward the insight that empathy

must always be fundamentally understood as shaped by interpersonal particularity. She insists

that one must understand this easy-to-miss insight about empathy's relation to difference. "To

presume that empathy is possible is to presume some sort of underlying commonality or

universality," she writes. "But that commonality is located at the level of underlying processes

rather than in any particular elements of a given system. Even our embodiment, our biological

reality, is experienced differently in different contexts. Empathy proceeds by striving to

understand the particular way those underlying processes get 'enfleshed' in different cultures and

contexts."[62] Again, McCarthy does not allow this rejection of universality to become a *prima

facie* denial of the possibility of empathy. Instead, her contribution is to critique the presumption

of its possibility given the ubiquity of interpersonal psychic and embodied difference that

characterizes all pastoral care. Pastoral theologians must come to terms with how profoundly

limited empathy is, precisely because of our situatedness.[63]

During this same moment in the early 1990s, pastoral and practical theologian Bonnie

Miller-McLemore also theorized the profound limits of empathy for caregiving and liberationist

work. With particular attention to the growing feminist and womanist criticism of individualistic

theory in pastoral care, Miller-McLemore famously argues in a 1993 essay for *Christian Century*

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[61] McCarthy, "Empathy Amid Diversity," 17.
[62] McCarthy, "Empathy Amid Diversity," 18.
[63] McCarthy expands upon this critique of the limitations of empathy, "If Incarnation suggests rich possibilities for empathically entering another world, it also points to real limits. Given who we are as human beings, there can be no 'universal' incarnation. The Incarnation could only occur in a quite specific and particular embodiment, in a given culture, context, historical time, and place. So too our empathic engagement with another always starts from within a particular culture and context. We never have a neutral place where we can stand. We are always situated somewhere" ("Empathy: A Bridge Between," 128).

that "we can no longer ignore an author's or a parishioner's identity and location. A 'living human web' cannot simply be read and interpreted like a document."[64] Drawing upon Boisen and Gerkin's metaphor of the "living human document," Miller-McLemore makes the compelling case that the pathos-centered labor of pastoral theology must tend to the specifics of subject positionality if it is to properly understand the relational web in which all persons live.

Three years later in a 1996 expansion of her *Christian Century* piece, Miller-McLemore offers a more explicit interpretation of the implications of the living human web for empathy in pastoral care and theology. She elaborates further, "Pastoral theology's trademark of empathy for the living human document is confounded by the limitations of empathy in the midst of the living human web. Sometimes a person must admit an inability to understand fully the lived reality of the oppressions suffered by another. There may be boundaries beyond which empathy itself cannot go."[65] With Miller-McLemore, one glimpses the paradoxical implications of a more relational theory of persons for empathy. One might anticipate that critiques of individualism within pastoral psychological theory would give way to easier conditions for empathy, social epistemology, and interpersonal enmeshment. This could be one reading of feminist pastoral theologian Nancy Ramsay's contemporaneous claim that "our understanding of life as inherently relational means that authority does not have to do with distance but with personal credibility and empathy."[66] The metaphor of the web, after all, emphasizes a greater sense of interconnectedness between persons. Yet Miller-McLemore's insight is that greater attention to the web-like structure of human experience also demands more vigilance to the unique texture of

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[64] Miller-McLemore, "The Human Web," 369.
[65] Bonnie Miller-McLemore, "The Living Human Web: Pastoral Theology at the Turn of the Century," in *Through the Eyes of Women: Insights for Pastoral Care*, ed. Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996), 21.
[66] Nancy Ramsay, "Feminist Perspectives on Pastoral Care: Implications for Practice and Theory," *Pastoral Psychology* 40 (1992): 251.

each person's life within it. Similar to both Ramsay and McCarthy in this regard, Miller-McLemore is not denying the possibility of empathy, but rather critiques the idea that empathy is a boundless epistemological enterprise.

It would be an overstatement to suggest that the entirety of the field of pastoral care and theology shifted from a more optimistic vision of empathy's potential to a more subdued relational account in the early 1990s. Even among those who identify as feminist and relational pastoral theologians, the idea of empathy as limited by subject position was not universal at the time. Though she is otherwise keen on naming the ways that structures of oppression surround race and class inform caregiving practices, pastoral theologian Carrie Doehring in her 1995 *Monitoring Power Dynamics and Relational Boundaries in Pastoral Care and Counseling* does not at the time connect these influences to empathy specifically. After naming empathy as leading to "moments of recognition,"[67] Doehring repeatedly describes empathy in hermeneutic terms that suggest empathy enables us to "look beyond our own horizons and see our own experience and others' experience in new ways."[68] That is, while Doehring's relational theory and careful attention to power dynamics allows her to make exceptional contributions to pastoral theological work around relational boundaries and abuse, there is clear residue in her thought at the time that empathy is more transcendent than one might otherwise expect from her thought.

In a recent "Twenty-Five Year Retrospective" on her seminal contribution of the living human web to the field of pastoral theology, Miller-McLemore humbly remarks that perhaps too much recognition was given to her for the phrase. The reason for this, she explains, is that she

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[67] Carrie Doehring, *Taking Care: Monitoring Power Dynamics and Relational Boundaries in Pastoral Care and Counseling* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 102.
[68] Doehring, *Taking Care*, 141.

believed herself to be largely capturing the *Zeitgeist* of pastoral theology in the early 1990s.[69] "In short, I simply observed what I saw happening around me at the time," Miller-McLemore writes. "I thought I was being descriptive."[70] Pointing in particular to the influence of liberation theologies on pastoral care near the end of the 1980s, she argues that by the early 1990s, pastoral theology had substantial collective momentum in moving away from a narrowly individualistic "therapeutic paradigm" in favor of a "shifted attention to communal, contextual, and intercultural paradigms."[71] In other words, although the field has never been homogenous, it would be a misunderstanding of the history of pastoral care and theology to view the insights of Miller-McLemore and McCarthy as completely aberrational.

Revisions of Empathy in Intercultural Pastoral Care and Theology

While perspectives in pastoral theology on empathy clearly shifted with the rise of relational and feminist theory near the start of the 1990s, the influence of a Kohutian theory of empathy would take even greater root with the rise of a more explicitly intercultural pastoral theology. Particularly among black pastoral theologians such as Archie Smith Jr., Emmanuel Lartey, Phillis Sheppard, and Stephanie Crumpton, attention to empathy as fundamentally conditioned by raced and gendered subjectivity takes increasingly center stage within pastoral care theory. Yet, as with the feminist and relational pastoral theology at the start of the 1990s, this trend in intercultural pastoral theology—which continues today—is far from homogenous.

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[69] See Bonnie Miller-McLemore, "The Living Human Web: A Twenty-Five Year Retrospective." *Pastoral Psychology* 67 (2018): 308. Miller-McLemore explains, "I now have the fortune of receiving recognition and credit for coining the term the 'living human web' to update the primary subject matter of the discipline, defined a half century earlier by Congregational Church minister and founder of clinical pastoral education (CPE) Anton Boisen as the 'living human document.' But in reality I owe my terminology to colleagues, some of whom were using the word 'web' almost simultaneously to capture ideas about the critical role of the wider political context and the location of pastoral care within a community in which the minister is not the only agent in its delivery (see Couture 1996; Gill-Austern 1995; Graham 1992; Louw 2002; see also Patton 1993)."

[70] Miller-McLemore, "Living Human Web: A Twenty-Five Year Retrospective," 308.

[71] Miller-McLemore, "Living Human Web: A Twenty-Five Year Retrospective," 317.

Within it, one finds that there is still a lack of consensus around just how freely or easily people can employ empathy in caregiving.

In surveying what might broadly be termed the intercultural shift in pastoral care and theology, the early contribution of Archie Smith Jr. confounds the narrative that this shift emerged after the rise of relational psychoanalysis and feminist pastoral theology. In his 1982 *The Relational Self: Ethics and Therapy from a Black Church Perspective*, Smith's central task is to reveal the ways that ethical theory and psychoanalytic therapy have further entrenched religious and subjective experience in structures of oppression. Smith's solution is to offer a vision of the self as relational, which connects social critique and self-criticism to enable inner and outer transformation. Smith writes, "Social reality is a complex emerging process which is mediated through a plurality of perspectives. The uniqueness of the social self is in its capacity to occupy a perspective within a social milieu, to give it its own unique stamp, and to enlarge its own particular standpoint by organizing within its own perspective the standpoint of others."[72]

Perhaps because Smith's scholarship is attuned as much with sociological theory as with psychology, he outlines at an early moment in the modern pastoral care movement that therapeutic interventions must tend to racialized structures of oppression. This is possible, he argues, only by challenging the tendency of therapeutic culture to conceptualize emotional progress in asocial terms.

Smith's theory of the self is based in a liberation ethics of religious consciousness, political engagement, and "anamnestic solidarity" of the black church, which requires remembering past racial injustices as one takes up future liberative praxis. The black church is central to Smith's project, but he insists that it serves as a "microcosm" for the Christian church

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[72] Archie Smith Jr., *The Relational Self: Ethics and Therapy from a Black Church Perspective* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1982), 68.

as a whole. In theological ethics as well as psychoanalytic theory, Smith's contention is that we

have neglected how "[r]elationality is a pregiven structure of being which, in the ideal situation,

moves people toward universal values, empathic sharing, and a deeper experience of their

humanness in their historical context."[73] In this regard, Smith is heavily influenced by the black

theology of James Cone in particular, who unabashedly contended that attention to the

particularity of black experience in oppression opens up the prospect for a universal conversion

experience.[74]

Yet while Cone was repeatedly critical of the prospect of "sympathy" within intercultural

dialogue—particularly between white oppressors and black persons in conditions of violent

political oppression—Smith Jr. shares a considerably more optimistic understanding of the social

and ethical potential of empathy for justice work in theological context. On several occasions in

the text, he contends that empathizing with situations of oppression has clear potential to foster

recognition and social solidarity. Smith Jr. argues, "A source of creativity in social life is rooted

in the self and in empathy with other oppressed groups and through recognition of the common

structure of oppression that binds them."[75] Empathy is a vehicle for ethical creativity in

responding to structures of oppression, where creativity refers in part to empathy allowing

persons to see themselves into oppressed situations that are completely distinct from their own.

More strikingly, Smith Jr. believes that therapy itself has the potential to cultivate

empathy in ways that will allow persons to be better equipped to respond to social oppression.

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[73] Smith Jr., *The Relational Self*, 73.

[74] Smith Jr. cites both *Black Theology and Black Power* and *God of the Oppressed*. See James Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1975), 125. Cone writes, "But the validity of any christological title in any period of history is not decided by its universality but by this: whether in the particularity of its time it points to God's universal will to liberate particular oppressed people from inhumanity. This is exactly what blackness does in the contemporary social existence of America. If we Americans, blacks and whites, are to understand who Jesus is for us today, we must view his presence as continuous with his past and future coming which is best seen through his present blackness."

[75] Smith Jr., *The Relational Self*, 52.

"[T]he therapeutic relationship" he writes, "may strengthen or enlarge the individual's and group's capacity for self-critical discernment, imagination, warmth, empathy, and sense of justice and vitality, and it can help deepen the capacity for hope and love."[76] Despite his many criticisms of therapeutic culture, Smith Jr. is adamant that insofar as therapy has the potential to deepen our capacity for empathy, therapy is also a remarkable tool for combatting mass social and political oppression. He even goes so far as to suggest that, in this sense, empathy has a transcendent potential for ethical transformation:

> When they struggle collectively, oppressed people are able to effect changes in the social structure that the lone individual cannot. They can transcend the social histories that have kept their struggles separated when they recognize their common humanity and the common sources underlying their oppression. They can transcend their social histories when they empathically enter the struggle with other groups that are oppressed by the same forces of domination.[77]

One must be careful to note here that Smith Jr. is referring to oppressed groups empathizing with one another—not with oppressors empathizing with the oppressed. But, similar to Cone's contention that God's truth is only possible in and through the universal experience of oppression, Smith Jr. does not view distinct experiences of oppression as negating the potential for empathy. His contention is that there is, without question, a universal experience of oppression that creates an experiential bridge for empathy, which in turn deepens one's capacity for hope and love for justice. For Smith Jr., empathy is an ethical tool that connects all persons to the universal structures of domination that threaten to oppress the marginalized.

Writing more explicitly from an intercultural pastoral theological vantage point nearly two decades later, Emmanuel Lartey in his 1997 *In Living Color: An Intercultural Approach to Pastoral Care and Counseling* echoes Smith's conviction that there are both particular and

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[76] Smith Jr., *The Relational Self*, 74.
[77] Smith Jr., *The Relational Self*, 90.

universal structures of cultured experience that must be accounted for in a pastoral theological understanding of empathy. At the heart of Lartey's theology, which he explicitly ties to his identity as a Ghanaian who was trained at predominantly white institutions in Britain and the U.S., is a general maxim taken from modern anthropology: "*Every human person is in some respects (a) like all others (b) like some others (c) like no other.*"[78] In effect, Lartey weds elements of a universalist, group-focused, and individualistic theory of the person. The consequence is an approach to pastoral care and counseling that does not attempt to fit persons too rigidly into ideologically pure visions of human sociality or isolation. Though it would be theoretically convenient to conceptualize persons as either fully social or fully individual, Lartey more pragmatically claims that we must accept our cultured experiences as in some ways unique and in other ways not unique at all.

It is from this nuanced vision of persons that Lartey carries the mantle of lauding the potential of empathy for intercultural pastoral theological caregiving. Though he offers an objectively incorrect historical account of the emergence of empathy,[79] Lartey presents an otherwise careful theory of empathy as predicated on the trifold structure of persons being like all others, like some others, and like no others. More specifically, it is the structure of likeness that makes the emotional process of empathy possible for Lartey. "Without emotion," Lartey

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[78] Emmanuel Lartey, *In Living Color: An Intercultural Approach to Pastoral Care and Counseling*, 2nd ed. (New York: Jessica Kingsley Press, 2003), 171. Emphasis original. Note that Lartey describes this himself as a "maxim."

[79] In his taxonomy of the ten "characteristics of counseling," Lartey inexplicably offers a wildly inaccurate origin story of empathy. He writes, "It is believed that the term empathy was first used in the 1930s by C. R. Shaw in describing his work with 'problem' boys in Chicago" (*In Living Color*, 92). This is incorrect. Not only had the term been in use for nearly 60 years by the 1930s through the work of Robert Vischer and Theodor Lipps in German, but even if one narrows one's focus on English uses in more strictly psychological and therapeutic settings, the term already had been in use for nearly 20 years prior in the work of Edward Titchener, and even in translations of Freud's work. See Robert Vischer, *Über das Optische Formgefühl: Ein Beitrag zur Ästhetik*, in *Drei Schriften zum Ästhetischen Formproblem*, 1-44 (Halle: Niemeyer, 1927); Theodor Lipps, "Aesthetische Einfühlung," *Zeitschrift für Psychologie und Physiologie der Sinneorgane*, 22 (1900): 415-450; Edward B. Titchener, *Lectures on the Experimental Psychology of the Thought-Processes* (New York: Macmillan, 1909). One might perhaps attribute this error to a more pragmatic than etymological interest of pastoral caregivers with empathy.

argues, "empathy, warmth and genuineness—the therapeutic triad spoken of in counseling and psychotherapy—would be impossible. Feeling permits us to be sensitive, caring and to 'understand the experiences' of others. It is by feeling that we enter into the 'world' of others, whether through their writing or their speech."[80] The insight of an intercultural approach to empathy in pastoral care, thus, is that empathy is neither boundless nor impossible. Though a pastoral caregiver cannot presume to be able to emotionally enter into the parts of another person that are "like no others," this does not mean they are incapable of vicariously introspecting into the universal and shared group experiences of others. It is for this reason that Lartey ultimately shares the sentiment of even the earliest pastoral theologians that practitioners must labor intensively to becomes more at home in their own emotional lives before caring for others.[81]

In the most sustained practical theological analysis of Kohutian self psychology in modern pastoral theological literature, psychoanalyst and womanist practical theologian Phillis Sheppard contends that practical theology must travel through cultural and psychoanalytic history not only as it pertains to womanist literature, as some counter-culturalists might have it, but in critical conversation with more traditionally dominant and exclusionary theories and histories. Trained in Chicago at the Center for Religion and Psychotherapy and the Chicago Psychoanalytic Institute, Sheppard focuses on womanist accounts of black women's psychic structures and experience in pain and suffering—especially that of Delores Williams and M. Shawn Copeland. Building from this, Sheppard argues for the ethical utility of womanist psychological theory in regard to "psychological reality" and "the conscious and the unconscious" structures, which are too often monopolized by dis-engendered psychoanalytic

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[80] Lartey, *In Living Color*, 74.
[81] See Lartey, *In Living Color*, 74. Lartey writes, "Pastoral practitioners need to develop their abilities of sensitivity and empathy through attention to their own feelings. It is as pastoral caregivers get in closer touch with their own feelings of hurt and pain, sorrow and sadness that they can begin to approach the pain."

theory that did not have to work through their cultural origins in the way that womanist thought did.[82]

Yet while Sheppard works through psychoanalytic and self-psychological theories of empathy to make her claim, she also emphasizes that Kohut's analysis of "cultural selfobjects" failed to account for the cultural and institutional adversity to many people's self-cohesion. In both her 2008 article, "Mourning the Loss of Cultural Selfobjects" and her 2011 *Self, Culture, and Others in Womanist Practical Theology*, she argues that bestowing the dignity of the *Imago Dei* on persons through structures of empathy and recognition is always contextually conditioned.[83] She insists that "self psychology must receive a critical reading and raise the importance of, and the lack of, a culturally empathic responsive sociocultural environ. Gender, sexuality, and race […] do not proceed along a smooth path of development regardless of social location, and certainly do not do so for African Americans."[84] That is, Sheppard remains optimistic about the theoretical utility of a self-psychological framework for understanding how persons are cared for developmentally—even proclaiming the "necessity" of a psychoanalytic approach.[85] However, she tempers this by critiquing Kohutian psychology and pastoral care for neglecting the fact that not all persons have equal access to the oxygenated empathic environment necessary for healthy development.

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[82] Phillis Isabella Sheppard, *Self, Culture, and Others in Womanist Practical Theology* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 76.

[83] See Phillis Isabella Sheppard, "Mourning the Loss of Cultural Selfobjects: Black Embodiment and Religious Experience after Trauma." *Practical Theology* 1 (2008): 241. Sheppard writes, "The first conviction is that we must understand *imago dei* socially, interpersonally and individually—thus, an epistemological claim is set before us: what are our sources for making claims or even questions concerning black women and *imago dei*?"

[84] Sheppard, *Self, Culture, and Others in Womanist Practical Theology*, 13.

[85] See Sheppard, *Self, Culture, and Others in Womanist Practical Theology*, 77. She writes, "[T]hough I am convinced about the necessity of a psychoanalytic perspective, I recognize that any appropriation of psychoanalysis for a womanist practical theology requires both critical knowledge of the history of the relationship between black experience and psychoanalysis as well as knowledge of black psychoanalytic perspectives in and out of the clinical domain."

