

Our Three Selves

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How many selves inhabit each of us? Reviving Durkheim, social psychologists Richard Shweder and Jonathan Haidt say the answer is two, individual and social.¹ We are homo duplex (Haidt 225). I would like to argue that there we are in fact homo triplex. What the third self is you will have to wait and see. I will just say that it, like the others, has potentials for good and bad.

The first self is the one we usually think of, the individual ego. Self number one looks out for number one. So common is this idea of selfhood that it is often hard to imagine any other. That is partly because we all directly sense our own ego but it is also because Western culture has emphasized egoistic selfhood.

According to rational choice theory, the basis of modern economics, each person always seeks maximum utility, to maximize pleasure and minimize pain. Dostoevsky's underground man ridicules this utilitarian idea as hopelessly naïve, but, in spite of much empirical counter-evidence, it has managed to thrive. Rational choice theorists add that people not only seek their maximal utility but do so rationally, meaning they do what they think best promotes their self-interest. Of course, they may be mistaken, either because of lack of knowledge or, as behavioral economists point out, inherent biases. There are cognitive illusions as there are optical illusions. Even so, we are still number one out for number one.

Freud also presumes the egoistic model of self. That is why children's egos have to be socialized, a process that generates repression but makes civilization possible.

Even John Rawls, who tries for a more egalitarian approach to justice, simply assumes rational egoism. No alternative is considered, a good sign that the model seems inevitable. Rawls conducts a thought experiment: Assume a person prior to any categories -- an agent without culture, gender, specified risk tolerance, specified intelligence or talents, or place in society. What sort of society would it choose? To answer this question, we must recognize that that primal person would pursue self-interest rationally, and this concept of rationality "must be interpreted as far as possible in the narrow sense, standard in economic theory, of taking the most effective means to given ends"(14). With only one's own interest to consider, "no one has a reason to acquiesce in an enduring loss for himself." Since "everyone is equally rational and similarly situated, each is convinced by the same arguments . . . a unanimous agreement can be reached" (141). Rawls' resulting idea of the just society derives from rational egoism as enacted by pre-cultural persons. They wind up choosing a form of egalitarian liberalism.

Now, I think we can take it as a rule that when a philosophical analysis winds up proving one's prior political position, one should be especially skeptical of one's results. Rawls starts with liberal assumptions about the self and then winds up with selves choosing liberal values. The very idea of a self before cultural categories commits what I like to call the "pre-cultural

fallacy.” Just because cultures vary does not mean that the essentially human is pre-cultural or that culture can be abstracted from humanness. One might as well argue that because languages vary, the essentially human is either mute or pre-lingual like a chimp. People do not belong to the same culture, but they all belong to *some* culture, just as they all speak some language. Culture and language are essential to being human in the first place, and to think them away is to by-pass the human.

For much the same reasons that economists think away cultural difference, so does Rawls in his critique of them. Both want the sort of absolute proof that comes from mathematical or logical deduction from axioms, and rational egoism offers a good axiomatic starting point. Culture, which cannot be mathematicized or formalized, must be gotten past. Swift was probably closer to the truth when he suggests, in book Four of *Gulliver's Travels*, that man is most human when clothed. Animals just don't wear clothes, but people without clothes are naked.

The egoistic model readily finds support in evolution. When rational choice theory held unchallenged sway, it was also orthodox to hold that evolution works only on individuals, not groups. If so, then all apparently altruistic actions, and all morality, must really be disguised egoism.

But what if competition did exist among groups? Wouldn't groups with individuals ready to sacrifice themselves for the group, or cooperate even when it was not in their self-interest, out-compete groups composed of egoists who cooperated only when it paid selfishly? Darwin entertained this possibility, and also posed the main objection that would have to be answered: the free rider problem. Suppose a group of 100 self-sacrificing individuals and two selfish ones: in times of crisis, some of the 100 would sacrifice themselves but the two selfish ones would safely reap the benefit. So in the next generation there would be proportionally more selfish people until the group consisted primarily of them. With arguments like this, George Williams and Richard Dawkins managed for years to banish the idea of group selection.² Individual egoism seemed to be given by evolution itself, with anything else a mere sentimentality, the unfortunate legacy of religious superstition.