Central to Sheppard's claim is her analysis of the Kohutian concept of narcissistic needs—specifically the needs of mirroring, idealization, and twinship. Sheppard agrees with Kohut and his followers on the importance of cultural selfobjects as relational vehicles for cultivating self structure. This has both psychological and theological significance for Sheppard, insofar as "mirroring from a culturally cohesive ideology, to which one is attached, is essential for an integrated psyche. Theologically, we are speaking of (1) being in and recognized by a community that affirms our relationship to the *imago dei*; (2) and being in relationship to a community that is deeply related to The Idealized One."[86] To develop a stable and strong sense of dignified recognition within a community and as included under the umbrella of the *imago dei*, it is insufficient to try to merely repeat narratives to oneself of self-worth; one must have oneself mirrored by cultural selfobjects, particularly selfobjects of prominence. The reason for this is simple: having one's self mirrored by selfobjects beyond one's familial structure is necessary to develop any coherent understanding that one's culture actually values one's subject position.

Sheppard's research is particularly significant for black and queer children—more specifically girls and gender non-conforming children—who infrequently see themselves mirrored in cultural selfobjects in positions of power. Sheppard contends that Kohut not only overgeneralized the selfobject needs of persons by neglecting cultural context and fell victim to the "myth of individualism" while attempting to shirk it,[87] but effectively missed the greatest coalescing insight for the relationship between selfobjects and self growth. She explains,

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[86] Sheppard, *Self, Culture, and Others in Womanist Practical Theology*, 138.

[87] See Sheppard, *Self, Culture, and Others in Womanist Practical Theology*, 115. Sheppard argues, "Self psychology assumes that all children everywhere have identical needs for mirroring, idealization, and twinship. Yet these needs are specific to segments of Western cultures, as is most of the valuing of individualism versus collective or communal efforts. In my view, Kohut does not favor individualism, but his perspectives emerged out of a context where the cultural myth of individualism, as the desired outcome of development, permeates the theoretical air."

> [C]ulture and society are implicated in selfobject experiences, but both selfobjects and cultural selfobjects are far more complex than Kohut articulated and certainly less reliably available for self-enhancing mirroring than he imagined. So, yes, "culture is the medium in which self grows," however, culture as a medium for development often means that one must stand opposed to the ambivalent, misrepresentative, and sometimes violent, cultural depictions of one's self in order to resist self-annihilation.88

The core of Kohut's theoretical claims regarding empathy are correct, but they neglect the far more pressing matter of how the cultural framework of empathy actually functions in relation to self structure development and cultural selfobject availability. If one is not a cisgender heterosexual white man, one will invariably experience cultural representations that communicate one's deficiencies and lack of potential. While Kohut may have been willing to acknowledge this on a hypothetical level, Sheppard claims that he misses the fact that these cultural factors have a self-perpetuating effect of destroying self structure, which in turn restricts one's capacity for empathy. Sheppard's project aims to correct this oversight both for psychoanalytic and practical theological research, particularly by reworking cultural selfobjects in terms of the lived experience and theology of black women, where race, sexuality, and mourning are understood as both integral resources to womanist identity and bound up with its cultural and psychological history of theological and psychological disintegration and distortion.

Building explicitly from Sheppard's work, womanist pastoral theologian Stephanie Crumpton offers perhaps the clearest diagnosis of the problem of empathy within pastoral theological literature emerging out of Kohutian self psychology to date. In focusing on the lived experiences of black women affected by intimate and cultural violence, Crumpton's work discovers the ways that self psychology is not prepared to theorize race and gender. "In order for Self psychology to provide a tool that opens up rather than distorts understandings of Black

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88 Sheppard, *Self, Culture, and Others in Womanist Practical Theology*, 122.

women's ongoing development, the theory requires some adjustments," Crumpton writes.[89]

More specifically, she argues that an adequate womanist pastoral theology must account for the

fact that "concepts of race, gender, sexuality, and class are embedded in the empathic or

empathically failing responses that selfobjects provide. It also means that practitioners must first

consider the social and cultural biases present in the theory before applying it as a viable lens for

reading Black female experience."[90] With this clear insight, Crumpton moves pastoral theology

beyond the contention that practitioners must become more at home with themselves if they are

to offer empathic care. This, of course, remains a worthy pastoral labor. Yet, Crumpton explains,

one must also reckon with the fact that empathy is always structured by the social and cultural

biases that are embedded within the fore-structure of empathy and its failures. Like Sheppard

before her, Crumpton lays out in clear terms that this fact is highly consequential for black girls'

development, given that they are subject to an inordinate number of empathic failures, which go

beyond mere transmuting internalization and are described more accurately as cultural

violence.[91]

Writing nearly contemporaneously with Crumpton in 2013, pastoral theologian Melinda

McGarrah Sharp also hones in on how intercultural empathy is simultaneously crucial for

pastoral caregiving and fundamentally limited by postcolonial contexts. Citing Miller-

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[89] Stephanie Crumpton, *A Womanist Pastoral Theology against Intimate and Cultural Violence* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 12.

[90] Crumpton, *A Womanist Pastoral Theology against Intimate and Cultural Violence*, 12.

[91] See Crumpton, *A Womanist Pastoral Theology against Intimate and Cultural Violence*, 66-67. Crumpton writes, "Empathic response to the need to feel confirmed as a whole person (mirroring needs) and uplifted by a powerful other (idealizing needs) affirms our humanity and place in community. Conversely, empathically failing responses to these basic mirroring and idealizing needs reflect back a distorted, less-than-whole vision of one's humanity. Violence of any kind is an empathically failing response to the inherent need to have one's humanity affirmed and uplifted. Within this framework, when selfobjects commit intimate violence, and/or cultural selfobjects normalize intimate violence, a form of empathic failure occurs and negatively affects the self, meaning one's identity, internal cohesion, continuity, and interdependent notions of self in relation with other. This empathic failure often has developmental implications."

McLemore's work, McGarrah Sharp believes that attention to subject positionality means that pastoral caregivers must accept empathy as reaching boundaries at the suffering of others.[92] Undertaking the first book-length work of pastoral theology on postcolonial theory, she devotes sustained attention to the anthropological and political dynamics that shape empathy and provoke misunderstanding and misrecognition, taking great care to connect pastoral theology's hallmark metaphor of the web to this discourse.

Despite this critique, McGarrah Sharp remains deeply committed to the idea of empathy as fostering healing, unity, and dignity within intercultural contexts—even those reckoning with the brutal effects of colonialism upon indigenous persons. Through her experiences as a white woman Peace Corps volunteer in the Republic of Suriname, McGarrah Sharp contends that "[e]mpathy forms a crucial part of any process of reconciliation."[93] The reason for this, she argues, is that empathy is closely connected to social recognition. McGarrah Sharp asks and answers, "What is the relationship between reconciliation and intercultural empathy? Empathy, as a deeper layer of recognition, is a process of being moved by another human being and also recognizing the imprint of other human beings in one's sense of self. It is the embodied hope that other human beings are understandable."[94] McGarrah Sharp believes that reconciliation is a goal for postcolonial pastoral theology and that empathy is predicated on recognition as a "deeper layer" of it. Said otherwise, recognition of the dignity of other persons precedes our capacity for intercultural empathy, which in turn lays the foundation for reconciliatory labor in pastoral care.

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[92] See Melinda McGarrah Sharp, *Misunderstanding Stories: Toward a Postcolonial Pastoral Theology* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013), 134-135. McGarrah Sharp, who studied under Miller-McLemore, cites the 1993 "living human web" concept in her assertion, "While pastoral theologians envision and expect possibilities of empathy, we also recognize limits and obstacles to it. Empathy can be 'confounded by its limitations' because good enough pastoral practice includes recognizing 'an inability to understand fully the lived reality of the oppressions suffered by another.'"

[93] McGarrah Sharp, *Misunderstanding Stories*, 142.

[94] McGarrah Sharp, *Misunderstanding Stories*, 134.

Throughout her text, McGarrah Sharp thus views empathy as a necessary tool for mutuality and justice work that must be developed and practiced over time.[95] "Theological anthropology that considers empathy a necessity for human beings assumes the mutual possibility of my understanding you and your understanding me," she writes. "Empathy is crucial in a postcolonial pastoral theology oriented toward more mutual intercultural understanding."[96] Insofar as postcolonial pastoral theology works to repair the damage of colonial violence, and insofar as empathy builds upon structures of social recognition, then empathy becomes an indispensable resource.

However, the crux of McGarrah Sharp's contribution to pastoral theological literature concerns the overwhelming proclivity of pastoral theologians—and, more generally, persons—to misunderstand the stories and experiences of others. Among the many reasons for these empathic failures are the aftereffects of colonial occupation of regions like the Republic of Suriname and the United States. McGarrah Sharp addresses the tension between the necessity of empathy and the intercultural difficulty of empathy by adopting a similar approach to pastoral theologians such as Lartey, who contend that "[e]mpathy seldom happens instantaneously."[97] She implores pastoral theologians to understand the cultivation of greater empathy in misunderstandings as "lifelong processes."[98] To this she adds, "Understanding across differences is more challenging than misunderstanding because the former involves a willingness to recognize one's own complicity in the latter. Understanding requires investing in processes of hearing, voicing, and approaching narrative with a hermeneutic of suspicion guided by the value of intercultural

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[95] On the matter of liberation in particular, McGarrah Sharp writes, "Participating in embodied empathic recognition unfolds in shared space claimed as liberative and empowering, but these goals must be enacted intentionally and with regard to histories and misunderstanding stories filled with dehumanizing representations" (McGarrah Sharp, *Misunderstanding Stories*, 172).

[96] McGarrah Sharp, *Misunderstanding Stories*, 134.

[97] Lartey, *In Living Color*, 93.

[98] McGarrah Sharp, *Misunderstanding Stories*, 4.

understanding as a good and a goal worthy of sustained effort."[99] Empathy is difficult not only because of one's raced and gendered subject position, McGarrah Sharp explains, but also because of the ways that one's relation to colonial power within those positions becomes so deeply entrenched. For a white person, growing in one's capacity for understanding requires a less defensive acceptance of one's implication in the unjust colonial powers that have foreclosed on the possibility of recognizing the personhood of those demeaned by colonialism. However, McGarrah Sharp argues, while empathy is limited, those limits are not fixed; pastoral theologians can continue to labor to broaden their capacity for empathy.

In her 2015 *Recognizing Other Subjects*, feminist pastoral theologian Katherine Lassiter primarily shares McGarrah Sharp's sensibility over the difficulty and necessity of empathic recognition for persons who are prone to misrecognition. Central to her argument is the contention that "recognizing another subject is difficult work but is central to pastoral praxis and theological reflection."[100] More specifically to contemporary social and ethical concerns, Lassiter contends that much of progressive political discourse dupes itself into believing it has achieved positive change through what she describes as an "identity framework," where a single identity such as "queer," "black," or "woman" is used in place of real pastoral engagement. She describes this trend in both constructive and pastoral theological anthropology as "problematic," and argues that there are two major limitations to this framework: "First, identity along cannot capture the full complexity of subjectivity. Second, identity can be used to disable the ability of a subject to give account of herself."[101] For Lassiter, an identity framework fails from to ethically empower the marginalized because it offloads the labor of recognition onto labels that

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[99] McGarrah Sharp, *Misunderstanding Stories*, 4.
[100] Katherine E. Lassiter, *Recognizing Other Subjects: Feminist Pastoral Theology and the Challenge of Identity* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2015), 8.
[101] Lassiter, *Recognizing Other Subjects*, 1.

fundamentally flatten human lived experience. Both of these issues stem from problems of recognition and misrecognition, she contends. This is why Lassiter, instead, turns away from identity theory to a theory of recognition.

Working closely with relational and intersubjective psychoanalytic theory, Lassiter extends the insights of Benjamin on recognition to include a more decidedly theological scope. She writes, "Just as subjects suffer from intersubjective and social misrecognition and non-recognition, so too can they suffer from theological misrecognition or non-recognition."[102] That is, pastoral theologians must acknowledge that their task as religious caregivers often includes communicating to those around them that they fall under the umbrella of God's care, and must subsequently work to remedy the pattern of persons feeling excluded from that circle of theological recognition.

Though Lassiter offers the insight in passing, it is important to note that she presents a slightly more visceral but no less compelling case that empathy may in fact be insufficient for pastoral theology's work toward justice. She argues, "To be in solidarity extends beyond compassion and empathy for others. To be in solidarity requires a commitment to be in the struggle—*en la lucha*—with those who experience oppression and domination. Pastoral theologians and caregivers, indeed all of creation, are called to be moved, emotionally, relationally, and even physically by the virtue of mercy when confronting injustices."[103] Empathy is not the endgame for pastoral theology, Lassiter believes. The ultimate task for pastoral theology rather is to be in solidarity in the resistance against powers of oppression and domination. Lassiter is clear that she believes empathy is often a viable tool in this solidarity. However, it is not always sufficient. To be in the struggle of solidarity may often require pastoral

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[102] Lassiter, *Recognizing Other Subjects*, 107.
[103] Lassiter, *Recognizing Other Subjects*, 138.

theologians to focus more on direct action than emotional processes. This is not a negation of empathy, but rather an invitation to allow one's empathy to translate into more material interventions in struggles for power.

From the early influences of Smith Jr. in the early 1980s to contemporary work in intercultural pastoral theology, one sees slow but steady transformation of empathy as a boundless tool for justice into one that is deeply limited by subject position and may at times need to be jettisoned altogether. While it is impossible to prove the influence of relational psychoanalytic theory and early feminist pastoral theology upon intercultural pastoral theology, the pattern of scholarly citation in the field of early pastoral theological and Kohutian sources makes it reasonable to infer these are in fact progressive developments, which are all attempting in their own ways to conceptualize empathy in more restricted cultural terms.

Cooper-White on the Practical Ethics of Intersubjective Pastoral Empathy

Though contemporary pastoral theological discourse on empathy remains broad today—due in large part to the ongoing influence of the intercultural pastoral theologians of the prior section—pastoral theologians have almost universally come to agreement on the idea that empathy as a form of social and emotional knowledge is somehow limited. That is, though few pastoral theologians believe empathy is impossible, today they agree with Miller-McLemore's early claim, "There may be boundaries beyond which empathy itself cannot go."[104] What remains less clear, however, is what these boundaries ultimately signal for the practical ethics of empathy within an intersubjective and relational pastoral framework. In other words, pastoral theological interest in empathy emerged largely because of the influences of both Rogerian and

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[104] Miller-McLemore, "The Living Human Web," 21.

Kohutian understandings of empathy's healing and ethical potential, yet few authors have reexamined those origins after the recent consensus regarding empathy's limitations.[105]

One notable exception to this is pastoral theologian Pamela Cooper-White, who has perhaps focused more on the practical ethics of intersubjective pastoral empathy than her contemporaries. Though Cooper-White shares many convictions about empathy with the broader fields of pastoral care and theology, she nonetheless offers a unique vision of the ethics of empathy, where the greatest ethical potential for empathy is in allowing "room for chaos" and not knowing. For this reason, Cooper-White's work deserves sustained attention in plotting the trajectory of empathy within pastoral theology.

In her 2004 *Shared Wisdom: Use of the Self in Pastoral Care and Counseling*, Cooper-White details—and subtly bemoans—the dominant influence of Rogerian client-centered therapy in the fields of pastoral care and counseling. Pointing particularly to Howard Clinebell's highly consequential dissemination of Rogerian theory to a generation of pastoral caregivers in his *Basic Types of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, Cooper-White argues that client-centered approaches largely prevented pastoral caregivers from "delving into childhood roots of present difficulties."[106] Said otherwise, her concern with Rogerian understandings of empathy is not that it valued persons too much, but rather that it neglected the richer depth and detail that psychoanalytic theory potentially offers in understanding suffering and offering care.

For this reason, Cooper-White focuses extensively on the function of countertransference as a subjective resource for pastoral counselors to "come to a deeper, more empathic appreciation of the other and be more open to the other's own thoughts, feelings, insights, and

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[105] Perhaps the most notable exceptions to this are Crumpton and Sheppard, who offer rather trenchant theoretical critiques of Kohut for failing to account for race and culture in his account of vicarious introspection.

[106] Cooper-White, *Shared Wisdom*, 29.

hopes for growth and healing."[107] Working at the intersections of a relational psychoanalytic, intersubjective, and feminist pastoral theological framework, Cooper-White argues that empathic caregiving is conditioned not only by countertransference, but also that it is shaped by one's social location. She argues,

> Race, gender, class, sexual orientation, physical ability, age, and other demographic factors that spell oppression for some and privilege for others must be considered in any empathic understanding of another's life situation. […] A consideration of the intersubjective relationship must include sensitivity to the social location of the other, with a profound respect for difference. This approach goes far beyond "tolerance" toward a genuine appreciation for difference and openness to learning from the other. Genuine empathy does not only operate out of commonality, but out of a capacity to vicariously imagine oneself into the different perspective of the other, with reverence. The proper stance of pastoral care is always "take off your shoes; you stand on holy ground." The intersubjective space created between two persons in the pastoral relationship is sacred space. We enter with awe, with fear and trembling.[108]

Writing from the vantage point of a straight white woman,[109] Cooper-White thus shares the consensus that empathy in pastoral theology is limited and conditioned by the structure of subject position. However, unlike scholars such as Smith Jr. who contend that common experiences of oppression provide the more universal structure upon which to build recognition and empathy, Cooper-White pairs Kohutian vicarious introspection with an attitude of reverence for difference. It is not that empathy cannot operate from commonality, she clarifies. Rather, Cooper-White argues that a truly intersubjective account of empathy must include the radicality of encountering difference through vicarious introspection with a deferential spirit of taking the other as sacred; empathy really does mean an encounter with others beyond mere sameness. She clarifies this position in an endnote to *Shared Wisdom*: "I have engaged in 'vicarious introspection' to the extent that is possible, but true to my own constructivist position, I am aware that one can never

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[107] Cooper-White, *Shared Wisdom*, vii.
[108] Cooper-White, *Shared Wisdom*, 129
[109] In today's parlance, it is important to add the predicate, "cisgender."

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fully represent the experiences of another, particularly one outside one's own social location."[110] For Cooper-White, the limitations of empathy do not mean that vicarious introspection is inherently violent toward others and difference. Instead, understanding the limits of social location upon empathy means that we must relentlessly remind ourselves that our vicarious social knowledge of those outside of our social location is always an imperfect representation. This is what it means to enter the psychic and spiritual experience of another with a sense of fear and trembling.

Yet between Cooper-White's ability to connect Kohutian vicarious introspection to her eventual attitude of empathic reverence and awe at the other is not immediately obvious. To understand this, it is important to chart in greater detail both how Cooper-White's intersubjective pastoral theological approach parallels Kohutian empathy and also where she perhaps departs from him. Though she does not hide the influence of Kohutian empathy on her work, Cooper-White's theory of empathy parallels Kohut's in at least four significant ways.

First and least controversially, Cooper-White shares with Kohut the conviction that empathy is the foundational tool upon which psychotherapeutic practice is possible. In a similar fashion to Kohut's contention that empathy is the foundational tool for all psychoanalytic discourse, Cooper-White argues that "[t]he therapist's reliability—devotion to empathic listening—is the foundation of trust upon which all fruitful therapy is built."[111] It is true that this insight is unique neither to Kohut nor to Cooper-White, and in fact may align more closely with Rogers than Kohut.[112] Nonetheless, it is a preliminary point of agreement.

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[110] Cooper-White, *Shared Wisdom*, 216n6.

[111] Pamela Cooper-White, *Many Voices: Pastoral Psychotherapy in Relational and Theological Perspective* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 142.

[112] In fact, elsewhere Cooper-White connects this uncontroversial position more explicitly to Rogerian unconditional positive regard than to vicarious introspection. In *Many Voices* she writes, "The foundation for all effective therapeutic work is empathy. Rather than a classical analytical 'blank screen,' it is important for the therapist to be warm and genuine and to have 'unconditional positive regard' for the patient (though not necessarily

However, Cooper-White departs drastically from a Rogerian understanding of empathy in her second point of alignment with Kohut. In her more recent *Many Voices: Pastoral Psychotherapy in Relational and Theological Perspective*, she argues that empathy "in and of itself is not enough to effect healing."[113] Borrowing here broadly from the insights of relational psychoanalysts such as Michael Basch and Melanie Klein, Cooper-White aligns herself more firmly with a post-Rogerian understanding that the "psychodynamic approach requires the therapist to observe the process that is occurring between therapist and patient and to act as midwife to the patient's growing insights about why his or her relationship might be unfolding as it is."[114] That is, Cooper-White agrees with Kohut's assertion that empathy's role in analytic healing is primarily through its ability to pave the way for interpretation in analysis, which in turn allows therapists to participate in the analysand's process of building self structure after narcissistic wounding.

Cooper-White's third point of alignment with Kohut is perhaps the most contentious precisely because it is a parallel of contradiction. Namely, after advocating for a deromanticized vision of empathy, both Kohut and Cooper-White partially rescind their claim that empathy does not heal by itself, and they do this for identical reasons. As discussed in chapter two, near the end of his life Kohut felt that he had to, "unfortunately, add that empathy per se, the mere presence of empathy, has also a beneficial, in a broad sense, a therapeutic effect—both in the clinical setting and in human life in general."[115] The reason for this, which he claims in no way undermines his previous claims, is that he may have understated how the mere act of being recognized may itself

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for everything the patient says or does). The therapist offers an honest, deeply human presence. In this sense, Carl Rogers's view of empathic relationship is the basis for therapy" (185).

[113] Cooper-White, *Many Voices*, 189.

[114] Cooper-White, *Many Voices*, 189.

[115] Heinz Kohut, "Introspection, Empathy, and the Semi-Circle of Mental Health," in *The Search for the Self: Selected Writings of Heinz Kohut: 1978-1981, Volume 4*, ed. Paul H. Ornstein (New York: International Universities Press, 1978), 544.

contribute to the building of self structure—particularly for those with profound narcissistic wounding. In at least two moments in her corpus, Cooper-White offers precisely the same caveat to her prior claim that Kohut did.[116] Most notably in *Shared Wisdom*, she observes that "empathy is often experienced as profoundly beneficial to patients—not because they feel warmly loved and reparented, but because they feel recognized and understood."[117] Like Kohut, Cooper-White believes that even a deromanticized understanding of empathy as vicarious introspection is ultimately predicated on an act of recognition of the other. While those who have their worth and dignity constantly recognized by their social and cultural world may not find this mere act of recognition beneficial, Cooper-White shares with Kohut the appreciation that many persons will find this therapeutic—and not because they feel "warmly loved."

There is, however, a fourth and final point of connection between Cooper-White and Kohut, which is the most ethically significant for Cooper-White's turn to a more sacred pastoral theological understanding of empathy. Like Kohut, Cooper-White does not allow the limits of empathy to breed complacency in knowing the other and oneself. For both of them, the fact that vicarious introspection is limited by subject position and the drives does not license us to become fatalistic in the ethical potential of our empathy to heal. Rather, both view empathy as a capacity to be broadened, specifically so that we may grow in our freedom to know ourselves and care for others. Kohut's greatest expression of this is his formative claim that through empathy we may ultimately arrive at "a wider and more vivid experience of freedom."[118] That is, though we may try to use empathy to understand what freedom is, Kohut insists that empathy reaches its

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[116] See Pamela Cooper-White and Michael Cooper-White, *Exploring Practices of Ministry* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 79. The less significant moment comes in a co-authored text with Michael Cooper-White targeted for a ministry audience, where Cooper-White offers a near perfect inversion of her earlier claim, writing, "The first and foremost goal of listening is empathy. And empathy is healing in and of itself."

[117] Cooper-White, *Shared Wisdom*, 178.

[118] Heinz Kohut, "Introspection, Empathy, and Psychoanalysis: An Examination of the Relationship between Mode of Observation and Theory," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 7 (1959): 481.

methodological limit at freedom itself, and therefore can only grant us a greater experience—not theoretical mastery—of freedom.

Though Cooper-White does not cite Kohut specifically on this point, she nonetheless echoes this same conviction about freedom at several moments in her corpus. In *Many Voices*, she lays the groundwork for this claim by naming the challenge of cultural in-group recognition as it pertains to increasing our empathy, and that "[a]s members of a culture are exposed to other cultures and worldviews, the capacity for empathy and mutual perspective taking increases, as well as the capacity to apply critical thinking to one's own cultural norms and values."[119] Similar to McGarrah Sharp, Cooper-White views empathy as an intercultural capacity that "is never finished but continues to increase in depth and complexity over the lifespan."[120] In this regard, Cooper-White again represents a relatively consensus position among contemporary intercultural pastoral theologians.

Yet while many feminist theorists such as Benjamin ridicule the concept of "freedom" as an individualist and patriarchal fantasy, Cooper-White makes it clear that she both understands and agrees with Kohut's conviction that empathy can lead to a greater sense of freedom. To be clear, this does not mean a fully unrestricted freedom, as if we are striving for a philosophical view from nowhere. Offering a more concrete example of this freedom than Kohut ever provided, Cooper-White explains,

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[119] Cooper-White, *Many Voices*, 48. See also Pamela Cooper-White, *Braided Selves: Collected Essays on Multiplicity, God, and Persons* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 58-59. Cooper-White makes this same claim in *Braided Selves*, writing, "At least two factors seem to be essential in allowing an individual to develop a critical stance toward his or her own cultural surround: exposure to other cultures and worldviews, and a capacity for empathy and mutual perspective taking. First is the exposure to alternative cultures, which present alternative 'language games' and ways of understanding one's own embedded world view. One cannot take the perspective of another person, another worldview, without coming into meaningful contact with the other. The more insulated an individual is from other national, ethnic, and linguistic communities, the less opportunity there is to place one's own assumptions into a critical or even self-reflective light."

[120] Cooper-White, *Braided Selves*, 47.

All psychodynamic work is indebted to Freud's basic belief that insight brings healing. The task of the depth therapeutic process is bringing the unconscious to consciousness. As I have told patients from time to time: "When you remember your childhood and allow yourself to know what you haven't known about the pain, then you will find that you can allow yourself to know what you need to know about the pain now. And when that happens, you will have the pain. The pain will no longer 'have' you. You will have freedom to decide what you want do to when you are feeling pain, rather than letting the pain automatically dictate what you do.[121]

The idea of freedom is both the most mundane and the most hopeful for Cooper-White. For the psychic determinist, the idea of freedom may seem like the most ambitious and speculative concept one could ever put forward—that we are somehow exceptions to an otherwise deterministic universe. However, Cooper-White understands freedom as also something simpler: being aware enough of the structure of one's own experience to not let them neurotically determine one's behavior. Said otherwise, because all psychological insight is derived either through introspection or vicarious introspection, greater self-awareness to combat unexpected neurotic or compulsive behavior is always either introspectively or empathically derived. To this Cooper-White adds that, in a more decidedly religious setting, "when unexpected enactments and rituals do inevitably occur, the exploration of their meaning—far more than the gratification of desires of the moment, even those expressed in religious form—will contribute most fruitfully to the patient's long-term spiritual goals of expanded awareness, freedom, and peace."[122] This means not only that our own capacity for greater freedom is enabled by empathy, but also that our ability to help others become less entrenched in harmful behavior is made possible by using empathy to help them become more attuned to their own pain. Though dramatic, Cooper-White is in effect claiming that the only chance of breaking cycles of abuse and generational violence is through either empathy or introspection.

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[121] Cooper-White, *Many Voices*, 141-142.
[122] Cooper-White, *Many Voices*, 177.

It must be stressed at this juncture that Cooper-White's position on the prospect of freedom is not as controversial as it may seem. The reason why empathy and introspection are necessary for building toward a wider and more vivid experience of freedom is because all psychological insight travels through either introspection or vicarious introspection. Though it makes their shared claim no less true, Kohut and Cooper-White's conviction on the potential freedom enabled by empathy is perhaps more tautological than speculative: Freedom is made possible through psychological insight into pain and unconscious desire, which would otherwise over-determine one's behavior; psychoanalysis as a field is defined by vicarious introspection as its foundational tool, which means that all psychological insight and self-awareness is either introspective or empathic; therefore, freedom is made possible by empathy.

However, for as much as she seems to agree with Kohut on the prospect of empathy in cultivating freedom, Cooper-White concludes her most substantive contribution to pastoral theological anthropology in perhaps the most drastically different ethical direction imaginable, which indeed departs radically from Kohut: chaos, kenosis, and not knowing. However, she is resolute that this direction is not a departure or a betrayal of her rigorous clinical sensibilities on empathy. Cooper-White argues that there are two ways to understand how pastoral psychotherapy is done. First is to reference analytic technique in therapeutic practice, to which she is tirelessly committed. But the second, she suggests, is "perhaps most important… which goes beyond specific techniques to an overarching commitment to the quality of the therapeutic relationship itself. This attitude is one of openness, a therapeutic willingness to be confused awhile, to not-know, and the courage to allow room for chaos, which is often a necessary precursor to change."[123] That is, for Cooper-White, the possibility of ethical therapeutic change

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[123] Cooper-White, *Many Voices*, 239.

in pastoral care is predicted more by one's willingness to let go of the desire for social and

vicarious knowledge of the psychic lives of others than anything else—empathy included.

Indeed, it is difficult to stress just how chaotic and paradoxical the closing chapter of

Many Voices becomes—this description not intended pejoratively. Among her most unapologetic

formulations of this position is Cooper-White's contention, "This is perhaps the paradoxical

value of deeply critical, theoretical thinking that it finally leads to the recognition of its own

limits and a lifting of one's gaze past books and papers and theories toward the horizon of that

which, inevitably, appears in the distance as a shimmering Unknown."[124] It is for this reason that

Cooper-White embraces what she fully acknowledges as a paradoxical conclusion for the task

and purpose of pastoral theology, psychotherapy, and empathy more specifically. She declares,

> Therapy itself is finally a process of kenosis. We empty ourselves of all presumptions and presumptuousness, in order to enter a Trinitarian "third space" of metaphorical play and imagination. Empathy itself is kenosis. It is the self-emptying that relinquishes the need to "grasp" wisdom or show off one's knowledge, inviting both therapist and patient into an intersubjective realm of exploration. In this intersubjective space, encapsulated and at times harmful fantasies and projections can be recognized and put in perspective, as mutual understanding can be tried on, practiced, and finally internalized as a habitus that is at once psychological, spiritual, and deeply ethical.[125]

Cooper-White's metaphorical use of kenosis or self-emptying is an affirmation of the

paradoxical and aporetic quality of empathy in pastoral theology. Empathy is best understood as

vicarious introspection, she claims, yet the highest expression of empathy within an

intersubjective pastoral theological framework is precisely to cease in this impulse to grasp

others. Though this may seem like a self-defeating position, there is a clear ethical and

theoretical reasoning to her claim. Namely, Cooper-White's kenotic claim helps reveal that

empathy is not an ethical end in itself. That is, there is no theological glory to be derived from

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[124] Cooper-White, *Many Voices*, 241.
[125] Cooper-White, *Many Voices*, 242.

the mere act of vicariously introspecting into the life of another. This is not to suggest that therapy and empathy are theologically or ethically useless. It remains true that empathy is the foundation for therapeutic healing, and that empathy subsequently offers social recognition to persons who have felt disenfranchised. But, in each of these settings, empathy at its best is in service of the theological dignity of others. As the likes of Hartman, Cooper-White, and even Kohut argue, it is not a given that empathy achieve this dignity; empathy can be used as much for harm as for care. There is no circumventing the fact that empathy as a form of social epistemology invariably includes a "grasping" of another, even if with the most benevolent and ethical of intentions. For Cooper-White to declare that therapy and empathy are kenosis is not to demand a form of self-sacrifice, but rather to invite us into a space of therapeutic exploration where our overriding will to know the other does not sacrifice any selves involved.

Without reading her carefully, one might infer from Cooper-White's reverential descriptions of empathy that she identifies with a Rogerian or even pre-Rogerian approach, perhaps even falling prey to the "pseudo-scientific mystical psychology" that Kohut warned about in 1959.[126] Though she is deliberate in not to build a strawman of Rogers,[127] Cooper-White makes it abundantly clear that her sacred understanding of intersubjective pastoral empathy is driven by a highly precise psychoanalytic vision of vicarious introspection emerging from Kohut. In *Shared Wisdom*, she goes so far as to say that her "study calls for a deromanticization of the meaning of the term empathy and a recognition, or recuperation, of its diagnostic usefulness, in the Kohutian sense, in guiding the therapist to understand enactments as they

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[126] Kohut, "Introspection, Empathy, and Psychoanalysis," 466.

[127] In *Many Voices*, Cooper-White offers a modest defense of Rogers against what she sees as unfair mischaracterizations of his work as being too warm and fuzzy. She claims, "Construing empathy as warmth and nurture is actually a misreading of Rogers himself. Being empathic and being nice are not the same thing" (188).

occur."[128] Perhaps more than other pastoral theologians and psychotherapists, Cooper-White makes it explicit how much she identifies with "relational theorists" and the "relational paradigm in contemporary psychoanalysis," claiming that "rigorous attention to ethics is not diminished by the new paradigm. If anything, the new appreciation of intersubjectivity requires an even greater attention to ethical integrity on the part of the helper."[129] We arrive at an attitude of reverence not by blurring the boundaries of empathy, but rather by becoming more precise in our understanding of how vicarious introspection relates to difference, and examining that relationship with great scrutiny.

Cooper-White's turn to kenosis is, unquestionably, the distinctively theological element to her contribution on empathy, where her insights are not reducible merely to the relational psychoanalytic framework to which she is indebted. It is indeed radical, though it should be noted that she is far from the first pastoral theologian to look to kenosis to help us understand the theological and ethical task of pastoral theology. Over three decades ago, Herbert Anderson contended that "all care—whether human or divine—moves from emptying to embodying, and so to empathy."[130] Nearly a decade after that, Marie McCarthy turned to God's "self-emptying" as an incarnational metaphor for "both the possibilities and the limits of empathy."[131] And, in 1997, Emmanuel Lartey challenged that "[p]astoral care needs to go through a process of kenosis," adding that "it is in such self-emptying that [pastoral care's] true being-in-the-world may be realized."[132] In short, Cooper-White's invocation of kenosis and chaos may not be as

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[128] Cooper-White, *Shared Wisdom*, 174.
[129] Cooper-White, *Shared Wisdom*, 58. Elsewhere in the same text, Cooper-White claims, "The relational paradigm in contemporary psychoanalysis offers a rich mine of new understandings of self and other, toward a more complex understanding of the use of the self in pastoral care and counseling" (34).
[130] Anderson, "Incarnation and Pastoral Care," 246.
[131] McCarthy, "Empathy: A Bridge Between," 128.
[132] Lartey, *In Living Color*, 175; 176.

heterodox to the history of pastoral theology as one might originally think, or even as groundbreaking in its description of empathy more specifically.

Yet Cooper-White, more than anyone before her, helps to signal the fact that the ethical potential of empathy in pastoral theology may be fundamentally paradoxical. More significantly, she helps to signal the possibility that this paradox is not a pseudo-scientific departure from the methodological confines of psychoanalysis, but rather a necessary and logical conclusion of empathy taken to its most radical ethical potential. Though Cooper-White does not have the final word on empathy for pastoral care and theology, it is safe to say that she does extend vicarious introspection to an important limit, one which commands us to re-evaluate its origin in Kohut. In a rather logical fashion, Cooper-White has revealed how the most ethical expression of empathy is simultaneously deromanticized and kenotic. Though empathy is fundamentally about social knowledge of others, empathy must be defined by its willingness to not know and to allow room for chaos.[133] This is, in a certain sense, closer to a Kantian antinomy than a contradiction—where taking a concept to its logical conclusion affirms both itself and its antithesis.

Conclusion and Summary

Like with relational psychoanalysis, one finds that pastoral theology today remains conflicted over the ethical potential and practice of empathy. While the transition from a more Rogerian to a more Kohutian understanding of empathy as vicarious introspection was pivotal in the development of feminist and intercultural pastoral theology's critical assessments of empathy's limitation by subject position, there is still disagreement over how empathy ethically

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[133] Cooper-White, *Many Voices*, 242. Cooper-White implores, "We are called as pastoral psychotherapists to embrace the chaos of creation, including the chaos of both our own and our patients' 'ring-streaked, specked and spotted' inner worlds. Like Anselm, we embrace the mystery of God and ourselves as a multiplicity of 'nescio quids,' or 'I know not whats,' even as we discern certain cloudlike forms in the motion of the dance itself."

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relates to difference. Though few pastoral theologians contend that empathy is impossible, some contend that there are universal experiences such as oppression that create a potential bond for empathy, others contend that empathy necessarily involves an imperfect representation of a different psychic experience, while others still believe the highest ethical potential of empathy is found in its kenotic self-emptying.

I began this chapter by surveying the earliest uses of empathy in pastoral theology, noting the first gradual and then sudden shift from a Rogerian to a Kohutian framework for understanding empathy's ethical and healing potential in pastoral care. Of particular interest was the fact that empathy went from being a completely undiscussed practice in pastoral care to being described as the "essence" of pastoral psychotherapy in just over three decades. I then followed the pivotal shift in pastoral theology with the advent of feminist and relational critiques of individualism in the early 1990s, which was led largely but not exclusively by the work of Miller-McLemore and McCarthy. Chief among their contributions to research in empathy was the contention that empathy is limited in meaningful ways by subject positionality in pastoral care and theology. I turned then to innovations in intercultural pastoral theology around empathy stemming from the prescient work of Smith Jr, through to the contributions of Lartey, Sheppard, Crumpton, McGarrah Sharp, and Lassiter. Specifically, these authors broadly affirmed the contention that empathy is an intercultural practice conditioned by raced and gendered subjectivity, but one with profound ethical potential for recognition and reconciliation, which we can grow with time and labor. Lastly, this chapter turned in a more sustained fashion to the intersubjective pastoral theology of Cooper-White, who both returned more precisely to empathy's Kohutian foundations and pushed pastoral theological accounts of empathy to its

logical conclusion as a form of kenosis, where chaos and not knowing are the highest ethical expressions of empathy.

Cooper-White's research in particular brings pastoral theology on empathy nearly to its present moment. However, her explicitly paradoxical theological account of empathy does not leave practitioners in relational psychoanalysis or pastoral psychotherapy with a clear sense of empathy's ethical potential—especially in the face of the social and political ills that this dissertation sought to respond to at its outset.