For Dostoevsky, such an understanding of morality does away with the idea of crime as something that is simply wrong. Murder becomes no different from parking tickets: it's just a matter of utility and deterrence. Nobel-prize winning economist Gary Becker, famous for extending the economic model to the rest of society, once reflected that in deciding whether to park illegally he was balancing the size of the fine and the chance of being caught against the benefit. Might not all criminality involve the same calculation and nothing more?³

Religion teaches the opposite lesson, that it is wrong to do some things even if one is not caught. Ivan Karamazov is torn apart by these contrasting views. On the one hand, he is convinced on logical and scientific grounds that “crime is not a crime” in any objective sense. But he is nonetheless obsessed with stories of child abuse which he just knows are wrong in and of themselves. In *Crime and Punishment*, Raskolnikov, who has committed a rationalist's

murder asks himself: "Why does my action strike them as so horrible? Is it because it was a crime? What is meant by crime? My conscience is at rest. Of course it was a legal crime, of course, the letter of the law was broken and blood was shed. Well, then punish me for the letter of the law. ... and that's enough!"⁴ He experiences guilt, but, unlike Ivan Karamazov and more like some follower of Dawkins, attributes it "to the dead weight of instinct [by which he means social conditioning] he could not step over, again through weakness and meanness" and not to "the fundamental falsity of his convictions" (526).

Only in Siberia does Raskolnikov change when he dreams the implications of rational egoism. In his dream, a plague of intelligent and willful parasites infects humanity with the unshakeable conviction that egoistic rationality and individual will are all there is. Reason becomes only a tool of self-assertion:

Never had men considered . . . their decisions, their scientific conclusions, their moral convictions so infallible. ... Each thought that he alone had the truth and ... could not agree on what to consider evil and what good.... They gathered together in armies against one another, but even on the march the armies would begin attacking each other, the ranks would be broken, and the soldiers would fall on each other, stabbing and cutting. (528-29)

Paradoxically enough, the unshakeable belief in ego and will is itself unwilling, an infection from outside. What looks like individual choice is really what might be called *ironic possession*. Dostoevsky identifies the parasites as trichina worms in order to recall the Gadarene swine into whom Jesus drives the devils possessing a madman.

2 – We

Let us now turn to the second kind of self, the social self. The social psychologist Jonathan Haidt refers to our "hive" self, because when it is switched on, people behave as if they were part of a super-organism, like bees or ants or termites. In Haidt's words, we are 90% chimp and 10% bee.⁵

Durkheim insisted that society is not just the sum of individuals but a thing with its own properties: "A whole can have very different properties from those which its constituent parts possess" (21). That whole takes up residence in the individual self, part of which acts accordingly. While some emotions, like fear, respect, and affection tie us to others as cooperating individuals, others make us lose our sense of individual self. The person feels: "I am simply a part of a whole, whose actions I follow, and whose influence I am subject to" (Haidt 226). "Thus in a public meeting," Durkheim observes, "the great waves of enthusiasm, indignation and pity that are produced, have as their origin no single individual consciousness. They come to each of us from outside and are likely to sweep us along despite ourselves" (70). The individual who surrenders to these great waves will not be aware of them as external, but if he tries to resist he will experience a conflict of two wills, individual and crowd, brought within.

The great historian William McNeill described an experience he called “muscular bonding,” present in military drill and communal dancing. The constant act of marching together, *keeping time*, produced “a sense of pervasive well-being ... a strange sense of personal enlargement; a sort of swelling out, becoming bigger than life, thanks to participation in a collective ritual” (2). It is this feeling that binds soldiers and makes them willing to risk their lives, which is almost always done not for a principle but for the fellowship of the small group. “We would not die in that man's company/ That fears his fellowship to die with us,” says Shakespeare’s Henry V.⁶ Social distinctions dissolve with this communal feeling:

We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;
For he to-day that sheds his blood with me
Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile,
This day shall gentle his condition. (IV.iii.60-4)

McNeill cites a historian of African dance describing a feeling of “boundary loss, the submergence of self in the flow” and he speaks of “a blurring of self-awareness and the heightening of fellow-feeling with all who share in the dance” or drill (8). He quotes a veteran: “most veterans who are honest with themselves will admit ... that the experience of communal effort in battle ... has been the high point of their lives.... Their ‘I’ passes into a ‘we,’ ‘my’ becomes ‘our,’ and individual fate loses its central importance.” It all feels like “an assurance of immortality,’ not individual mortality, but as part of a group: the sense that “I may fail, but I do not die, for that which is real in me goes forward and lives on in the comrades for whom I gave up my life” (10). “I” passes into “we”: the group acts as another will within me.

Haidt sees some moral emotions as essentially collective in nature. While respect for individual autonomy as a source of morality derives from our individual nature, other sources, like loyalty, authority, and sanctity, reflect the hive. American academics usually overlook these values, Haidt insists, but they are active in most other cultures and, indeed, among non-liberals in ours. Durkheim, too, insists that in the realm of the sacred the self disappears. Awe, including the awe romantic poets felt towards nature, is an emotion reflecting the value of sanctity.

These hive emotions prompt deeds of heroism, among soldiers, firemen, or ordinary citizens who save imperiled neighbors. One is not balancing costs against benefits. It is obvious how these emotions can serve a community. Indeed, a community that loses them will not long survive.

And yet, the collective self within us can lead to horror. The great literary work about that horror, Euripides’ *Bacchae*, describes the Maenads as a group maddened by a frenzy inspired by Dionysus. They lose all sense of themselves as individuals, which is why their leader Agave can destroy her own son Pentheus. Euripides describes the Maenads literally tearing him limb from limb: “One tore off an arm, another a foot still warm in its shoe. His ribs were clawed clean of flesh and every hand was smeared with blood as they played ball with scraps of Pentheus’ body” (408). They strip his flesh while he is still alive. Pentheus screams “no, no, mother, I am Pentheus, your own son.... Pity me, spare me, Mother!” in vain. “But she was foaming at the

mouth, and her crazed eyes rolling with frenzy” (407). She is literally ecstatic, standing outside her self. The play’s most heart-rending moment occurs when Agave realizes that the head she is holding is her son’s. “I feel as though—my mind were somehow—changing,” she says as her personal self returns (415).

As it happens, Pentheus, too, is possessed when he goes to spy on the Maenads -- *ironically possessed*, as in Raskolnikov’s dream, by the spirit of extreme selfhood. He is dissociated from himself without being attached to a crowd. Dionysus drives Pentheus mad by making him “passionately curious” to know and see what he should not know and see (393). Curiosity belongs to the ego and risks impiety. And so Pentheus suffers dismemberment just where his cousin Actaeon was torn apart by his hounds for having spied, however unwittingly, on Artemis. The curiosity possessing him makes Pentheus willing to do what he would never otherwise do: humiliate himself by publically wearing women’s dress as a disguise for spying on the Maenads. Dionysus taunts: “For sane of mind this man would never wear a woman’s dress: but obsess his soul and he will not refuse” (397). He is literally not in his right mind, which means, as the phrase suggests, he is in some other mind. Pentheus returns to his first self only when he sees his mother about to tear him to pieces.

3 – *The Madness of Crowds*

In my book on aphorisms, I identified a genre I called “the summons.” In a time of crisis, with the survival of a people at stake, a leader summons the people to rise above themselves as individuals and act together.⁷ He promises only “blood, sweat, and tears,” a badge of honor only when we value something beyond self: duty. “Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duty, and so bear ourselves that, if the British Commonwealth and Empire last for a thousand years, men will say, ‘this was their finest hour.’”⁸ The successful summons transforms a people into a band of brothers, guided by an outside will they adopt, not like the Maenads, but by their own individual choice.

Any power that can be used can be abused. Mussolini, too, mastered the summons:

[Our movement rejects the view of man] as an individual, standing by himself, self-centered, subject to natural law, which instinctively urges him toward a life of selfish momentary pleasure; it sees not only the individual . . . instinct for life closed in a brief circle of pleasure [but] builds up a higher life, founded on duty, a life free from the limitations of time and space, in which the individual, by self-sacrifice, the renunciation of self-interest . . . can achieve that purely spiritual existence in which his value as a man consists (cited in Haidt 141).