In the next and final chapter, this dissertation will turn in a more explicit fashion to the normative ethical foundations for which empathy may ultimately be a resource in pastoral theological anthropology. In other words, to make a clearer judgment on the ethical potential of empathy for justice-oriented pastoral care, one must scrutinize what the ethical ends of caregiving are more closely. Moreover, one must examine them in closer proximity to the enduring phenomenological problem of social recognition that has been ubiquitous though often tacit in this project thus far. The scholarly intention of this fourth chapter has been to chart the ways that empathy has been used as an ethical resource in intercultural and intersubjective pastoral theology. The final chapter will be to re-evaluate whether these uses remain viable under closer phenomenological scrutiny of empathy and the problem of recognition.

THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL PROBLEM OF RECOGNITION FOR EMPATHY IN

PASTORAL THEOLOGY

Introduction

In the first chapter of this dissertation, I identified the ethical potential of empathy in responding to the suffering of others. In the following three chapters, I illustrated in greater detail how controversial of a prospect this truly is. Since its reception into psychoanalytic and theological contexts, empathy has been at the center of a subtle though substantive battle among scholars over what it is, what it can accomplish, and whether it respects the methodological boundaries of the disciplines that use it. For clarity's sake, a brief recapitulation of the major claims made in these theoretical disagreements may help bring the debate into greater focus.

For Sigmund Freud, empathy does not fit within the boundaries of psychoanalysis. Yet, for Heinz Kohut, empathy as vicarious introspection is the foundational tool that defines psychoanalysis and makes healing and freedom possible. For relational psychoanalysts such as Jessica Benjamin, vicarious introspection conceals delusional ideals of individualism and the male fantasy of unfettered autonomy. Likewise for critical race theorists such as Saidiya Hartman, empathy is a precarious phenomenon always marked by an obliteration of otherness. Yet for other relational analysts such as Donna Orange, empathy remains a viable contextual form of emotional understanding and availability. For early pastoral counselors such as Carrol Wise, empathy and "sentimental sympathy" were viewed pejoratively in the same way that Freud viewed countertransference. Yet for pastoral counselors such as Chris Schlauch in the 1980's, empathy became the essence of pastoral psychotherapy. For feminist pastoral theologians such as

Miller-McLemore, empathy must be tempered with the appreciation that there are boundaries beyond which it cannot go. For intercultural pastoral theologians such as Archie Smith Jr. and Emmanuel Lartey, empathy can unite people around universal experiences of oppression. For intersubjective pastoral theologians such as Pamela Cooper-White, empathy as a form of kenosis becomes among the highest expressions of ethical care for others.

As I have surveyed this literature, I have been careful neither to over-narrate nor to make broad inferences about those who champion and those who critique empathy as an ethical resource for caregiving. As the bird's-eye view of the major figures I just offered makes clear, practitioners and theorists give different reasons for either favoring or opposing the ethical potential of empathy. With rare exception, few theorists are unequivocally against or in favor of the power of empathy. However, in this final chapter I close with a more focused analysis of how I view the phenomenological problems of empathy and recognition as ultimately undergirding the tension that is at the heart of this controversy. More specifically, I argue that empathy in pastoral theology is aporetic insofar as it both demands and is repulsed by the prospect of freedom that Kohut originally proposed. By aporia, I do not intend that empathy is inherently contradictory or nonsensical; rather, it is aporetic insofar as divergent and equally coherent modes of inquiry and practice emerge from it, yet which create an impasse because they oppose one another.[1] Justifying this claim requires that I examine more carefully how the aporia of

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[1] This use of aporia is influenced both by Jacques Derrida's discussion in *Aporias*, and Kant's description of the "antinomies" in both the *Critique of Pure Reason* and *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*. For Derrida, an aporia is distinct from a problem, insofar as it creates an impasse of "not knowing where to go." He adds, "There, in sum, in this place of aporia, *there is no longer any problem*. Not that, alas or fortunately, the solutions have been given, but because one could no longer even find a problem that would constitute itself and that one would keep in front of oneself, as a presentable object or project, as a protective representative or a prosthetic substitute, as some kind of border still to cross or behind which to protect oneself" (*Aporias*, trans. Thomas Dutoit [Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 12). For Kant, the description of the antionomies vis-à-vis pure reason signals concepts that, when considered carefully, lead to contradicting conclusions. For him, this means that with a concept (e.g. God), we have reached the limits of reason, and must retreat. He writes, "the antinomy of pure reason will put before our eyes the transcendental principles of an alleged pure (rational) cosmology, yet not in order to find it valid and to

empathic freedom emerges from the phenomenological problems of empathy and recognition, and detailing how this aporia presents itself as an ideological dilemma for pastoral theological anthropology.

Toward this end, this chapter first reconsiders pastoral theology's initial ethical interest in the prospect of empathy by revisiting Kohut's concept of empathic freedom, and clarifying how Kohut's concept of freedom stands in contrast to the enduring legacy of Freud's psychic determinism. Because Kohut engages neither the theological or phenomenological problems of empathy and social recognition that continue to trouble his theory, in the second section I turn to the work of theologian Edward Farley as a resource for connecting the issue of empathic freedom more explicitly to a pastoral theological anthropological understanding of ethical relation. To more carefully contextualize Farley's contribution and the significance of the phenomenological problems of empathy and social recognition, in the following two sections I trace Farley's analysis to its textual origin in the work of phenomenologists Edmund Husserl and Emmanuel Levinas. Building from these more philosophical expositions, I argue that, in tandem with one another, the works of Husserl and Levinas underscore how a closer examination of the phenomenological problems of empathy and social recognition only reveal them to be more challenging to untangle, precisely because they push the methods of pastoral care and theology to their limits. I contend that the tensions between pastoral care and theology's normative ethical commitments to compassionately alleviate marginalized suffering presents an aporia, where the Kohutian idea of empathic freedom is both a necessary tool for addressing marginalized

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appropriate it, but rather, as is already indicated by terming it a contradiction of reason, in order to display it in its dazzling but false plausibility a as an idea that cannot be made to agree with appearances" (*The Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. & ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood [New York; Cambridge University Press, 1998], B435). See also Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, trans. and ed. Gary Hatfield (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

suffering and an affront to theories of psychic difference. Stepping back from this argument, I temper my claims by addressing three substantive critiques of my own analysis: that I overstate the connection between freedom and empathy; that I create a false dilemma between cultivating freedom and honoring subject positionality; that I frame the ethics of empathy in pastoral care too strongly around the affect of the privileged, and not the oppressed. In responding to these objections, I outline the consequences of the phenomenological problem of recognition for empathy in pastoral theology by returning to the case study that set this project in motion, and reinterpret my ethical shortcomings as a pastoral caregiver along those lines. Lastly, I briefly outline two potential interpretive and practical strategies for pastoral theology as it continues to wrestle with the ethics of empathy.

Thus, my closing argument is that the idea of empathy's freedom is both why people believe it can help in ethical caregiving situations, and is why so many people have rejected empathy as functionally reducible to in-group recognition. That is, the phenomenological problem of recognition for empathy in pastoral theology is that for empathy to be useful in broadening ethical consciousness, it must be capable of vicariously introspecting into the psychic lives and lived experiences of those we do not already recognize. As innocuous as this prospect may seem, hidden within it is the ideal of a theological anthropology that resists psychic determinism. Freedom here is not an unfettered view from nowhere, but rather the belief that our ethical consciousness is not always pre-determined by in-group recognition. This itself is enough to divide practitioners and theorists. Moreover, it is not something that is easily resolved.

Empathy after Intersubjective Revisions: Is Kohutian Freedom Still Here?

To offer a final analysis of where empathy stands in contemporary debates around its ethical potential and limits, revisiting Kohut's original thesis regarding empathy as vicarious

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introspection, even if momentarily, will be important. Though chapters two and three partially addressed Kohut's paradox of freedom, the matter of what is entailed in the freedom and "expanded scope" of empathy in self psychology remains undertheorized—particularly after the developments in psychoanalytic theory following his death. That is, how exactly did Kohut view the relation of empathy to freedom? Perhaps more importantly, how did that specific relation inform his understanding of freedom within the lineage of psychic determinism within psychoanalytic theory and practice? Lastly, have the theoretical developments of recent decades conserved, modified, or negated this concept of freedom?

One incontrovertible observation about Kohut's attitude toward freedom is that he is far more comfortable with the prospect of freedom, free choice, and free will than Freud ever was. In his 1959 "Introspection, Empathy, and Psychoanalysis," Kohut named explicitly that the psychoanalytic method invariably reaches theoretical limits in its analysis of experience. That is, psychoanalysis can break down experience into very small theoretical units such as neuroses and drives, but its analysis is never fully totalized. He explains, "As we succeed, however, to reduce [experiential] phenomena psychoanalytically by establishing their motives, we move simultaneously toward the re-establishment of free choice and decision."[2] The irony of the psychoanalytic method, Kohut effectively argues, is that in its attempt to eliminate the opacity of "free choice" as a black box, psychoanalysis can only ever reinforce and solidify the reality of freedom and choice. In this sense, freedom for Kohut is not a philosophical ideal of the human as a "writing-tablet" or *Tabula Rasa* in the Aristotelean or Lockean meanings.[3] Rather, freedom is

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[2] Heinz Kohut, "Introspection, Empathy, and Psychoanalysis: An Examination of the Relationship between Mode of Observation and Theory," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 7 (1959): 481.

[3] Aristotle, "On the Soul," in *The Complete Works of Aristotle, Volume One*, trans. J. A. Smith, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 429b30 – 430a2. This and all subsequent citations refer to the standardized Bekker pagination. In Smith's translation, the more classically known "writing-tablet" is translated as "writing-table." John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (New York:

first and foremost a limit concept. It refers to the realm of human thought and action that cannot be reduced to pre-existing social, psychic, and ethical consciousness.

This understanding of freedom as a negative or limit concept is central for understanding just what Kohut originally intended in describing vicarious introspection's potential and limitations. The punchline for Kohutian freedom is this: as the fundamental tool of psychoanalysis, empathy ostensible seeks to reduce experience into more comprehensible psychoanalytic components (i.e., psychological understanding); yet, in so doing, empathy paradoxically makes all persons less beholden to those components as psychically determining our experience. Put in more concrete terms, we may use empathy and introspection to help us understand our seemingly irrational thoughts, behaviors, biases, and neuroses. But, if we actually succeed in empathically understanding these dynamics in our lives, we have not disabused ourselves of the illusion of freedom. Rather, we have cultivated greater awareness of the forces that work to undermine our freedom.

To better illustrate this, consider Kohutian empathy through the metaphor of a flashlight. If we view empathy as an epistemological tool like a flashlight, and freedom like a peripheral darkness waiting to be illuminated and eliminated by the theoretical apparatuses of empathy, then we find two important realizations about freedom. First, we find with our empathic flashlight that we simply can never eliminate all of the opacity. Even the brightest light and the most granular psychoanalytic theory will not be able to illuminate the cracks in the floorboard of our consciousness. This is what Kohut means for psychoanalysis to hit theoretical limits at free choice, and for empathy and introspection as its foundation tools to be the root cause of this limitation. Empathy and psychoanalysis are ultimately not "universal acids" that consume

everything in their path, as some philosophers of science like to describe their own theories.[4] They can illuminate a lot, but not everything.

The second insight gleaned from the metaphor of the empathic flashlight is less obvious. The greatest surprise of empathic freedom is not that the darkness magically pushes back and reasserts itself against the light of empathy; rather, we find that freedom reemerges with a vengeance precisely in that—despite the fact that illuminating territory means reducing them to psychoanalytic concepts—these now illuminated territories are suddenly less psychically determining. In other words, for years we may have been tripping in the dark over an unidentified object in the hallway; once we introspectively or empathically turn on the light and discover what was there all along (e.g., a concrete statue; a transferential attachment issue stemming from an alcoholic parent), we are now better suited to either walk around it or, in rare cases, move it entirely. While it is of course true that the psychoanalytic flashlight is what ultimately helped us illuminate the opacity, this does not mean that our attitude or approach to what has become illuminated remains unchanged. The purpose of psychoanalytic empathy is not so that one can continue bludgeoning one's foot off of a hallway statue in the brightness of day; the purpose of empathy is to help you to step around it and stop wounding yourself, and possibly others.

From this vantage point, Kohut's point about freedom is less controversial than it may initially appear, particularly to those for whom the concept of freedom has negative philosophical associations.[5] Moreover, this clarifying insight is essential for understanding the

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[4] See Daniel C. Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life* (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 63. Dennett likens evolutionary theory and the Darwinism that Freud would eventually adopt to a "universal acid: it eats through just about every traditional concept, and leaves in its wake a revolutionized world-view, with most of the old landmarks still recognizable, but transformed in fundamental ways."

[5] See, for example, Jessica Benjamin, *Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), 188.

continuity of Kohut's remarks about empathic freedom from his earliest remarks on empathy to his posthumously published work.

Bridging this early and later work, Kohut offers two particularly salient comments on the connection of empathy to freedom, which are worth returning to. First, in 1959 in his "Introspection, Empathy, and Psychoanalysis," Kohut describes the "re-establishment of free choice and decision" referenced above. However, he also makes the perhaps more significant claim, "[F]or all that the persistent recovery of unconscious motivations and of rationalizations leads to is, under favorable circumstances, a wider and more vivid experience of freedom."[6] Second, in his posthumously published monograph *How Does Analysis Cure?*, Kohut makes a related though differently-phrase claim,

> [T]he greater relaxation of the self psychologist, his greater freedom to respond with deeply reverberating understanding and resonant emotionality, and the generally calmer and friendlier atmosphere of self psychological treatment-these developments do not rest on the self psychologist's increased use of empathy, on the fact that he is "more empathic" than his non-self psychological colleagues. They rest instead on the expanded scope of empathy that is the product of the self psychologist's expanded theoretical understanding.[7]

Juxtaposing these early and late remarks, one finds that where in 1959 Kohut describes the freedom of empathy as a "wider and more vivid experience," in 1984 Kohut describes it as an "expanded scope of empathy." In both contexts, Kohut makes it clear that the theoretical tools of self psychology are themselves largely to credit for this greater freedom. That is, Kohut is careful to anticipate and defuse the misunderstanding that self psychologists are somehow more empathic in the sense of being more compassionate or even deliberate in their empathy. His point, more pedestrianly, is that self psychology has a better theoretical toolset than conventional

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[6] Kohut, "Introspection, Empathy, and Psychoanalysis," 481.
[7] Heinz Kohut, *How Does Analysis Cure?*, ed. Arnold Goldberg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 82.

drive-theory psychoanalysis, which in effect means that it is able to vicariously introspect with greater efficacy.

Yet to reduce Kohut's claim about freedom to a mere matter of self psychology's theoretical superiority is to neglect the way that empathy grows and enables itself within his framework. It is true that there is a greater and more expansive sense of freedom once one has an improved theoretical toolset to analyze experience. If Kohut is correct about the accuracy of his broader self psychological theory, then this is a clear asset to the durability of his legacy. But limiting freedom in this more academic fashion overlooks the reciprocal way that empathy begets more empathy, which in turn cultivates more stable self structures, and therefore a greater sense of freedom and control over the narcissistic and neurotic impulses that constantly undermine our autonomy. Said otherwise, the "wider and more vivid experience" and "expanded scope" of freedom in empathy is as much about personal autonomy emerging out of self-awareness as it is about a more accurate self-psychological theory; empathic freedom is both a matter of illuminating more with our flashlight, and the greater ability to orient ourselves toward what has been illuminated.

While it is clear that Kohut's vision of empathic freedom is not a completely unfettered freedom that would be socially and philosophically untenable, the fact remains that he does sustain a coherent concept *of* freedom, one which he maintains throughout his career to be central to his project, to healing, and to empathy. Not only has the ideal of freedom been ridiculed by several of the figures surveyed in this dissertation such as Jessica Benjamin,[8] but it is unclear whether or not Kohut's vision of empathy—which rejects Freud's psychic determinism—holds up to the scrutiny of the phenomenological problems of empathy and

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[8] See Benjamin, *Bonds of Love*, 188.

recognition that have been rather dormant in this project thus far. Given the focus of this project on ethical caregiving as it pertains to social recognition, its final challenge is to assess whether or not this ideal of freedom remains coherent enough to accomplish the ethical labor that early psychoanalytic theorists and pastoral theologians once intended for it. In short, what precisely are the looming phenomenological problems of empathy and recognition plaguing this ethical issue, and does empathic freedom in a post-Kohutian intersubjective context still mitigate them? Answering this adequately requires more careful attention to the phenomenological problems of empathy and recognition, and how they inform any viable understanding of ethical freedom in pastoral care and theology.

The Prospect of Phenomenology for Clarifying the Ethics of Empathy in Pastoral Care

Working at the intersections of practical and pastoral theology, phenomenology, and theological anthropology, Edward Farley raises a closely overlapping series of questions in his analysis of the ethical potential of empathy and what he frequently terms the "interhuman" or social sphere of human relation.[9] In an early 1977 essay in *Pastoral Psychology* appropriately titled "Phenomenology and Pastoral Care," he argues that that though "phenomenology is not a panacea" for thinking through the problem of empathic caregiving, "phenomenology offers potential resources for pastoral care" that help clarify important impasses.[10] Despite going to great lengths to stress that he does not believe phenomenology will be a methodological savior to pastoral care, Farley nonetheless claims that phenomenology makes two significant contributions

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[9] See Edward Farley, *Good and Evil: Interpreting a Human Condition* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996), 37. Farley clarifies his definition of the interhuman early in *Good and Evil*, "Because of the multiple ways the terms are now used, the intersubjective, the interpersonal, and the interhuman could be used interchangeably to mean the inclusive sphere of the inter human. In this essay the inter human is the inclusive term but its primary meaning is that of the interpersonal, of which alterity and intersubjectivity are necessary aspects. The intersubjective is the always-already-social reality of the interhuman."

[10] Edward Farley. "Phenomenology and Pastoral Care," *Pastoral Psychology* 26 (1977): 97.

to pastoral care and its analyses of human experience and social ills: "(a) a reflective method by which the essential structure of a subject matter (phenomenon) and the corresponding human act in which it is present are grasped; and (2) [*sic*] the results of the above in a philosophical anthropology that offers illuminations of human sociality (intersubjectivity), language, lived-space, lived-time, and embodiment."[11] In short, Farley's suggestion is that phenomenology offers both a rigorous analysis of consciousness as well as a tightly-reasoned social theory of intersubjective relation, both of which are particularly germane to those seeking to better understand how empathy and recognition function intra-psychically and inter-psychically.

Toward this end, Farley draws particularly heavily on the work of phenomenologists Edmund Husserl and Emmanuel Levinas to develop his social theological anthropology. The simplest explanation for this penchant is that Husserl and Levinas are central figures in classical phenomenology, and developing a social phenomenology in theological context invariably requires Farley to draw on them as resources. However, more central to this turn is the fact that Farley sees Husserl and Levinas as two figure who worked rigorously on the issues of empathy, recognition, and ethics within a specifically phenomenological framework.