In *Paradise Lost*, Satan, himself a radical individualist, inspires the devils in just this hive way. As he speaks, the possessors are possessed:

And to confirm his words, out flew
Millions of flaming swords drawn from the wings
Of mighty cherubim. (ll. 663-5)

As with McNeil, they are bound by communal music:

Such as raised to highth of noblest tempter Heroes old
Arming to Battle, and . . .
Deliberate valor breathed, firm and unmov'd
With dread of death to flight and foul retreat,
Nor wanting power to mitigate and swage
With solemn torches, troubl'd thoughts, and chase
Anguish and doubt and fear and sorrow and pain
From mortal or immortal minds. (ll.551-9)

Russian specialists will immediately think of the Soviet ideal of *partiinnost'*, party-ness. The new Soviet man would entirely overcome individuality and become only the creature of the Party. His individual will was suffused into the Party's. One common plot of the Soviet novels described how a Communist who begins using his own initiative at last matures and surrenders such initiative altogether. As a medieval saint who overcomes selfhood earns sanctification, the Soviet hero achieves *partiinnost'*.

Charles Mackay's classic *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds* (1841) narrates how this madness has often caused financial bubbles. Almost everything commonly known about the great Dutch Tulipomania, the Mississippi scheme, and the South Seas bubble comes from Mackay's account. Conventional rational choice theory, especially in the version including efficient market theory, rules out the very possibility of bubbles, and so some economists have argued that in what looks like a bubble each individual is in fact behaving rationally. Each calculates he can ride the market's rise and get out in time. But Mackay proposes that some form of possession is taking place. People are not calculating at all, but acting in a frenzy. Sophisticated people who knew better invested in perpetual motion machines or even in so obvious a scam as "a company for carrying out an undertaking of great advantage, nobody to know what it is" (55). And after the fact, they behaved like Agave, unable to believe how they could have done what they did or, as they sometimes say, what possessed them.

Nor is this behavior restricted to finance. "In reading the history of nations," Mackay explains, "we find that whole communities suddenly fix their minds upon one object, and go mad in its pursuit; that millions of people become simultaneously impressed with one delusion, and run after it until their attention is caught up with some new folly more captivating than the first" (xix). The folly spreads by what Mackay calls "popular imitativeness" in which people seem infected by some mental virus taking over their will. "Men, it has been said, think in herds; it will be seen that they go mad in herds, while they only recover their senses one by

one” (xx). Rational choice theory presumes agents with a single will, but Mackay’s herd—or hive—thinkers have a second one, a hive will, poised to take over.

In recent years, group evolution has regained respectability. The free rider problem is solved when culture becomes a super-organism like a hive. That is why cultures develop moral values like loyalty, authority, and sanctity, irreducible to egoistic cooperation, and punish the free riders who violate them.

4 – Barn Owls

I would like to extend the two-self model Haidt developed from Shweder and Durkheim. To the chimp and the bee let us add one of those avian species that mate for life—let us say, the barn owl, which apparently becomes severely depressed, even willing itself to perish rapidly, when a spouse dies. We are homo triplex.

We are not only individual and group creatures, we are also *pairing* creatures. Just as we do not feel fulfilled if we ignore our social selves, so our pairing selves demand expression. Durkheim describes the ailment he calls anomie, normlessness, afflicting people who live entirely as individuals and so find no meaning beyond themselves. Analogous to such anomie is an emotion that resembles loneliness but is perhaps best described by the Russian word *toska*. One person longs for another. *Toska* includes loneliness, longing, a sense of something missing, and a need to communicate with an other. In English we say one person *misses* another, in Russian they say he *toskas* for him—*toska* being made into a verb.⁹

Our tendency to pair is so obvious a feature of our lives that one wonders how it could have been overlooked. Of course it hasn’t been, but has instead been subsumed into one of the other two categories, treated either as an aspect of the social – two is already plural – or as a vehicle for individual expression. Denis de Rougemont’s classic study *Love in the Western World* describes what he calls *romantic love* – the love celebrated by the troubadours, described in *Romeo and Juliet*, and presumed by so much popular culture – as an individual’s route to transcendence over the mundane. Ultimately the lover loves not the other but love itself. This form of love is primarily about the self, with the other as instrument.

So is hedonistic love. Shortly after my book on *Anna Karenina* appeared in 2007, *The Journal of Family Therapy and Review* asked me to do a commentary for a special issue on marriage.¹⁰ I discovered that this branch of sociology understands marriage much the way a rational choice theorist like Gary Becker does. The title of a survey article made the presupposition clear: “Research on the Nature and Determinants of Marital Satisfaction: A Decade in Review.” Marriage is about *satisfaction*. It is an arrangement entered into by two people who each hope to use the other to maximize their personal utility.¹¹

In Becker’s analysis, people stay married if the transaction costs in switching to a better partner are too high, and have children to give them a kind of pleasure he calls “child services.”¹² In the hedonistic “marriage as satisfaction” studies, children are also incidental and

exist to provide satisfaction to their parents. They are something like pets, but with a longer commitment -- more like houses, except that they cannot be remodeled.

I was struck by how limited this view was, both historically and culturally. If one turns to the history of marriage in the West, the idea that marriage exists for the pleasure of the partners is absent until recently. In his classic study of medieval marriage, George Duby describes a long and "gradual process of acculturation" toward an ecclesiastic model from a secular one that was essentially dynastic (17).

The two views differed over questions of incest, bigamy, divorce, sexuality, inheritance, and above all, consent. The church insisted that you couldn't just abduct a bride, both parties had to agree. That's a step toward our view, but still regards marriage as something beyond individual satisfaction. If one looks at cultures around the world, the idea that marriage is primarily, let alone exclusively, about two people's pleasure and that children are incidental seems decidedly weird.

If marriage is not necessarily a hedonistic contract, then what else might it be? It is in part also social, of course. But it might also express the human need for a smaller unit, the pair. It would in that case not be the only such expression: friendship is another. If one considers how much of life concerns marriage and friendship, it is remarkable that they are subsumed into individuality or society. Pairing, as well as sociality, is part of what makes us human.

For Aristotle, one of the few Western philosophers who discuss the topic, friendship is not just a good like any other but essential to a meaningful life. "For without friends no one would choose to live," he observes. He quotes the phrase from the Iliad, "two going together." And we recall that what motivates Achilles to give up his sulk is not loyalty to the group -- Odysseus, Ajax, and Mentor appeal to these values in vain -- but the death of his friend Patroclus. Aristotle declares: "With friends men are more able both to think and to act." In a sense, one is more oneself in a friendship than alone (1058).

For Aristotle, a true friendship, like a true community, is something beyond the people who make it up. Becker would treat friendship like marriage, as a contract for mutual benefit. Aristotle allows that this kind of friendship exists: "Those who love for the sake of utility love for the sake of what is good for *themselves*, and not insofar as the other is the person loved. . . And thus these friendships are only incidental" (1060). When young people have amorous relationships this way, "they fall in love and quickly fall out of love, sometimes within a single day" (1061). But there is also a form of true friendship in which the friends wish each other well not for the sake of themselves but for the other: "Now those who wish well to their friends for their sake are most truly friends" (1061). Such relationships are by nature meant to be both intimate and permanent. You want to know the friend as well as you can.

That is also one way to think of marriage. Like friendship, it is something greater than the two individuals involved. One can believe in the marriage as something of value in itself, something essential to a life in a way other relationships are not. Marriage so conceived does

not resemble an ordinary contract, which consists of nothing but the obligations and benefits of the parties to it. People marry without even knowing the terms of the contract.

In their book *Nudge*, Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein suggest that we stop treating marriage as one-size-fits-all and set up a menu of possible contracts that people could choose among, or, if they like, pay the expense of drawing up their own (217-228). They describe the obvious advantages of such a menu, but they do not seem to understand that they are suggesting abolishing marriage itself, which is by its nature something distinct. Marriage is not just a contract, or why would people enter into it without ever reading its provisions?—nor do experts advise them to do so, as they would when signing a note or buying a house. Societies surround marriage with special rituals and taboos. Gays would not accept civil union with the identical legal provisions as marriage. Sunstein’s and Thaler’s substitute loses the aura of marriage, which is perhaps the most important thing about it.