Yet surveying Farley's corpus and his use of Husserl and Levinas, it becomes immediately clear that not only is phenomenology not a panacea for the problems of empathy and recognition that plague pastoral care and theology; more accurately, the phenomenological method often only outlines their theoretical and ethical problems in much greater detail. In his more optimistic moments on the utility of phenomenology for pastoral care and theology, Farley explains that by "[f]ocusing on this depth, social, intersubjective structure of the community of faith with the aid of phenomenological modes of reflection, the minister might well discover at

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[11] Farley, "Phenomenology and Pastoral Care," 97. The parenthetical demarcations are Farley's own, including the error in transitioning between letter and Arabic-numeral listing noted above.

least some of the referents that fund the Gospel he or she would interpret in the situation of pastoral care."[12] Insofar as the phenomenological method focuses more narrowly on matters of intersubjective sociality, it may indeed help to parse out what a Gospel-oriented social and ethical engagement with others looks like.

However, far outweighing these optimistic moments in Farley's work are instances of his using phenomenology to problematize the very frameworks from which he, as a theologian, hopes to build a constructive project. In his most sustained theological anthropological work, his 1996 *Good and Evil*, Farley writes explicitly on the myriad issues facing a phenomenological theory of empathy and recognition. When it comes to deploying empathy from a phenomenological vantage point, Farley insists that "our empathetic imagination can only slightly help us to enter the environments of other living things. We really have no idea what it would be like to swim weightlessly in the viscous environment of a bacterium. Limitation, then, is part of what it means to adapt to and depend on a specific environment."[13] Later when it comes to the matter of recognition and how we are to ethically comport ourselves in and through it, he nearly fully writes of its ethical utility for broadening our ethical attention to those around us, arguing, "We can recognize only what we have experienced already. Recognition, in other words, requires some retention of past experience."[14] If one intends to look to Farley as a quick phenomenological resource for resolving the tension at surrounding empathy and recognition's theoretical ambiguity for caregiving, one is bound to be quickly disappointed both by the tragic

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[12] Farley, "Phenomenology and Pastoral Care," 109
[13] Farley, *Good and Evil*, 89.
[14] Farley, *Good and Evil*, 66.

character of much of Farley's writing, as well as the lengthy detail with which he engages his phenomenological sources in Husserl and Levinas.[15]

Yet Farley does succeed rather thoroughly in outlining just what is at stake in the phenomenological problems of empathy and recognition, and how they intersect not only the work of Husserl and Levinas, but also the task of caregiving, human dignity, and cultivating freedom. Focusing specifically on this convergence of concepts, Farley in *Good and Evil* writes,

> We human beings desire confirmation from the other of our integrity and reality. We aspire to approval, respect, and love. And we bitterly resent the other who withholds these acknowledgements and deals with us as if we were not real agents. To use Emmanuel Levinas's concept, we want genuine others to discern in us the face, which is to say, something that evokes from that other a response of compassionate responsibility. This desire is not just for cognitive collaboration but for empathetic and emotional appreciation. It is the aspiration for the affection, empathy, even love of the other. It desires an other who will respond aesthetically and emotionally to the mystery, uniqueness, creativity, and even beauty of the face. This aspiration is for recognition in its fullest sense, a recognition that has the character of felt emotion and carries with it affection and love. In sum, because the interhuman is an interpersonal relation of the face, human agents are not indifferent to whether the other acknowledges their subjectivity in compassionate obligation."[16]

Writing this in 1996, Farley is neither the first nor unique in drawing a connection between empathy, recognition, and matters of personal dignity. But, writing from the vantage point of a pastorally- and practically-minded theological anthropologist, he is perhaps unique in underscoring how the phenomenology of empathy and recognition (emerging from Husserl and Levinas) are vital for understanding a theological and ethical response to the needs and desires of others.

In much of his writing, Farley presumes of his audience an intensive familiarity with Husserl's work on the phenomenology of empathy and Levinas's phenomenological ethics of

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[15] This is not to suggest that Farley is a tragic theologian, or that he venerates tragedy. Rather, it is reasonable to say that he goes to great lengths to problematize naively optimistic theoretical frameworks for wedding constructive theological anthropology to resources in philosophy and the social sciences.

[16] Farley, *Good and Evil*, 104.

recognition. This is regrettable given the fact that much of Farley's social theological

anthropology builds directly upon the history of phenomenology. To better contextualize

Farley's theology of empathy and the enduring viability of Kohut's empathic freedom, one must

first situate the phenomenological problem of empathy as it emerges out of the work of Husserl,

and the phenomenological problem of recognition as it emerges out of Levinas. The following

two sections will take up this task in that order.

Husserl and The Phenomenological Problem of Empathy

Aimed at the very foundations of human experience, Edmund Husserl's rigorous

philosophical project has become the platform for modern phenomenological approaches to

understanding human subjectivity and experience. Picking up largely from the Cartesian and

Kantian philosophical tradition, his systematic investigation of the conditions and attitudes of

intuition, consciousness, and intentionality brought the question of the ego firmly into the 20th

century. Consistent with the Cartesian tradition with which he identifies, Husserl makes it clear

that his aspiration for a transcendental phenomenology[17] is nothing less that "a complete reform

of philosophy, including all the sciences, since the latter are merely dependent members of the

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[17] Husserl's recurrent description of his project as a "transcendental" phenomenology is a reference to the transcendental idealism of Kant, and the pursuit of philosophical system. More specifically, the "transcendent" quality for him refers to the contention that objects in consciousness transcend perception itself. In other words, a transcendental phenomenology focuses on how phenomena appear to consciousness, not merely how objects are immanently present in perception. It is for this reason that, contrary to a popular misconception, phenomenology is not merely a form of close empiricism. Husserl explains, "Our considerations have established that the physical thing is transcendent to the perception of it and consequently to any consciousness whatever related to it; it is transcendent not merely in the sense that the physical thing cannot be found in fact as a really inherent component of consciousness; rather the whole situation is an object of eidetic insight: *With an absolutely unconditional* universality and necessity it is the case that a physical thing cannot be given in any possible perception, in any possible consciousness, as something really inherently immanent. Thus there emerges a fundamentally essential difference between *being as mental process and being as a physical thing*" (*Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, First Book*, trans F. Kersten [The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1982], 89).

one universal body of knowledge which is philosophy."[18] While it might be tempting to place Husserl narrowly into an analytic epistemological tradition, Husserl is concerned with more than the study of how knowledge comes to be. More broadly, Husserl is interested fundamentally with the occurrence and structure of experience, even prior to claims of whether these constitute knowledge proper.

In service of this ambitious aim, Husserl's most well-known innovation is his idea of the phenomenological reduction.[19] Phenomenology, Husserl believed, relies greatly on the task of bracketing or suspending all theoretical presuppositions of one's experiences so that one might cultivate a consciousness of one's attitude toward the world. In a more commonplace tone, the phenomenological reduction is beneficial because it helps us get rid of unreflective or "naturalistic" assumptions we have about our world. This means that Husserl's phenomenology helps one reflect more simply on oneself as an ego and as being receptive to other phenomena in one's world. Husserl saw this as a three-fold, yet synthetically unified consciousness, which he regularly refers to as the "ego cogito cogitatum:" the ego; its act of experience or intuitive cognizing; and, what it is experiencing, or the phenomenal substance thereof.[20]

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[18] Edmund Husserl, *The Paris Lectures*, trans. Peter Koestenbaum (Boston: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964), 3. This and all subsequent references refer to the original German pagination.

[19] While this dissertation focuses more on Husserl's phenomenology of intersubjectivity as found in *Ideas II*, *Cartesian Meditations*, and the *Paris Lectures*, the most substantive account of the phenomenological reduction can be found in Edmund Husserl, *Ideas, First Book*, 94. This and all subsequent references refer to the original German pagination. In the clearest distillation of this core tenet, Husserl explains, "It now becomes clear that, in contrast to the natural theoretical attitude, the correlate of which is the world, a new attitude must in fact be possible which, in spite of the 'exclusion' of this psychophysical universe of Nature, leaves us something: the whole field of absolute consciousness. Instead, then, of living naively in experience and theoretically exploring what is experienced, transcendent Nature, we effect the 'phenomenological reduction.' In other words, instead of naively *effecting* the acts pertaining to our Nature—constituting consciousness with their positings of something transcendent, and letting ourselves be induced, by motives implicit in them, to effect ever new positings of something transcendent—instead of that, we put all those positings 'out of action,' we do not 'participate in them;' we direct our seizing and theoretically inquiring regard to *pure consciousness in its own absolute being*. That, then, is what is left as the sought-for '*phenomenological residuum*' though we have 'excluded' the whole world with all physical things, living beings, and humans, ourselves included. Strictly speaking, we have not lost anything but rather have gained the whole of absolute being which, rightly understood, contains within itself, 'constitutes' within itself, all worldly transcendencies."

[20] Husserl, *The Paris Lectures*, 14.

But while this basic move of the phenomenological reduction occupies much of the ink spilled over Husserl's 21st century relevance, one of Husserl's most perennial concerns was far more social and relational in quality. Husserl offered many presentations of his systematic thinking, ranging from introductory lectures to extensive and comprehensive tomes. And while the entrée into these works almost always included an explanation of the foundational concepts of the phenomenological method and the ego constituted therein, Husserl's thought invariably drifted toward a different, and unquestionably more commonplace series of questions about the ego's relation to other individuals. The end of his famous and concise *Paris Lectures* concerned itself in this way, the final of five meditations in his *Cartesian Meditations* asked these questions, and the entire second volume of his *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy* was devoted to the relational and intersubjective questions that ensued from his first volume. In his *Cartesian Meditations*, Husserl distills the central social and relational question that unites all of these works: "When I, the meditating I, reduce myself to my absolute transcendental ego by phenomenological epoché do I not become *solus ipse* […] Should not a phenomenology that proposed to solve the problems of Objective being, and to present itself actually as philosophy, be branded therefore as transcendental solipsism?"[21] Husserl's question is pointed directly at the problem that arises when one works to reconcile phenomenology's rigorous focus on the ego's horizon of intuition with the more everyday assumption that we are not the only conscious, reflective, and individual people in existence. Said otherwise, the challenge facing Husserl is that the strength of his science (i.e., its rigorous commitment to resist speculation) is also the most potentially damning feature. By committing to

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[21] Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorion Cairns (The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), 121. This and all subsequent references refer to the original German pagination.

the phenomenological reduction, how can we actually provide an account of other people, minds, or egos? This issue, quite simply, is the threat of solipsism.

Though he is not unique in identifying it in this way, Farley rather clearly summarizes the issue of solipsism not only for Husserl but for also for the plight of social theological relation. In *Good and Evil*, Farley observes, "Much of the literature on the interhuman is preoccupied with the challenge laid down by solipsism, the idea that each human individual is so utterly enclosed in its sphere of consciousness that it has no true knowledge or experience of any other consciousness."[22] As early as his—regrettably titled—1975 *Ecclesial Man: A Social Phenomenology of Faith and Reality*, Farley similarly explains that "any transcendental philosophy tends to solipsism," noting even more explicitly, "This problem was in fact the starting point of Husserl's struggles with intersubjectivity."[23] In juxtaposing Farley's work with Husserl's, one finds a shared seriousness over the threat of solipsism.

For socially and ethically minded theologians and caregivers, Farley warns that it can be easy to discount the theoretical problem of solipsism as a philosophical fantasy or an abstract indulgence. Yet, he insists,

> [W]e should not permit the overwhelming consensus against solipsism to eliminate the strange mystery of the interhuman. For the very struggle with the problem of solipsism uncovers that without which the interhuman would have no reality. Solipsism articulates the irreducible and uninterchangeable structure of human experience. This "I" is an embodied centeredness in the world and the foundation of the very notion of perspective. We never experience anything except in and through our own complex of sensations, thinkings, and feelings. Accordingly, we do not experience anyone else's felt emotions, sensations, or immediate flow of thoughts. If we could experience these things, there would be no other and therefore no interhuman. For dialogue, intimacy, and empathy all require a genuine other. […] The strange elusiveness of the other "I" is the solipsistic element in the interhuman. The solipsistic element in the interhuman is what makes this a sphere of relations between beings who are irreducibly other to each other; in other

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[22] Farley, *Good and Evil*, 34

[23] Edward Farley. *Ecclesial Man: A Social Phenomenology of Faith and Reality* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1975), 93.

words, the sphere of alterity. The other, then, is what I do not and cannot experience in the mode in which I experience myself.[24]

To frame Farley's claim in negative terms: to not take the problem of solipsism seriously is effectively to presume an understanding of others, which experience does not afford us. The irony is that pastoral and practical theologians may be inclined to refuse the seriousness of solipsism out of an alleged commitment to social and communal life. Farley's point, derived heavily from Husserl, is that this naturalistic impulse to assume solipsism is not a problem actually overstates our knowledge of the lived experiences of others—an automatic and deluded social omniscience.

Like Farley after him, Husserl took these questions regarding solipsism very seriously, and he saw these issues as connected to the foundational issues of the possibility of intersubjectivity, as well as human empathy. For Husserl, the "problem of empathy," as he sometimes called it, was crucial for addressing the relevance of phenomenology for any social discourse. The fact that there is no thought, logic, reason, or intuition of the existence of another ego outside of oneself within his method seems to affirm the suspicion that phenomenology is fundamentally solipsistic. Husserl acknowledges this concern, noting, "The only conceivable manner in which others can have for me the sense and status of existent others, thus and so determined, consists in their being constituted *in me* as others."[25] Husserl appears to concede the case that phenomenology is solipsistic, but there is more to this story for Husserl than the concession that his philosophical science is isolationist. Husserl was not ready to compromise the philosophical rigor of phenomenology as a "transcendental solipsistic science," [26] one that resists the speculative thought of what he deems a "metaphysical adventure" beyond the horizon of the

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[24] Farley, *Good and Evil*, 34 – 35.
[25] Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 156. Emphasis original.
[26] Husserl, *Paris Lectures*, 12.

transcendental ego of the phenomenological reduction.[27] For Husserl, the task of responding to the problem of empathy was the task of respecting the rigorous boundaries of his philosophical science, yet tending to the basic acknowledgment of one's ability to engage those around oneself in a way that prevents radically solipsistic isolation.

While this seems like an insurmountable dilemma for Husserl's phenomenological method, which threatens to render his entire science socially irrelevant, upon closer scrutiny, it becomes clear that Husserl's greatest liability may simply be the honesty with which he acknowledges the threat of solipsism for empathy. Husserl's dilemma closely resembles the tension between Freudian and Kohutian debates over empathy's legitimacy within a psychoanalytic science. Kohut was deeply troubled by the challenge of explaining how empathy can serve both as a tool that abides within the domain of a science, yet can also be oriented toward what is beyond its purview. While Kohut is no phenomenologist and the distinctions between his and Husserl's methodologies must be kept closely in mind, there is no question that Husserl and he both wrestle with the fact that "[e]ach branch of science has its natural limits, determined approximately by the limits of its basic tool of observation."[28] In other words, whether with Husserl or Kohut, one must be careful not to misinterpret their openness regarding the threat of solipsism against empathy as an indictment of their projects.

Husserl's position against critiques of solipsism in his method begins with the distinction between two different understandings of solipsism. The first is the sense that one can never reason or intuit beyond the scope of one's own intentionality and that therefore everything is reducible to this horizon; the second is the sense that one cannot know or reasonably assert that there are other egos like myself. Husserl's identification of phenomenology as a "transcendental

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[27] Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 166.
[28] Kohut, "Introspection, Empathy, and Psychoanalysis," 481.

solipsistic science" is aimed primarily at recognizing the veracity of this first sense of solipsism, that intuition must be limited to the transcendental ego, which by now should be clear.[29] The second sense of the accusation, however, is quite different.

The second is aimed at the question of whether or not there is any room within the horizon of intuition for another ego like myself.[30] Husserl rather simply concedes the point that "I obviously cannot have the 'alien' or 'other' as experience."[31] Suggesting that my ego can include the totality of the other ego would be utterly implausible, for the other ego would desist in being other or alternative to my concrete very-ownness. But despite this concession, Husserl contends that the accusation of solipsism in a pejorative way already presupposes a division between the transcendental ego and the contents of its intuition, which includes other subjects. The transcendental subjectivity that results from the phenomenological epoché in fact opens fully onto what he deems a "transcendental intersubjectivity." Here, the existence of other subjects takes the form of what Husserl describes as an "omnitemporality" with the communal world, where the transcendental ego is always already constituted temporally in a "harmonious constitutive system."[32] The temporal harmony of the Other with the transcendental ego cannot be divided by the misguided question of solipsism. Rather, the unified synthesis of the world of the transcendental ego is one and the same with all other subjects that would ever possibly enter into its infinite horizon. It is omnitemporally unified into the structure of the intersubjective. In this way, Husserl believes he is both able to assert the transcendental reality of the intersubjective, while also maintaining the fundamental rigor of his science.

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[29] See Husserl, *Paris Lectures*, 12.
[30] In this context, it matters little whether that other ego is within a naturalistic or phenomenological attitude for Husserl.
[31] Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 125.
[32] Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 155 – 156.

But given Husserl's basic contention about the transcendental intersubjectivity of the phenomenological reduction, a more specific question arises regarding the actual phenomenon of intersubjective intuition: even within a communal world that synthetically unifies all subjective experience in the transcendental horizon, how does one actually experience these other egos? If these other subjects are experienced by the transcendental ego, does not the act of their being experienced turn them into the objects of intuition, and not their own subjects? It is in light of these questions that Husserl contends, "Here we need a genuine phenomenological description of the transcendental act of *empathy* [*Einfühlung*]."[33]

Husserl's phenomenological understanding of empathy is not completely detached from the everyday use of the term, as the act of putting yourself in an Other's shoes or perspective. But before this happens, Husserl contends that a more initial recognition must happen, which he defines as "mirroring."[34] For an Other ego to become a consideration of empathy, it first "points to me myself; the other is a 'mirroring' of my own self and yet not a mirroring proper, an analogue of my own self and yet again not an analogue in the usual sense."[35] While the other as a phenomenon is not fully equitable with myself, in the phenomenological attitude the transcendental ego can still identify with certain features of the phenomenon of the Other. Most notably, Husserl suggests it is the body and characteristic animation of this Other that begins to appear to the ego as an alter ego. The act of mirroring operates within the communal world of the transcendental ego and the contents of its intuition.[36] This act of mirroring necessarily involves

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[33] Husserl, *Paris Lectures*, 34. Emphasis original.
[34] Husserl and Kohut have a shared interest in the concept of mirroring vis-à-vis empathy, which is itself a remarkable conceptual similarity between them. However, their uses of the term appear to be independent from one another. That is, there is no textual or historical evidence to substantiate the claim that Kohut borrowed "mirroring" from Husserl's discussion of it in empathy.
[35] Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 125.
[36] In Husserl's nomenclature, these are unified in the structure of the *ego cogito cogitatum*.

transitioning between the view of being a disinterested spectator of myself to that of an Other.[37]

He explains, "[T]he body over there, which is nevertheless apprehended as an animate organism, must have derived this sense by an *apperceptive transfer from my animate organism*, and done so in a manner that excludes an actually direct, and hence primordial showing of the predicates belonging to an animate organism specifically, a showing of them in perception proper."[38] It is from this that one begins to see how empathy operates for Husserl. The "apperception" in mirroring illustrates his slightly more flexible understanding of intuition.[39] It is not much of a stretch for intentional consciousness of another animate body to reason that it is a body like mine. For Husserl, this kind of reasoning is not of the category of judgments from which he originally intended to depart in the phenomenological reduction, but instead is rooted in the basic evidence of intuitive experience, and therefore passes as phenomenological insight.