Like true friendship, marriage is supposed to be permanent. To enter into marriage with the sense one can always get out of it is not really to make the commitment at all. People often interpret divorce as meaning a failed life. To divorce after fifteen years is not the same as to have a spouse die after fifteen years. The marriage exists beyond mere self-interest: in sickness and in health, for better or for worse, “until death do us part.”

Best friends can be like that. In *War and Peace* Tolstoy cites an anecdote about a Frenchman whose best friend has died and who laments that now the theatre of his actions is gone. One’s actions have significance when and because they are told to a friend or spouse and so can seem pointless after his or her death. That is because one’s actions have not really been just one’s own but belong also to the friendship or marriage.¹³

5 – Dwee

If marriage and friendship go beyond our egoistical selves, neither can they be explained by our communal selves. Indeed, a great deal of literature about love, marriage, and friendship deals with the *difference* between the pair and society at large. John Donne’s poem “The Good Morrow” contrasts the small room of the lovers with the wide world outside:

For love, all love of other sights controls,
And makes one little room, an everywhere.
Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone,
Let maps to others, worlds on worlds have shown,
Let us possess one world, each hath one, and is one. (2)

Lett (Lithuanian) sailors map the globe, but the second person imperative “let us” is addressed to just one other. There is the world, and there is the two of us. In “The Canonization” Donne mocks the call of community:

Alas, alas, who's injured by my love?
What merchant's ships have my sighs drown'd?
Who says my tears have overflow'd his ground? . . .
Soldiers find wars, and lawyers find out still
Litigious men, which quarrels move,
Though she and I do love. (16)

For Donne, the small love poem (what he calls the sonnet) addressed to one other contrasts with the big genres for the community, epic and chronicle: "And if no piece of chronicle we prove,/ We'll build in sonnets pretty rooms" -- an implicit pun, since in Italian, a stanza also means a room.¹⁴ The private world of two people's intimacy calls on a different self from the public world of society.

Two is a distinct sort of plural. In fact, some languages have not two numbers, singular and plural, but three, singular, dual, and plural, in which case plural means three or more, not two or more. Old Church Slavonic for instance featured seven cases and three numbers, for a total of twenty-one forms. There were dual pronouns, including a first person dual that meant "we two," as if English had a word I imagine as "dwee." The Slavonic dual derives from Proto-Indo-European, and it survived in Vedic Sanskrit and modern Slovenian. Many other language families have had it: Proto-Uralic, Semitic, and Austronesian, for instance. Tolkien gave it to the elvish language he invented. So widespread is the form that it may reflect not just our bodily symmetry but something basic about the human condition and our barn owl selfhood. Even in English, we have a distinct word "both" for a twosome but no equivalent for a threesome. And think of the difference between referring to two people and referring to a couple.

It is easy enough to see how evolution would favor a proclivity to pair. Unlike male chimps, human males stay to form a family. Though its forms differ, marriage appears to be a universal. So does the pairing of mother and infant, all the more necessary for human neonates who are uniquely helpless. Our first relations are pairs. If folklore says anything, mother and child form a unit in itself. And people with best friends are more likely to thrive. We are jealous of identical twins who, we suppose, have a bond unavailable to the rest of us.

6 – Empathy

The defining emotion of pairing is empathy. One is hurt by pain to the other, not directly, of course, but as closely as possible.¹⁵

In *Anna Karenina* Levin at first imagines married love as transcendent bliss, but he learns it is something entirely different, prosaic intimacy. From the moment he and Kitty emerge from the church, he feels as if he did not know just where she ended and he began. When they quarrel, "he felt for the first moment as a man feels when, having suddenly received a violent blow from behind, turns around, angry and eager to avenge himself, to look for his antagonist, and finds out that it is he himself who has accidentally struck himself, that there is no one to be angry with" (506). Instead of romantic mystery, he discovers a love that cultivates *intimacy*,

knowing the other moment to moment. The couple can communicate in a dialogue that would make no sense to eavesdroppers. In *War and Peace*, Pierre and Natasha, as soon as they were alone, “began to talk as only a husband and wife can talk, that is, apprehending one another’s thoughts and exchanging ideas with extraordinary swiftness and perspicuity, contrary to all the rules of logic, without the aid of premises, deductions, or conclusions, and in a quite singular way. Natasha was so used to this kind of talk with her husband that for her it was a sure sign of something wrong between them if Pierre followed a logical train of thought” (406). Constant intimacy allows them to sense the other’s point of view while simultaneously maintaining their own.