However, Husserl is aware that intuited bodies are not egos. The mere act of mirroring does not constitute a connection with the Other in its lived experience. There can be a direct encounter with the phenomenon of the body, but the body's animate action is something for Husserl that is more difficult. He explains,

> In a certain way, I also experience (and there is a self-givenness here) the other's lived experiences; i.e., to the extent that the empathy (*comprehensio*) accomplished as one with the originary experience of the Body is indeed a kind of presentification, one that nevertheless serves to ground the character of *co*-existence in the flesh. To that extent, what we have here is thus experience, perception. But this co-existence ("*appresence*" in the previously fixed sense) does not, in principle allow itself to be transformed into immediate originary existence (primal presence). It is characteristic of empathy that it refers to an originary Body-spirit-consciousness but one I cannot myself accomplish

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originarily, I who am not the other and who only function, in regard to him, as a comprehending analogon.[40]

Husserl makes it clear here that a division of the body and whatever lived experiences it may have as an ego is a difficult, if not an impossible or misguided task. In the same way that he deeply stresses the synthetic unity of intuitive experience for the transcendental ego in the three-sided structure of the *ego cogito cogitatum*, here he stresses the issue of dividing an Other's lived experience. He is adamant that, to a certain degree, one does in fact experience the Other's lived experience.[41] This is because the body is not separate from its animation; the body *is* animated, literally spirited.

In other words, for empathy to take aim solely at the so-called "lived experience" or consciousness of the Other would be on par with searching for a totally distinct "ego" from the "ego cogito." It is for this reason that, in the *Cartesian Meditations*, Husserl emphasizes that the apperception of empathy "is not inference," meaning there is a sense in which empathy is a direct intuition of the Other in its animated state as a body.[42] And yet, in *Ideas II*, Husserl points out the fact that, for empathy to be in any way distinct from the mere act of sensibly intuiting the animated body of an Other in mirroring, empathy must take aim at something foreign to the mere

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[40] Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, Second Book*, trans R. Rojcewicz and A. Schuwer (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002), 198. Emphasis original. This and all subsequent citations refer to the original German pagination.

[41] See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans G. E. M. Anscombe, 3rd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001), §304. There, Wittgenstein makes exactly this point and subtle distinction in his remark that pain "is not a *something*, but not a *nothing* either." His point, exactly that of Husserl, is that while there is a true sense in which the experience of pain is part of a private lived experience, it is impossible for one to have direct access to this—in the same way that it would be impossible to develop a private language—and therefore it is "not a *something*." And yet, one does experience an Other's pain in the sense that, when an Other reports that they are in "pain," one understands what the word has come to mean in the context of communal linguistic experience of language games. Therefore, it is "not a *nothing* either." Husserl and Wittgenstein in this way are both sensitive to how common communal experiences in language and intuition afford us a true experience of an Other's experience, without over emphasizing the role of difference.

[42] Husserl, *Cartesian Meditation*s, 141.

locomotion of a body. Noting carefully this intimate relationality of the "Body-spirit-

consciousness" of the Other, he reasons,

> That which is given to us, as human subject, one with the human body, in immediate
> experiential apprehension, is the human person, who has his spiritual individuality, his
> intellectual and practical abilities and skills, his character, his sensibility. This Ego is
> certainly apprehended as dependent on its Body and thereby on the rest of physical
> nature, and likewise it is apprehended as dependent on its own past. But on this is
> striking: *the apprehension* in which *the human being* is given to us *in the human Body*,
> the apprehension in which the human being is given as a *real* person who behaves under
> the circumstances of his personal life now in this way and now in that was, *seems to
> contain a surplus* which does not present itself as a mere complex of constitutive
> moments of apprehension of the type we have described.[43]

Husserl here makes a very different observation about the transcendental ego's encounter with an

Other. He contends that, when the *ego cogito cogitatum*'s intentionality includes the phenomenal

experience of an Other, there is a part of the Other's lived experience that goes beyond basic

intuition, which "*seems to contain a surplus*" that simply cannot be understood. To put it mildly,

this description of "surplus" is a very odd claim for Husserl to make. Even if there were a surplus

to this other human body in its individuality, how could there possibly be any way of

understanding this? If it truly were a surplus, would not one simply miss this entirely, for it "does

not present itself" to intuition?

It is on this very point and objection that Husserl presents empathy as the form of

intuition which responds to the question. While only what is not a surplus can be directly present

to intuition, empathy—despite being oriented toward the animation of the body—is also

comported toward something of the Other, this surplus, which does not lend itself to immediacy:

> I can have a 'direct' experience of myself, and it is *only my intersubjective form of reality*
> that I cannot, in principle, experience. For that I need the mediation of empathy. I can
> experience others, but only through empathy. Their own content can be experienced only
> by themselves in originary *perception*. Likewise, my lived experiences are given to me

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[43] Husserl, *Ideas, Second Book*, 139 – 140. Emphasis original.

directly, i.e., the lived experiences in their own content. But others' lived experiences can be experienced by me only mediately, in empathy.[44]

Empathy here is revealed to be, in Husserl's phenomenology, a multi-valent receptivity. In a direct way, empathy is what co-occurs with the process of mirroring. There, empathy is apperceptive of the animation of the Other's body, that it is spirited in the way that I myself am. But here, Husserl emphasizes that, as far as the absolute continuity of the Other's own lived experience is concerned, there is no immediate or direct intuition of this.

And yet, Husserl claims, one does have a sense of the Other's originary perception of its own lived experience. One does not have this immediately, however, but rather mediately through empathy. Quite literally, Husserl explains, in empathy, "I place myself at the standpoint of the other, any other whatever, and I acknowledge that each encounters every other as the natural being, man [*sic*], and that I then have to identify myself with the man seen from the standpoint of external intuition."[45] While this is not a direct experience, Husserl's description of this as an "external intuition" suggests that empathy functions as a point of mediation between the positioning of the transcendental ego and those animated bodies mirrored back to it in the intersubjective context of a communal world. Empathy, as *Einfühlung*, is the synthesized feeling that intuition in the place of an Other is possible through mediation of intuition in this way, that the feeling is unified into one.

Empathy as a facet of the transcendental ego's intuition begins with the basic recognition of the animation of an Other's body in mirroring. There, it makes a tightly knit, deductive reasoning about the basic phenomenon of the body: that it moves and is animated like my own. There are certain regards in which Husserl may want for empathy to stop here, perhaps in the

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[44] Husserl, *Ideas, Second Book*, 200. Emphasis original.
[45] Husserl, *Ideas, Second Book*, 169.

moments when he is most focused on the restrictions and commitments of his own science in phenomenology. And yet, he insists that empathy also embarks on an "external intuition," which mediately infers into the experience of the other.

There is a sense in which Husserl's understanding of empathy may truly have multiple valences, which meander across either side of his accusers: those who accuse him of being a solipsist and those who accuse him of being phenomenologically lax. What cannot be argued, however, is the observation that Husserl does express conflicted insight regarding the domain of empathy's intuition. At the very least, it is clear that Husserl views empathy as a form of intuition functioning at the limits of the phenomenological method.

Levinas and the Phenomenological Problem of Recognition

Within Farley's corpus, Husserl's foundational insights on the phenomenological problem of empathy are central for understanding and appreciating the looming threat of solipsism for what he deems the interhuman. However, Farley's broader ambition of developing a theological anthropology from both a relational and ethical vantage point, Husserl's analysis is not enough.[46] Where Kohut in 1959 seemed to presume that empathy will always be directed at psychological acts and did not evaluate how this process emerges, Farley in 1996 goes considerably further in noting the implication of the problem of recognition in the problem of empathy. "The passive recognitions and acts of meaning which constitute this flow do not simply succeed each other," Farley explains. "They shape and structure what we human beings are as

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[46] Farley traces the connection between the problem of recognition and empathy more explicitly within "The search for the distinctive act in which the other appears as other goes back to Fichte and Hegel. The term both of them used, recognition (Anerkennung), gives primacy to the apprehending or knowing consciousness, and this approach continues in Edmund Husserl's description of the transcendental constitution of the other (Cartesian Meditations, V). Both Husserl and Max Seheier, the two dominant figures of the early phenomenological movement, ceased to give primacy to the knowing consciousness when they identified empathy as the basic act of human being-together. 21 But it was Seheier who moved the search for the act toward the other onto a new plane by his emphasis on the emotions" (Farley, *Good and Evil*, 38).

selves or persons. Like the experiencings of all living things, human experience has the character of a shaping or forming of being."[47] That is, to take seriously the phenomenological problem of empathy also requires tending to the conundrum of how recognition operates—from the experiential vantage point of the ego—to determine who counts as other persons. Repeatedly, Farley turns to the phenomenology of Emmanuel Levinas and his work in *Totality and Infinity* to think through this aporia. Just as with Husserl, Levinas deserves some sustained attention here to parse out the phenomenological problem of recognition through primary sources.

Despite strong efforts by his phenomenological predecessors, Levinas's project in *Totality and Infinity* inherits the problem of how intentionality can account for others while maintaining the separated structure of the ego. While ventures into transcendental intersubjectivity by Husserl and later relational psychoanalysis attests to the value of thinking of the ego in terms of its connection and co-constitution with others, Levinas instead stresses the centrality of separation for the ethical relation with the Other. This dominant feature of the text, the separation of the phenomenological subject from the Other, is at once compelling and troubling for those wishing to broaden the phenomenological project into an ethical space where psychic difference is respected, yet engaged.

Departing from the phenomenological tradition for Levinas means developing an attitude toward the ego itself. Deeply embedded in the Husserlian tradition, Levinas is mindful of the fact that for Husserl, phenomenology "becomes a transcendental solipsistic science […] a science about the ego—a pure egology—which becomes the ultimate foundation of philosophy in the Cartesian sense of a universal science, and which must provide at least the cornerstone for its absolute foundation."[48] There are many features of this complex claim with which Levinas

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[47] Farley, *Good and Evil*, 68
[48] Husserl, *The Paris Lectures*, 12.

agrees, and others—particularly around the issue of solipsism—which he aims to deepen. On the account of phenomenology as an egology or a study of the ego, Levinas nonetheless agrees, "[p]hilosophy is an egology," and must give an account of the ego in his "essay" on exteriority.[49]

Not embracing the language of solipsism as does Husserl, Levinas rather describes the ego as constituted by separation [Séparation]. He explains that in its most basic form, "Separation is the very constitution of thought and interiority, that is, a relationship within independence."[50] Insofar as the thinking occurrence of the ego has any interiority or independence from others, it is separated. Separation is the constitution of interiority for the ego where thought abides, which is perhaps a softer way of framing the phenomenological attitude without recourse to a transcendental purview.

To be separated as an ego is not merely a reclusion from the world and affect, however. To the contrary, affectivity is for Levinas a central feature of what it means for the ego to be separated. While the "unicity of the I conveys separation […] in the strictest sense [it also] is solitude, and enjoyment—happiness or unhappiness—is isolation itself."[51] Levinas's description of the ego as separated may seem like a facile attempt to protect some semblance of philosophical objectivity, as if to insulate the ego from contaminating forces that would wrest us from the phenomenological attitude itself. But it is precisely the opposite. For the ego to be separated is for it to have any affective space for enjoyment of what it might encounter. "The separation accomplished as enjoyment, that is, as interiority, becomes a consciousness of

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[49] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 44.

[50] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 104.

[51] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 117.

objects," and thereby is opened to a dimension of desire for what might not be strictly confined to separation itself.[52]

This affective or desiring dimension of the separated ego is a helpful start for understanding the centrality of separation for Levinas. Yet the question remains as to what the ego is separated from, or why the language of separation as opposed to the mere Husserlian concept of ownness is appropriate.[53]

The prospect of enjoyment that comes with separation, Levinas contends, is not something determined by reference to a system of affective or communal expectation. To desire or to enjoy is essentially to be free from these demands. But already, the issue then comes of how the concept of free separation can be maintained with others with whom the ego might relate. Levinas offers a close analysis of precisely this quandary,

> [F]or relationship between separated beings to be possible, the multiple terms would have to be partially independent and partially in relation. The notion of finite freedom then imposes itself to reflection. But how is such a notion to be formed? To say that a being is partially free immediately raises the problem of the relation existing in it between the free part, *causa sui,* and the non-free part. To say that the free part is impeded in the non-free part would bring us back indefinitely to the same difficulty: how can the free part, *causa sui,* undergo anything whatever from the non-free part? The finitude of freedom must therefore not signify some limit within the substance of the free being, divided into one part endowed with a causality of its own and one part subject to exterior causes. The notion of independence must be grasped elsewhere than in causality. Independence would not be equivalent to the idea of *causa sui,* which, moreover, is belied by birth, non-chosen and impossible to choose (the great drama of contemporary thought), which situates the will in an anarchic world, that is, a world without origin.[54]

Levinas here is concerned with anthropological or subjective theory that posits the relation between separated beings as a sort of Venn diagram: a separated internal space of freedom that

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[52] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 139.

[53] See Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 134, German pagination. He writes, "Where, and *so far as, the constituted unity is inseparable from the original constitution itself*, with the inseparableness that characterizes an immediate *concrete* oneness, not only the constitutive perceiving but also the perceived existent belongs to my concrete very-ownness."

[54] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 223.

overlaps with the claims or demands of other partially free and partially non-free egos in a communal space. Separation cannot merely refer to the dissection of an ego into discrete regions of freedom or inhibition. Rather, separation for Levinas explains that all affective and relation composure toward others must begin from subjective individuation and a state of desire and enjoyment. If not for this, any desire for the ego would be from nowhere, empty, and ethically vapid. The freedom of the separated ego is thus not a partitioned psychological domain which abuts other non-free portions of egoity, which would ironically undermine freedom. Separation instead refers to the individualized and anarchic "somewhere" of desire, as the affective point of departure for any ethical relation to others.

From the perspective of sociological or communitarian theory, Levinas's argument regarding separation may very well smack of radical individualism. He insists, after all, that "[s]eparation is the very act of individuation, the possibility in general for an entity which is posited in being to be posited not by being defined by its references to a whole, by its place within a system, but starting from itself. The fact of starting from oneself is equivalent to separation."[55] However, Levinas's insistence is that separation not be understood as a feature of subjective existence that is cut off from experience and guarded under the auspices of the phenomenological method—as if to say, "You can't confront the feelings I have harbored inside." This understanding of separation is problematic for several reasons. But among them is the basic fact that separation is intended to characterize a subjective space which is at once anarchic, free, and for which one is completely responsible and accountable—not an affective space where judgment is wielded without recourse or accountability. Levinas's point is that without separation, there would be no space for an affective desire for the other.

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[55] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 299 – 300.

Yet, still, with the separated desire and enjoyment of the ego in Levinas's phenomenology, there remains the basic problem of how the separation abides alongside an ethical relation to an Other at all. The difference of alterity is such that separation is removed from any prospect of totality over the other; a recurrent theme of *Totality and Infinity* is this feature that the alterity of the other cannot be reduced to the same, except in violence.[56] A more subtle implication of this point, however, pertains to how the encounter with the other phenomenologically occurs.

It is on this point that Farley turns repeatedly to Levinas for aid in connecting the problem of empathy to the problem of recognition. In Farley's terms, "If the passion for the interhuman meant merely the need for the other's empathetic acknowledgement, it would be incorrigibly narcissistic, dominated by the passion of subjectivity. But, the passion of the interhuman has another side. In the inter human as interpersonal relation, the agent is already drawn beyond itself in acts that recognize and empathize with genuine others."[57] Using narcissism more colloquially and pejoratively than Kohut, Farley argues that empathy is only one part of the picture in establishing ethical relations with others. The fact that the separated ego cannot encompass or thematize the Other problematizes ethical relations that depend upon a recognition of another on the basis of a thematic representation. One does not seek out the other as a phenomenality from which an inner separation might be gleaned.[58] One of the initial places one might go in extrapolating the concept of separation beyond the phenomenological ego is to insist on an inferential relationship of this separation to that of the other. Yet for Levinas, the

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[56] See Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 47. Levinas early in the text what proves to be a common threat and theme throughout: "For the philosophical tradition the *conflicts* between the same and the other are resolved by theory whereby the other is reduced to the same."

[57] Farley, *Good and Evil*, 104.

[58] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 212. Levinas argues, "The presentation of the face, expression, does not disclose an inward world previously closed, adding thus a new region to comprehend or to take over. On the contrary, it calls to me above and beyond the given that speech already puts in common among us."

separation of the ego is not something one can merely project onto other phenomena, even the Other. "The other does indeed invoke this separated being, but this invocation is not reducible to calling for a correlative."[59] The strangeness of the encounter with the Other is that it comes from a desire to exteriority that is in the somewhere or something of separated enjoyment, yet does not connect to a correlative separation in the other.[60]

The complication of Levinas position on this inferential or correlative cognition to the other is that, despite noting the obvious ways in which the structure of cognition does not properly apply to the other,[61] he nonetheless plays with the concept of recognition in a paradoxical way in relation to the infinite. One would be inclined to think that anything infinite—not being limited to cognition—would be impossible to properly recognize as such, given its excess. However, Levinas contends, "Whatever be the extension of my thoughts, limited by nothing, the Other cannot be contained by me: he [*sic*] is unthinkable—he is infinite and recognized as such."[62] Building explicitly from the third of Descartes's *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Levinas here suggests that even if not properly grasped or contained by the intellect, the separated ego can recognize the other as infinite, not contained, excessive.[63] It may be

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[59] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 216.

[60] This may be a point of connection between Levinas and Husserl on the concept of "mirroring," which proves to be an essential feature of intersubjectivity for Husserl. For Husserl also, the mirroring of another ego is not a simple analogue of oneself, but maintains a mirroring relation nonetheless. See Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 125. Husserl explains that the other ego "points to me myself; the other is a 'mirroring' of my own self and yet not a mirroring proper, an analogue of my own self and yet again not an analogue in the usual sense."

[61] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 62. Levinas writes, "Infinity is not the "object" of a cognition (which would be to reduce it to the measure of the gaze that contemplates), but is the desirable, that which arouses Desire, that is, that which is approachable by a thought that at each instant *thinks more than it thinks.* The infinite is not thereby an immense object, exceeding the horizons of the look."

[62] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 230.

[63] See Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy, with Selections from the Objections and Replies*, trans. & ed. John Cottingham (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 32 and 35. In his progress toward an argument for the existence of God, Descartes first notes, "It does not matter that I do not grasp the infinite, or that there are countless additional attributes of God which I cannot in any way grasp, and perhaps cannot even reach in my thought; for it is in the nature of the infinite not to be grasped by a finite being like myself." At the culmination of Descartes first argument for the existence of God, the concept of recognition is front and center: "The whole force of the argument lies in this: I recognize that it would be impossible for me to exist with the kind of nature I have— that is, having within me the idea of God—were it not the case that God really existed."

simpler to say that because of separation, the ego is not able to recognize the other as infinite, that the infinite exceeds the capacity for recognition by the separated ego. Yet, as paradoxical as it is with Descartes,[64] Levinas maintains this sense of the limitation of cognition, but nonetheless insists that the subjective structure of the ego is able to harbor the paradox of infinite recognition.[65]

As one may work to amalgamate a sense of community, intersubjectivity, or multiplicity on the basis of this recognition or an identity politic (e.g., the community of those whom I recognize to be like myself), Levinas returns to the fundamental problematic of the ethical relationship: that it not merely be a projective reification of sameness. Herein lies the phenomenological problem of recognition:

> Being is exteriority. This formula does not only mean to denounce the illusions of the subjective, and claim that objective forms alone, in opposition to the sands in which arbitrary thought is mired and lost, merit the name of being. Such a conception would in the end destroy exteriority, since subjectivity itself would be absorbed into exteriority, revealing itself to be a moment of panoramic play. Exteriority would then no longer mean anything, since it would encompass the very interiority that justified this appellation.[66]

At the outset, the desire to extend separation into the other may have emerged from a desire for exteriority. But if this desire is culminated from a conception of the other which merges the other with pre-cognitions with which it might be re-cognized, then the "subjectivity itself would be absorbed into exteriority." This communal or web-like relational scheme may be appealing for what it affords societal or group relation: a strong identificatory tie to others. Yet with it, one forfeits this fundamental freedom of separation, which desires not out of an obligation to the

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[64] To develop the idea of this paradox further, Levinas introduces the peculiar concept of "psychism" to describe how the "paradoxes [of recognition, cognition, and separation from the infinite] are overcome by the psychism" (Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 56). What this tells us is that for Levinas, the subjective structure of separation is able to encounter the other in an ethical relationship, yet the intellectual gaze of phenomenology is not simply able to situate the phenomena of the other within a normal system of intellectual totality, as one might a tool.

[65] Here, recognition and the correlate understanding of the Other as a counterpart to oneself are less experiential in the conventional sense than it is the very desire for being as exteriority.

[66] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 290.

vision of a mirror like recognition—that one is suddenly obliged to desire upon a psychic resonance with someone one believes to be like oneself. Thus even when models of intersubjectivity attempt to bridge the gaps of difference by reference to a relational anthropology rooted in recognition, the problem of the ethical relation to the Other, from the position of separation, is hardly circumvented. Rather, if there is indeed a prospect for a multiplicitous relationship with the other through recognition, one must maintain the fact that "[t]here is an anarchy essential to multiplicity," that the ethical relation to the other must be fundamentally free and without simple reason predicated by a model of identity which can be manipulated, and misidentified.[67]

Whether taken as an indictment of recognition and relational models of anthropology and social life, or as a very specific and proprietary understanding of recognition in the ethical relationship, Levinas' position on the ethical relationship to the infinite still leaves one with conceptual problems. The problem with the recognition or social anthropologies rooted in positive accounts of communal life was not that it binds separated beings together; rather, these bonds were predicated on a projected vision of the ego of how the mechanics and boundaries of this ethical constitution would operate.

Though it is not his direct intention, Levinas's concept of separation largely reaffirms the paradox of the phenomenological problem of recognition as it pertains to a relational ethic. The structure of separation does not refer to a categorical distinction of the ego within a private psychological space. Rather, separation illustrates the fact that the ego is set apart into its insular and affective freedom to desire exteriority. But while one might try to connect this separated ego to the Other through simple models of recognition or social anthropology, these constructions of

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[67] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 294.

the ethical relationship remain predicated on a projection of sameness onto the other. Recognition remains a paradoxical feature of the separated ego insofar as, like with Descartes, recognition technically is directed toward exteriority in its transcendence, yet this is not a correlative or adequating form of recognition that might breed a formulaic group identity. Separation's isolation will continue to be problematic if couched in terms of spatial syllogisms, that no foreign substance persists in the space claimed by isolation. And while it is indeed challenging to conceptions of the phenomenological method which hold rigid boundaries around intuition or the horizon of understanding, for Levinas the difference of this encounter is respected, but affectively transgressed in a marveling desire: "Exteriority is not a negation, but a marvel."[68]

Thus the issue of solipsism, from which both Descartes and Husserl work, takes on a rather different tenor with Levinas and *Totality and Infinity*. "The solipsist dialectic of consciousness always suspicious of being in captivity in the same breaks off. For the ethical relationship which subtends discourse is not a species of consciousness whose ray emanates from the I; it puts the I in question. This putting in question emanates from the other."[69] An ethical relationship which reduces itself strictly to separation of course would be solipsistic. Separation is not itself reduced, but neither does it reduce the Other to itself.[70]

The fear of solipsism, legitimate as it is, may similarly provoke one too quickly to formulate one's relation to the Other in ways that in fact dupe the ego into believing that it is in relation to the Other when it is not. One desires to have a relation to the Other that takes one outside oneself, yet the reductive shortcuts of ego-derivative recognition or social anthropology

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[68] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 292.
[69] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 195.
[70] It is this tension which may be unpalatable to certain formal logics which strive for an uncomplicated account of the ethical relation.

only mimic an ethical relationship with an Other that does not need to be legitimated by the separated ego's cognition.

Separation in Levinas's phenomenological account of the ego in ethical relationship ultimately presents an aporia to conventional philosophical standards on how one might circumvent the problem of solipsism. For those committed to more linear explanations of the problem of other minds, as in the Anglo-American tradition, Levinas's resolute response to the challenge of separation without solipsism will likely remain unsatisfactory. For those open to the paradoxical features of subjective constitution in time and affectivity, Levinas provides a viable phenomenological account.

Phenomenological Insights for Kohutian Empathy and the Limits of Psychoanalysis

In tandem with one another, Farley, Husserl, and Levinas largely confirm the methodological problem that has been facing relational psychoanalysis and pastoral theology from the outset. For Husserl, the possibility of empathy pushes phenomenology to the limits of its methodological boundaries; it puts us in a double-bind where we either entertain the possibility of empathy and are viewed as methodologically imprecise, or practice a more methodologically restrained phenomenology and are viewed as solipsistic. For Levinas, the possibility of recognition becomes predicated on separation itself, and the ability to phenomenologically intuit the infinite countenance of the Other.

Kohut's concept of empathic freedom ultimately relates to the question of how psychoanalysis is possible as a scientific endeavor. But the effect of it on his thesis is a humbling one. He admits, "Introspective science must […] acknowledge the limits beyond which the observational tool does not reach and must accept the fact that certain experiences cannot at

present be further resolved by the method at its disposal."[71] Regarding the discernment of psychological from non-psychological acts, the analyst has no more certainty that they have full insight into the depths of psychological motivation. Both at the level of introspection and vicarious inference, empathy only goes so far before it must admit that it is at best a reasonable mode of inference, not a view from nowhere.

Kohut and Husserl agree in many regards on how empathy functions. Like Kohut, Husserl reasons that "[e]ach person has, ideally speaking, within his communicative surrounding world his egoistic one insofar as he can 'abstract' from all relations of mutual understanding and from the apperception founded therein, or, rather, insofar as he can think them as separated."[72] And though the terminology of empathy as a "vicarious introspection" may be foreign to Husserl, he makes it clear that the basis of empathy is in "*the possibility of an originary self-grasp, a "self-perception*," which is subsequently offered as an indirect inference into the Other, whom one identifies in mirroring.[73]

However, there is a significant regard in which Kohut's perspective on empathy differs. Both he and Husserl agree that the pure lived experience of the Other is not possible in terms of their scientific tool in empathy. Both recognize the limitations of their science and empathy defined therein, but with Kohut one sees his science of the ego to be constituted precisely by its surplus; with Husserl, one sees his science of the ego to be, at best, conflicted with the entertainment of its surplus. Where Husserl—like Freud—views this as the limitation over which his science cannot step, Kohut's views the other side of this limit to be precisely where his

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[71] Kohut, "Introspection, Empathy, and Psychoanalysis," 482.
[72] Husserl, *Ideas, Second Book*, 193.
[73] Husserl, *Ideas, Second Book*, 101. Emphasis original.

science is meant to operate. That is, the entire purpose of psychoanalysis is to engage others through empathic interpretation, and to begin working toward healing.

Two different sciences of the ego, then, take two very different directions: Husserl's science becomes a transcendental solipsistic science, while Kohut's becomes a science devoted fundamentally to the relational and ethical treatment of this surplus, the Other. For Kohut, there, where empathy extends and cannot fully interpret, lies the content of his science. It is here where his hopes are for reaction, responding, relating. The totality of Kohut's science in its positive content falls short of this sphere of the alter ego's lived experience, yet Kohut unabashedly extends the totality of his science to this end. Husserl, on the other hand, at best has a conflicted attitude toward this surplus on the other side of intuition's factual evidence.[74]

To be clear, this difference in attitude and purpose—Husserl operating primarily as a philosopher; Kohut operating primarily as a clinician—is not to suggest that Kohut is flippant with regard to the rigor and limits of his science; he and Husserl are in agreement when it comes to the abuses of their science. Husserl makes adamant the contention, "Phenomenology's purely intuitive, concrete, and also apodictic mode of demonstration excludes all 'metaphysical adventure', all speculative excesses."[75] Likewise, from his 1959 essay to his final public lecture, Kohut is intent on preventing the misunderstanding that empathy itself grants a privileged insight

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[74] These significant comparisons aside, the methodological differences in Husserl and Kohut's projects should not be downplayed. It might be argued that they are at the outset oriented in these different directions. But this is exactly the point: the decision of whether or not to let empathy be compelled by what exceeds itself dictates largely for them not so much the purview of empathy as a tool, but the *attitude* with which it is employed. Specifically, Husserl is reticent to declare empathy as something that takes seriously its surplus, only mentioning it in passing, and ultimately falling back on a more defensible scientific attitude. Ultimately, for Husserl, the demands of his science to be in *"reference to the things and facts themselves, as these are given in actual experience and intuition"* precludes this different sort of devotion to the Other, as the pursuit of a science beyond itself (Husserl, *Paris Lectures*, 6). Husserl's modification of phenomenology as a transcendental solipsistic science does allow him to straddle this limit, but not in the sense that it asserts any particular devotion to the revelation of the Other above and beyond the limitations of his science.

[75] Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 166.

into the Other's inner processes.[76] He warns that despite its scientific utility, "Introspection can, of course, also constitute an escape from reality" leading to "rationalized forms of introspection of mystical cults and pseudo-scientific mystical psychology."[77] That is, given the fact that empathy marks the liminal space between psychoanalysis's scientific discourse and what is no longer present to view, it is understandable that people might mistake empathy as accomplishing more than it does, actually extending directly into the Other's inner psychic space and enacting therapy naturally therefrom.

The crucial point of distinction, then, is that despite their agreement on the abuses of their sciences and the limitations of empathy, Kohut conceives of his science and its possibility as founded upon that which exceeds empathy: the lived experience of the Other. For Kohut, what Husserl describes as the surplus of empathy is the only thing that grants his science any legitimacy at all. It is not that Kohut views his science as mystical—which he abhors—but rather that the affirmation of this surplus is what drives his science in the first place. The experience of the freedom of an Other is the very experience of difference for Kohut. It does not demand explanation, but rather it calls one's science toward it.

The distinction between these visions of the surplus for empathy has drastic implications for the subsequent discourse of a science. Kohut's response to empathy's limits, that the Other's lived experience still constitutes the foundation of his science, points him in an unquestionably interactive relation to this other, and to the pursuit of a better understanding of what paradoxically he recognizes that he cannot understand directly in empathy. Husserl's response to

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[76] See Heinz Kohut, "On Empathy," in *The Search for the Self: Selected Writings of Heinz Kohut: 1978-1981, Volume 4*, ed. Paul H. Ornstein, (New York: International Universities Press, 1978), 527. Kohut remarks, "[People] will claim that empathy cures, they will claim that one just has to be 'empathic' with their patients and they will be doing fine. I don't believe that at all."

[77] Kohut, "Introspection, Empathy, and Psychoanalysis," 466.

empathy's limits, instead, is one of caution; it compels him to step back from this surplus of the Other's lived experience, develop an explicitly "transcendental solipsistic" account of the intersubjective context, and focus his efforts more narrowly on the positive occurrence of intuition's factual experience.

Empathic Freedom as Ideological Conflict for Pastoral Theological Anthropology

To describe social recognition and the ethics of empathy as being a "problem" for pastoral theological anthropology may thus be slightly misleading. More accurately, it is an aporia that forces a decision. The conflicting criticisms of Freud's psychic reductionism, Kohutian empathy, Husserlian solipsism, and Levinasian recognition are all the result of a vacillation between two equally plausible, but incongruous ideological sensibilities: to empathically transgress the boundaries of science through freedom, or to respect the limits of psychic difference.

From a more practical- and caregiving-oriented vantage point, it may appear that the conflict over empathic freedom is merely a matter of theoretical interpretation or even semantics. The phenomenological problems of empathy and recognition for pastoral theology and care are perhaps a vestige of an early psychoanalytic dispute between the likes of Freud and Kohut. In an important regard, this is true. However, the dispute over psychic determinism and the limits of psychoanalysis early in its movement were substantial for a reason.

In his monumental *Freedom and Nature*, philosopher and scholar of both phenomenology and psychoanalysis Paul Ricoeur goes to great lengths to parse out what is at stake in the debate over the concept of freedom in the psychoanalytic movement, which he sees playing out perpetually in the fields of philosophy, psychology, and theology. Anticipating the sort of

interpretations that downplay the significance of the conflict for the enduring legacy of Freud

and psychoanalysis, he writes,

> Here it might still seem that only a linguistic subtlety separates us from Freudian realism and causalism. But this is not so. If the unconscious were purely and simply a "thing," a "reality" homogeneous with the nature of objects subject to the law of determinism, it would no longer have room for a voluntary and free superstructure. Man [*sic*] in his entirety would be given over to determinism. This is in fact how the Freudians interpret human psychic life. Freud's entire work breathes his mistrust of the place of the will and of freedom. This, let us note well, is not only a sign of the psychotherapist's professional deformation, but it is also the strong conviction that determinism cannot remain isolated, and that we can never leave it. Determinism devours all because it is not reciprocal with a freedom. This is why methodological determinism which lies at the basis of psychoanalysis can be interpreted as the inevitable and legitimate objectification of a necessity which is the obverse of free subjectivity.[78]

For Ricoeur, the matter of freedom is controversial in psychoanalysis because it threatens

to undermine the core tenet of psychic determinism, which holds together Freud's entire corpus.

It is not that Ricoeur believes that Freud was misguided in theorizing the existence of the

unconscious. Rather, he insists, the problem is that Freud ultimately tried to conceptualize the

unconscious as if it were a thinking agent;[79] it merely defers the problem of explaining the

freedom of consciousness onto the unconscious. This is a "professional deformation," as Ricoeur

not so delicately puts it, because it neglects the hermeneutical problem of explaining how we as

phenomenological consciousnesses actually arrive at a theory of psychic determinism. Here

Ricoeur aligns very closely to Kohut's hermeneutic critique of Freudian determinism in his

defense of freedom.[80]

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[78] Paul Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, trans. Erazim V. Kohák (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1966), 400 - 401

[79] "What shall we conclude from this—that there is no unconscious? Not at all: but the unconscious does not think, does not perceive, does not remember, does not judge. And yet, "something" is unconscious, something which is akin to perception, akin to memory, akin to judgment, and which is revealed in the analysis of dreams and neuroses." (Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature*, 387).

[80] For greater detail on this argument, see chapter two, "Kohut on the Paradox and Freedom of Empathy," in this dissertation.

On more ethical grounds, Ricoeur's indictment of Freudianism lies in the contention that, like with any caregiving relationship working toward cure and health, the analyst is not there to convince others that they have no freedom. Rather, it is the exact opposite:

> The profound meaning of a cure is not an explanation of consciousness in terms of the unconscious, but a triumph of consciousness over its own proscriptions by the detour through a deciphering consciousness other than itself. The analyst is the midwife of freedom, aiding the patient in forming the thought which fits his disease. He unravels his consciousness and restores its fluidity. Psychoanalysis is a healing by the mind. The true analyst is not the despot of the diseased consciousness but a servant in the restoration of freedom. In this the cure, though not an ethic, is no less the condition of ethics rediscovered where the will had succumbed to the terrible. An ethic in effect is always only a reconciliation of my self with its own body and with all the involuntary powers. While the eruption of proscribed forces marks the triumphs of the absolute involuntary, psychoanalysis places the patient back in normal conditions in which he can attempt such a reconciliation anew with his free will.[81]

To relate his argument to the metaphor of the empathic flashlight, Ricoeur here is making the point regarding what one does after one has illuminated previously opaque psychic material in one's world. Psychic determinism quickly becomes psychic reductionism, where the analyst points to the objects over which one has been stumbling, and subsequently embraces fatalism: your conscious existence is explained by what is unconscious. This is "despot[ism] of the diseased consciousness," Ricoeur argues, and is not ethical caregiving. For the analyst to truly be a "midwife of freedom" is for the caregiver to facilitate the process of deciphering how the unconscious has restricted one's voluntary powers. Toward this end, psychoanalysis's theorizing and pointing to the unconscious is ethically helpful, but only so far as it is a condition for the possibility for us to subsequently reconcile ourselves with those involuntary powers. That is, the greatest ethical potential of psychoanalysis and its tools is to protect and cultivate, not reduce, freedom and free will.

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[81] Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature*, 400.

For as hopeful and intuitive as Ricoeur and Kohut's arguments about the centrality of freedom and empathy are, it can be difficult to recall why the concept of freedom can be so offensive in the first place. Ed Farley helps to explain something important about the theological insight to empathy. In his 1990 *Divine Empathy*—which, despite its title, focuses more on the doctrine of God than theological anthropology—Farley explores how "rich contents of redemption, the event of Jesus as Christ, and the symbolics of God all point to a single metaphor for God's activity, the metaphor of divine empathy."[82] That is, the incarnation itself is an act of empathy, insofar as God decided to dwell in the world when God did not have to. God also models empathy for us in how deeply God cares for us. God knows us intimately and deeply. While Farley does not ostensibly disagree with this, for him the true depth of divine empathy comes in the fact that it has "no restrictions. No territorial privilege, legacy of class and tradition, gender, or status qualify is *as such* character."[83] In short, what makes empathy truly divine is that it has a freedom to transcend all categories the delineate and intersect one another in subject positionality.

What Farley does not add, however, is the fact that this divine quality is precisely what makes the prospect of a perfect empathy so offensive for persons. In other circumstances, the idea of achieving a divine level of care would seem to be positive. But here, empathy amounts to an offense precisely because it has no respect for the boundaries of psychic difference. While one may want to model one's empathic care off of Jesus's seemingly boundless evangelical mission of relating to every marginalized stranger he encountered, for anyone but the son of God to carry oneself in this way would feel presumptive. No one person can empathize with every marginalized stranger; there is no universal human empathy.

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[82] Edward Farley, *Divine Empathy: A Theology of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990), 295.
[83] Farley, *Divine Empathy*, 282. Emphasis original.

A similar critique may thus be offered of Ricoeur. As compelling as Ricoeur's claims regarding freedom are, there remains for him a lack of attention to the accessibility of this freedom. In a sense, the entirety of the shift to attention regarding subject positionality in caregiving is about tending to this disparity. The analyst may indeed be the midwife of freedom, but not everyone has access to healthcare.