There is also an empathy of nonequals. Levin wonders that the emotion provoked by his newborn son is not joy but “pity” and “disgust” (747). Here love and empathy fuse into a direct sensation of extreme vulnerability. It is as if the other’s insides were exposed to the air, which is what also produces the disgust.

But there is a dark side to empathy. Con men are expert empathizers. Still worse, empathetic people can take pleasure in witnessing another’s suffering, which they share vicariously and safely. Voyeuristic pleasure at the other’s pain grows all the stronger as one senses it more intimately. And part of the other’s suffering consists in the fact that something so intimate is being witnessed. The sufferer’s pain and the witness’s exhilaration reinforce each other.¹⁶

Dostoevsky often described what he calls the “strange inner feeling of satisfaction” felt at witnessing the most private of acts, dying (*Crime and Punishment* 178). And so witnessing a fire often produces “a thrilling and exhilarating effect... a certain concussion of the brain and, as it were, a challenge to those destructive instincts which, alas, lie hidden in every heart, even that of the mildest and most domestic little clerk... This sinister sensation is almost always fascinating” (*The Possessed*, 523-4). The next step is producing the pain deliberately, torture.

Dostoevsky is not interested in torture for a rational purpose, like the extraction of information, an analogue to friendship based on utility. He is interested in torture that, like true friendship, exists for the sake of the other, but negatively. Such torture demands empathy -- no one gets pleasure from torturing a stone -- and the pleasure is in direct proportion to the degree of empathy. The torturer *requires* a *torturee*, a human being he acknowledges as such, for such torture to have its point.

In *The House of the Dead*, the guards love to torture prisoners while shouting “I am your God!”: I can do anything to you and you will do anything, absolutely anything I wish. I can strip you down, beyond mere body, to your quivering soul:

I imagine that there is something in this sensation [of inflicting pain] that sends a thrill at once sweet and painful. ... Anyone who has experienced this power, this unlimited mastery of the body, blood, and soul of a fellow man made of the same clay as himself,

a brother in the law of Christ -- anyone who has experienced the power and license to inflict the greatest humiliation upon another creature made in the image of God will unconsciously lose the mastery of his own sensations. Tyranny is a habit ... the mind and the heart are tolerant of the most abnormal things, till at last they come to relish them. (240-1)

The whole point is that the victim is a fellow soul, like oneself. One inflicts physical pain and humiliation so as to achieve “unlimited mastery” of another *person*. The attraction of such power is a fact of human nature one must never forget.

In 1984 totalitarianism turns out to be a vehicle for such Dostoevskian domination. It looks like collectivism, but it is ultimately about couples, each with a torturer and a torturee. In the climactic torture scene, O’Brien explains that the real goal of Ingsoc is “the exact opposite of the hedonistic utopias that the old reformers imagined.” Progress will be what he chillingly calls “progress towards more pain.” One soul violates another, using the body as a vehicle to reach the soul. This violation, O’Brien explains, takes place in the sight of a torturer who experiences “the thrill of victory, the sensation of trampling an enemy who is helpless. If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face -- forever”: the face, because it shows the self, and a boot, something worn by a human being, to make the humiliation *personal* (203).

And remember, O’Brien continues, “that it is forever”:

This drama I have played out with you during seven years will be played out over and over again. . . Always we shall have the heretic here at our mercy, screaming with pain, broken up, contemptible -- and in the end utterly penitent, saved from himself, crawling to our feet of his own accord” (204).

What comes in as hedonism, pleasure for the individual, to be secured by collectivism and socialism, winds up as an endless pairing of torturer and torturee.