The heart of the objection to empathic freedom is not that freedom does not matter, but rather that unreflectively championing for greater freedom neglects the structural injustices that impede such a process. Using empathy as a resource for ethical transformation in responding to marginalized suffering falls prey to the same legitimate critiques of "spreading democracy": democratic life remains vital for resisting authoritarian oppression, but the colonizing ambition to force democracy on others overlooks the broader systemic reasons for why political autonomy is not always available to begin with. Precisely the same diagnosis can be made of empathy as a well-intended tool for broadening freedom and ethical life: As the foundational tool of psychoanalysis, empathy is central to empowering others to a wider and more vivid experience of freedom; yet, any effort to force empathy upon others without their enthusiastic consent will amount to coercive psychic colonialism under the guise of normative liberal ethics.

Perhaps the most peculiar and surprising consequences of the ideological conflict over empathic freedom is that while Freud's psychic determinism may appear to be far more sterile and restrictive than Kohut's theory of empathic freedom, in the end, Freud's more cautious attitude toward the limits of psychoanalysis actually align more closely with the concerns around the careless transgression of psychic determinism in empathy—expressed by the likes of Benjamin, Hartman, Miller-McLemore, and Cooper-White. In other words, the audacity of Kohutian empathy is precisely that it dares to entertain the possibility of a wider and more vivid

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experience of freedom, which includes being freed from the involuntary forces that restrict our desires and relationships.

This is not to say that Kohut and empathic freedom cannot ever consider subject position and cultural context within its analysis. As the work of several feminist psychologists and theorists in the 1980s and 1990s and, more recently, womanist pastoral theologians Phillis Sheppard and Stephanie Crumpton attest, there is room within self psychology for greater attention to how race and gender factor in to empathic recognition and cultural selfobjects.[84] Yet, it is also safe to say at the very least that Freud's caution over including empathy within the bounds of psychoanalysis anticipated the methodological and ideological conflict over whether or not, for example, a cisgender heterosexual white man can ever empathize with the experiences of structural injustices of a black woman in the U.S.. Once one permits the possibility of vicariously instrospecting into the lived experiences of others within one's science, it becomes difficult if not impossible to use that science to discern which moments of empathy are genuine, and which are abusive overextensions of social knowledge. Perhaps better than anyone, and certainly better than Kohut, Freud understood that he was not able to develop any psychological criteria to be able to adjudicate these cases. Once the bridge to freedom in psychoanalysis is crossed, we are left with an irresolvable ideological conflict over empathy: does one want to

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[84] See Phillis Isabella Sheppard, *Self, Culture, and Others in Womanist Practical Theology* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Stephanie Crumpton, *A Womanist Pastoral Theology against Intimate and Cultural Violence* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014); Joan A. Lang, "Notes Toward a Psychology of the Feminine Self," *Kohut's Legacy: Contributions to Self Psychology*, ed. Paul E. Stepansky and Arnold Goldberg, 51 – 70 (Hillsdale, NJ: Analytic Press, l984); Judith Kegan Gardiner, "Self Psychology as Feminist Theory," *Signs* 12 (1987): 761 – 780; Leslie M. Lothstein, "Selfobject Failure and Gender Identity," *Progress in Self Psychology:, Volume 3: Frontiers in Self Psychology*, ed. Arnold Goldberg, 213 – 236 (Hillsdale, NJ: The Analytic Press, 1988); Joan Hertzberg, "Feminist Psychotherapy and Diversity: Treatment Considerations from a Self Psychology Perspective," *Diversity and Complexity in Feminist Therapy*, ed. Laura S. Brown and Maria P. P. Root, 275 – 298 (New York: Harrington Park Press, 1990); Barbara Johnson, "The Quicksands of the Self: Nella Larsen and Heinz Kohut," *Female Subjects in Black and White: Race, Psychoanalysis, and Feminism*, ed. Elizabeth Abel, Barbara Christian and Helen Moglen, 252 - 265 (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1997).

respect the boundaries of psychic difference, or does one want the freedom that would allow empathy to enact ethical action and social change?

Three Critiques: Practical and Pastoral Consequences of the Aporia of Empathy

The argument of this dissertation has largely been diagnostic. Namely, it has argued that debates over the ethical potential of empathy in pastoral caregiving practice is ideologically conflicted because of an inherent aporia regarding the freedom of empathy, which divides many practitioners and theorists—albeit in subtle and often undetected ways. We are ultimately repulsed by what we need most ethically: An empathic freedom that responds to the problem of marginalized suffering is effectively an obliteration of otherness and an erasure of difference.[85] I offer this argument both with caution and conflict, as there are important concerns that must be raised about its implications. Although there are surely more critiques of my argument than I am aware of, there are at least three substantive objections to my diagnosis that must be named and addressed explicitly.

The first critique of my argument is that there is nothing special about empathy's relation to freedom, and that I have misattributed a broader philosophical problem to a more specific relational and ethical phenomenon. To be as generous to this objection as possible, one might critique my assessment along the following lines: "It is of course true that debates between determinism and freedom are a perennial tension that permeates discussion within psychoanalysis, theology, and philosophy. All concepts are conditioned by how one orients oneself to deterministic or free systems of thought. However, you have singled out empathy as if it were the only concept that faces a dilemma with regard to freedom and psychic determinism.

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[85] See Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 19. Hartman argues that "empathy is double-edged, for in making the other's suffering one's own, this suffering is occluded by the other's obliteration."

You have not actually discovered anything new or unique about the problem of freedom; you have not discovered anything new about the problem of empathy; you have merely connected two problems in an arbitrary fashion, and attempted to explain the problem of empathy through an etiology that applies to every concept."

To first this challenge, I have no option except to agree, though with a significant caveat. Indeed, debates over the controversy of freedom are hardly new within the fields of theology, psychoanalysis, and philosophy. This analysis of the aporia of empathy is not to suggest that we have suddenly stumbled for the first time upon the perennial problem of reconciling the paradox of human freedom and the will. Rather, the practical and pastoral consequences of accepting the aporia of empathy amounts to caregivers shaping their ethical framework more explicitly around this insight: one must make a decision on whether or not to view empathy as a resource for freedom. While it is true that I have offered no innovation in resolving the enduring problem of freedom and determinism, it is nonetheless new insofar as it argues that our ethical strategies will become increasingly confused if we neglect the fact that this tension exists in empathy.

The second objection is less analytical, but perhaps more damning. This second challenge is that I have played a dishonest and unfair game with my analyses of subject positionality and freedom. To again be generous with this critique, one might object to my argument along these lines: "While it is clear that you see both freedom and attention to subject position as valuable, you have situated them against one another in a false dichotomy. In practical scenarios where empathy has ethical potential for offering care, you have weaponized freedom as a compulsory tool for judgment, as if to pose to caregivers: are you on the side of freedom, or not? Your argument has the consequence of forcing pastoral caregivers to decide whether they would like to take personal identity seriously, or to labor toward greater freedom for others. Not only does

your argument make it impossible to take full responsibility for one's place in the world and care for others, but it effectively licenses caregivers to unapologetically embrace the fantasy of unfettered autonomy over tending to subject position, because you have presented that as a viable option within the aporia of empathic freedom. Though you have claimed to be working toward greater ethical responsibility in empathic caregiving, your argument has the opposite effect."

There is, again, a degree of truth in this objection. However, it would be a misconstrual of my argument to suggest that I am posing an either/or ultimatum, forcing pastoral caregivers to choose between (a) constructing their caregiving practices with attention to subject position and (b) constructing their caregiving practices to work toward the Kohutian ideal of a wider and more vivid experience of freedom. The truth of this second objection, rather, is that it points us back to the tension of the aporia itself. Said otherwise, empathic freedom is aporetic precisely because it is harmful to have to choose between taking identity seriously and taking freedom seriously, yet it demands a certain transgression of psychic difference.

Within this theological ethical caregiving context, a vital clarification must be made about the aspiration to freedom. To practice some self-awareness in this context, I must name the obvious trope of the cisgender heterosexual white man offering a defense of freedom, and the problematic trend among persons from my subject position in bolstering the fantasy of complete self-reliance. While it is true that cultivating greater freedom as pastoral caregivers will always include a degree of creating autonomy for oneself, the ethical significance of this analysis is not for the sake of independence. That is, the point of defending empathic freedom is neither to pursue a delusional ideal that we should depend on no one, nor to suggest that the ego is not fundamentally intersubjective in its constitution. Rather, the ethical purpose of freedom lies

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precisely in the fact that, without it, not only will we be unable to offer care to those who have not experienced freedom and autonomy in their own lives, but we are more liable to become entrenched within in-group tribalism that enables white nationalism. Said otherwise, what is at stake in the defense of empathic freedom is the prospect of not being imprisoned within harmful and cyclical patterns of prejudice.

At the outset of this dissertation, I offered a humbling personal example of the failure of empathy, and how the structure of in-group social recognition around race threatens to undermine the deliberate efforts of caregivers to respond empathically to marginalized suffering and violence. As a reminder of this case, I had a disproportionately strong empathic reaction to observing violence against a white woman news reporter than I ever had in viewing police violence against black men and women. Quite simply, my empathy was structured by forces of white supremacy, which compelled me to have a far stronger cognitive and emotional response to violence wielded against my racial in-group as a white person.

To connect my case study with the phenomenological problem of recognition for empathy in pastoral theology, freedom would have involved my ability to direct my empathy as I desired, and not merely according to the pre-existing structures of social recognition that shape my ethical attention. While one may try to defend my reaction on the grounds that it was involuntary, this would only make my indictment more serious and would reaffirm the problem at hand. That is, such a defense confirms the issue that my empathy is pre-determined by how my social recognition has been racially cultivated, and suggests that there is nothing else I could have done. Interpreting my experience through psychic determinism would be to suggest that my reaction could only ever have happened as it did, effectively erasing my responsibility for my inability to respond.

As a white man, I may be tempted to feel self-satisfied with my efforts at scrutinizing my internalized racism and my ethical shortcomings. Refusing petty reassurances of one's ethical goodness does seem to be an important first step for pastoral caregivers who take seriously the normative ethical charge to alleviate marginalized suffering, and who are working to live out Jesus's preferential treatment for the poor.

However, this leads to the third and, I believe, most substantial critique of my argument, which is both a critique of this dissertation and, potentially, of the entire liberal normative ethical commitment of pastoral care and theology. This final critique is that the history of pastoral care and theology's obsession with empathy as a normative ethical resource for caregiving—which I have carried forward in this project—is nothing more than the infinite effort of privileged liberals to make themselves the center of attention in ethical and social movements. To be generous with this final critique one last time, such an indictment might go as follows: "Everything about the effort of pastoral caregivers to use empathy as an ethical resource for combatting marginalized suffering and injustice is fundamentally misguided. More specifically, it is misguided because it attempts to make social progress and justice contingent upon those who benefit from systems of oppression. You have used your opening case as an illustration of your failure in empathy and the racist structure of your social recognition, and you are right to judge yourself in this fashion. But, you have framed your case and this ethical discourse as if everything hangs on your personal integrity. Though black liberationist pastoral caregivers are justified in viewing empathy as a resource for uniting all persons facing oppression,[86] you have deployed empathy as

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[86] See Archie Smith Jr., *The Relational Self: Ethics and Therapy from a Black Church Perspective* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1982), 73. As noted previously, Smith argues that "[r]elationality is a pregiven structure of being which, in the ideal situation, moves people toward universal values, empathic sharing, and a deeper experience of their humanness in their historical context."

a way to center the universe once again around white affect.[87] Not only does your argument reflect a lack of awareness regarding subject position—something you purport to value—but you have entrenched pastoral care and theology further in the harmful vision that social change can only happen through the free will and good empathic intentions of white people. What you have performed in this argument and personal anecdote does not even arise to the level of false humility; it is an ethical delusion of grandeur."

One final time, I must concede that there is truth in this critique. If my project has the consequence of framing social progress as contingent upon the benevolent empathic freedom of white male liberal pastoral caregivers like me, then it is a failure. However, this is not its intention or purpose. At its best, a defense of empathic freedom in the Kohutian lineage for pastoral care and theology is a defense of holding privileged caregivers accountable for their empathic failures. With my own case, where my racist social recognition was fully transparent, the consequence of my argument is not that the disproportionate racial violence of a white supremacist society would have been solved if I had only directed my empathy in accordance with my normative ethical commitments as a pastoral caregiver. There must be no tolerance for entertaining the delusion of the white savior within pastoral care and theology. Rather, the consequence for accepting the aporia of empathy and social recognition is to embrace the ethical demand: You have been born into and benefited from a world of white supremacist violence and theory; it has structured your social recognition in ways that are out of your control and that you will never fully appreciate; even if you could properly align your empathy with the suffering of the world, you still could not save it; and, yet, you are responsible for it.

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[87] Although the particular salience of subject position in this setting is racial—given the matter of racially-motivated police violence—one might also add, "male and Eurocentric accect."

The Enduring Challenge of Empathy in Pastoral Theological Anthropology

The enduring challenge for pastoral care and theology is the question: am I responsible for my empathy? Though I have diagnosed the ways that the relational psychoanalytic and phenomenological problems of empathy and recognition structure this ethical conundrum, my analysis does not leave room for an unqualified answer. If there is any hope in living up to the theological ethical hope of responding to the suffering of the world, pastoral caregivers can and must be responsible for one another. However, the precise role that empathy plays in cultivating the freedom of others remains aporetic.

Framed slightly different, the aporia of empathic freedom poses two divergent directions for both interpreting and strategizing deficiencies in empathic care and action. Both are oriented toward cultivating ethical responsibility, but through different means as a consequence of their valuation of empathy as a resource for social transformation. In this dissertation, we have already seen these strategies emerge in a number of places, though they are most prominently represented in the arguments of Melinda McGarrah Sharp and Pamela Cooper-White on the one hand, and Saidiya Hartman on the other. For heuristic purposes, one might demarcate them as expansionist and restrictive approaches to the ethics of empathy and social recognition.

First, in the expansionist approach to the ethics of empathy and social recognition, the primary task of taking responsibility for one's empathy is to labor in a longitudinal fashion to scrutinize how the forces of implicit bias and prejudice structure one's social recognition. This is the approach that underlies McGarrah Sharp's brutally honest self-inventory in *Misunderstanding Stories*, where she stresses that broadening empathy in a postcolonial context where misunderstandings abound is a "lifelong process[s]."[88] Cooper-White largely joins with

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[88] Melinda McGarrah Sharp, *Misunderstanding Stories: Toward a Postcolonial Pastoral Theology* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013), 4.

McGarrah Sharp in this regard, again stressing that growing in one's capacity for empathy "is never finished but continues to increase in depth and complexity over the lifespan."[89] In this approach, the aim is not to embark on a misguided effort to colonize all persons and social locations with one's empathic gaze. Rather, the greatest aim for empathy in this strategy is to grow ever more attentive to how structural forces of oppression and domination stand in the way of us offering better care for those who need it most.

The expansionist strategy would advise me in my empathic failure to continue in the labor of becoming more aware of how the white supremacist culture I have grown up in has shaped my social recognition. The expansionist strategy would still insist that I am responsible for this biased affective attention, but would invite me to cultivate relationships of mutual respect and reciprocity with those with whom I hope to be in ethical solidarity. McGarrah Sharp and Cooper-White would of course caution against any impulse to inappropriately insert myself into social and cultural spaces where the consequence would be me forcing persons already afflicted by marginalization to also become my educator. In short, the expansionist horizon for empathy in pastoral theological anthropology demands that I accept the responsibility for cultivating my own empathy without exacerbating situations of injustice and oppression.

Second, in stark contrast, the restrictive approach to the ethics of empathy and social recognition would advise pastoral caregivers not to put much stock in the ethical prospect of empathy for social chance. This position, advocated by Hartman, notes that even the most noble efforts to expand one's ethical consciousness to include those who previous did not occupy one's empathic attention are ultimately short sighted and do not truly value the dignity and worth of marginalized persons. The restrictive approach does not contend that empathy is without merit,

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[89] Pamela Cooper-White, *Braided Selves: Collected Essays on Multiplicity, God, and Persons* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 47.

but rather that if one has to grow in one's capacity to vicariously introspect with others in order to adequately advocate for them, then one's ethics of care is ultimately rooted in the affect of the oppressor, not the suffering of the oppressed.

The restrictive strategy would then advise me in my empathic failure not to invest too heavily in growing my empathy, but rather to labor in principled and material ways toward the liberation of the marginalized. To be clear, the restrictive strategy would condemn my ethical shortcomings as harshly if not more so than the expansionist approach, precisely because, from its vantage point, my impulse to grow in my empathy still does not appreciate that white affect is not the key for black liberation and safety from police violence. The path forward for pastoral theological anthropology from the restrictive strategy would be to reorient pastoral care and theology away from empathy and good intentions, and toward material solidarity and organizing.

I must stress that these divergent strategies moving forward in pastoral care are both genuinely compelling. Moreover, one must be careful not to overstate how mutually exclusive they are with one another. Hartman, McGarrah Sharp, and Cooper-White are all in agreement that empathy is not a panacea for the world's social ills. They draw broadly from intrapsychic psychological theory and intersubjective social theory, and therefore do not fall neatly within the bounds of either a strict psychic determinism or a more liberal theory of empathic freedom. In this regard, the matter of methodological divergence in the ethics of empathy in pastoral theological anthropology is not unique in facing the problem outlined by theorist of religion Jonathan Z. Smith: "[A] methodological or theoretical position is not some magic wand that makes problems disappear. Each position assumed entails costs and consequences. The question is not one of deciding on solutions but of choosing what set of costs one is willing to bear."[90] It

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[90] Jonathan Z. Smith, *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 99.

just so happens that what makes the problem of empathy and recognition so pressing for pastoral

care and theology is precisely that the costs are not one's own.

It is for this reason that, in surveying the developments in pastoral care in recent decades,

pastoral theologian Bonnie Miller-McLemore underscores empathy as perhaps the most constant

and vital feature of the discipline's evolution and future. She argues,

> In the end, one trademark of the discipline has stayed constant throughout the shift in metaphor from living human document to living human web, and that is the power and value of empathy. To understand the document or the web, we need empathy. The distinction between document and web simply points to different strategies that we have developed and used over the years to increase empathy. However, the living human web has pushed empathy to its limits, so to speak. The idea of the living human web reminds us that sometimes we must admit our inability to fully comprehend and respond to the oppressions suffered by others. […] Sometimes our intervention at the individual or social level, however well intended, simply causes even more injustice and harm than the tragedies that we hoped to address and avert. We do know, however, that empathy matters. With all due recognition of the living human web and its importance, we should return to an original source of vitality at the beginning of the modern reinvention of pastoral theology: our compassion for individuals (including ourselves and our own interior lives)—what Boisen called the 'document'—which is our most or one of our most distinctive contributions within the academy and within the variety of practices that comprise ministry.[91]

Though Miller-McLemore perhaps sides more closely with fellow pastoral theologians

McGarrah Sharp and Cooper-White than Hartman in her narration of development of the living

human web as an evolving strategy to increase empathy, she also resolutely names the fact that

pastoral theology's attitude toward empathy is constantly shifting. Laboring toward justice and

offering better care for the plight of the oppressed will require a degree of uncertainty in the fate

of empathy as an ethical resource. This is not from lack of trying, but, rather, because taking our

responsibility for the care of others demands it.

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[91] Bonnie Miller-McLemore, "The Living Human Web: A Twenty-Five Year Retrospective." *Pastoral Psychology* 67 (2018): 317.

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