Orwell’s dystopia culminates with the ultimate abuse of all three souls of a human being. Winston’s individuality is developed in order to be smashed. Ingsoc turns collective bonding into the two-minute hate. And in the final scene, as Winston sits beside the telescreen and hears a voice singing: “Under the spreading chestnut tree, I sold you and you sold me” (223). He has betrayed the relationship with Julia, but he has at last achieved the love of his life: “he loved Big Brother” (226).

7 – Dialogue

Dialogue defines us. We are always paired. For Bakhtin, selves are dialogic because language is. Linguists forget that the basic unit of language is not the sentence, but the

utterance: someone *says* an utterance to someone else at some particular time and place. The sentence is just raw material for an utterance. Unlike sentences, utterances by their very nature possess *addressivity*. They anticipate a response and are shaped in expectation of one. Speech is never solitary, always binary.

In traditional communicative models, the role of the listener begins *after* the utterance is formed, and traditional reader reception theory studies how the listener responds *after* the work is made. But Bakhtin's point is that the listener shapes the utterance from the outset. It is the joint property of speaker and listener. Everything about the utterance is shaped by the anticipated response: the information presumed, the choice of words, the tone. You must always choose whether you are speaking to an adult or a child, to someone above you or below you in the social scale, and countless other distinctions. Languages may mark some of these distinctions grammatically, but even if left unmarked they are always there. Every utterance presupposes dialogue with another person.

The same is true of thought. Thought is inner speech, dialogues we hold in our heads. When you think, you are always addressing *someone*, present implicitly as the person we are trying to persuade, the judge before whom we vindicate ourselves, or some other partner in dialogue. Specific others, like our parents, inhabit us as the others we mentally address. Talking to oneself is talking to the other within. Each person consists in part of the others that inhabit him as partners in inner dialogue.

Consciousness is itself dialogic. It is, as its etymology suggests, knowing with. And through consciousness dialogue extends to all life. Bakhtin insists on

The dialogic nature of consciousness, the dialogic nature of human life itself. The single adequate form for *verbally expressing* authentic human life is the *open-ended dialogue*. To live means to participate in dialogue . . . In this dialogue a person participates wholly and through his life: with his eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his whole body and deeds. He invests his entire self in discourse, and this discourse enters into the dialogic fabric of human life, into the world symposium. (294)

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¹ See Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*. Shweder's ideas are discussed on pages 14-21 and 99-102.

² See Williams, *Adaptation and Natural Selection*; Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*; and Haidt, 195-99.

³ See Becker, "Crime and Punishment; An Economic Approach", 1-54.

⁴ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 526.

⁵ See Haidt, chapter 10, "The Hive Switch," 221-245.

⁶ The famous speech occurs in *Henry V*, Act 4, scene iii, lines 18-67. These are lines 38-39.

⁷ Gary Saul Morson, *The Long and Short of It*, 173-94.

⁸ *History in Quotations*, 846.

⁹ Chekhov has a marvelous early story -- entitled "Toska" -- about this emotion. The title is sometimes translated, inadequately, "Misery."

¹⁰ Morson, "*Anna Karenina*" in *our Time: Seeing More Wisely*.

¹¹ Morson, "Marriage, Love, and Time in Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*", 353-369.

¹² See Becker, *A Treatise on the Family*. Becker won a Nobel Prize for his extensions of the economic model.

¹³ In fact, so long as one continues to think of one's actions that way, death does not necessarily end the friendship. Like a missing limb, one feels the other even beyond the possibility of presence. It does not feel that way when some other contractual partner goes out of business.

¹⁴ *The Songs and Sonets of John Donne*, 16 and 18; see note on page 19.

¹⁵ It is crucial to recognize that empathy is not the same as merging, as if two people just became one. They are both a unit and remain a twosome. As Bakhtin observes, in empathy one "lives into" the other, which means one also retains one's outsideness (*vnenakhodimost'*). "I actively live into an individuality, and consequently do not, for a single moment, lose myself or lose my singular place outside that other individuality." See the paraphrase of Bakhtin's ethical treatise in the introduction to Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, *Rethinking Bakhtin: Extensions and Challenges* (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1989).

¹⁶ I offer an extended discussion of voyeurism, torture, and the negative use of empathy in Morson, *Prosaics and Other Provocations*, 145-170.