Toward A Phenomenology of Depression: Merleau-Ponty and the Plunge into the Present

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TOWARD A PHENOMENOLOGY OF DEPRESSION: MERLEAU-PONTY AND THE PLUNGE INTO THE PRESENT

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The goal of this work is to try to understand and identify the reality that corresponds to the word “depression.” My orientation is to treat depression as a problem that is nonetheless a way of living, and an experience that will be better understood and articulated through the performing of a phenomenological investigation. I proceed in three stages, and this phenomenology will be the third, and final stage. I present in the first stage crucial insights from the tradition of phenomenological inquiry, regarding what form lived experience actually takes, drawing primarily from Merleau-Ponty and thinkers inspired by him. The second stage draws on a synthetic, historical account to determine what the reality corresponding to depression has been. The third stage of the thesis, and my main accomplishment, will be to unite these first two parts into a phenomenological description of the lived experience of depression. This stage is oriented towards demonstrating that the phenomenon can be understood as the inter-relations of four fundamental features.
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We often hear talk about the phenomenon of depression. Depression is a serious issue for those who suffer with it, and how it is understood has a huge impact on its treatments. My goal is not to engage polemically with existing treatments, nor is it to present a model for treatment. My goal is more basic, but nonetheless of fundamental importance. My goal is to try to identify and understand what is the reality that corresponds to the word "depression". The successful fulfillment of the goal of this dissertation will be to say at the end "this is what depression is". It is to understand depression as a way of existing, to bring it, as a phenomenon, as an experience, to articulate perception.

My basic orientation is to treat depression as a way of living, or a kind of experience. My goal is to try to understand it "from the inside", to understand how it is lived by those with it. In that sense my orientation is one of performing a phenomenology. My dissertation will proceed in three stages, and this phenomenology will be the final, third stage. The first stage will bring out crucial insights from the tradition of phenomenological inquiry, regarding what form lived experience actually takes. These forms will be the basic resources used to understand the phenomenon of depression, and I will use Merleau-Ponty and thinkers inspired by him as basic resource. The second stage will draw upon a synthetic, historical account of phenomena related to depression to determine what the reality associated with this name has been. The delimitation of the 'fact' of depression cannot be separated from how it has been interpreted, and I will use
this synthetic historical account to specify the phenomenon of depression, the "it" in study. The third stage of the thesis, and my main accomplishment, will be to unite these first two parts into a phenomenological description of the lived experience of depression. This stage is oriented towards demonstrating that the phenomenon can be understood as the inter-relation of four fundamental features. I will argue that these four features are inseparable from each other.

Part 1 of the thesis will proceed in three chapters, corresponding respectively to the analysis of perception as it is lived bodily, temporally and intersubjectively. I use insights from Merleau-Ponty and followers of his thought. I will proceed in three chapters, corresponding to perception as it is lived bodily, temporally and intersubjectively. In Chapter 1, I explore the bodily nature of perception. I do this with a specific goal of understanding the body's response to the world when the habits generated are ones that carry the body forward into ever more sophisticated perception. These "good habits", as I define them, are the habits of responsive action that take the body beyond the object of perception itself. In this sense, habits of perception that are helpful and supportive toward our lives are the ones that enable a more fully discerned object and a stronger bodily habit. I will here especially focus on perceptual habits that are responsive to possibilities for novelty and transformation in experience, which I will call "leaping habits." I conclude this chapter with a working definition of good habits of perception, an introduction into the idea of a "leaping habit", and a discussion of the kind of freedom that "immersion", as a reciprocal dialogue of self and world, gives way to.

Lived experience has a temporal form, as well as a bodily one, and this will be the topic of Chapter 2. Action takes time, and the form that it takes is one in which the body responds to an object's call from the present. Its active response is a plunge into the object it immerses itself in, but also into the present that is the object's appearing and beckoning. The body plunges into
this present through its action. Importantly, the present it plunges into has a past behind, and this past is the body's own past that has served as a supportive platform for its action, for its plunge. This past is the habit-body that clears the way for action, and importantly, opens it to a future, and this, its own future, will be the sustaining of its action, its continuous immersion in the object, but the object as its world. I emphasize in this chapter the bodily plunge into the present and the overlapping at present into past and future. My goal is to identify those good habits of perception that allow an active plunge into the present, and to demonstrate how trauma lends itself to the inability to be in a present that is open to a new future. I argue that it is the same thing to be open to a world and open to a future, the same thing to be stuck in a world and stuck in one's past. I explore the form of a habit that opens one to leap beyond this past world, even though it entails risk and a vast unknowable future. These "leaping habits", I contend, are ones that can take the unprepared habit-body back into the present and into the world.

Chapter 3 is the laying down of the terms of lived experience as it is intersubjective. How we perceive is a matter of how we meet other people in the present, and how we negotiate our relationships with them. While in Chapter 2, I conclude with a focus on the autonomous body in its lived temporality, in this chapter, I explore the ways our relationships with other people are necessary for the development of autonomy, and I explore the ways that they can undermine the developing of a healthy and autonomous habit body. I draw on R.D. Laing to describe the ways we are inherently open and vulnerable to other people. This vulnerability has the consequence of determining in many important respects the way our habits are formed and the direction they take toward, or away, from our powers of perception. I take Laing's features of "ontological security" in order to demonstrate what is at stake and what is involved when we have the experience of being 'alive', 'whole', 'continuous' and 'real'. My goal in this chapter is
to show the union of the bodily and temporal features of our experience with the intersubjective feature. I do this not only to emphasize that our ability to develop good habits \textit{at all} is given by other people (and indeed how the other is powerfully implicated in our ability to form leaping habits), but to show how it is that the perspective of the other offers a route out of our own perspective.

The second stage of the dissertation will be to present an historical overview of what the relevant phenomena of depression have been understood to be. Interpretation has changed a great deal from ancient writings on the topic to current theories and models that attempt to understand the phenomenon. Interpretation varies according to the placement of emphasis on the body (in ancient times), on 'mood' (in the Romantic Era), on personal history (in late 19th Century psychology) and on the workings of the brain (modern conceptions). My goal in this chapter is to draw on these accounts and changing interpretations to find persistent features of the phenomenon, features that, despite great variance in interpretation, remain. I will, in this chapter, make two primary arguments. I argue first that the melancholy of ancient times is in an important way different from melancholy of the Romantic Era and from modern depression, mainly in terms of the expanding consciousness and experience of the phenomenon for both society and the individual. The second argument I will make is that, despite their distinctions, there are existential features in common to the phenomena which give something definitive to say about depression. I identify four features which are present throughout each of the historical periods and which are retained - to some degree or other - in developing and changing theories. These four features are 1) the inability to act; 2) self-loathing; 3) the tendency to self-isolation; and 4) suffering.
The goal of Part 1 of this dissertation was to lay out the basic terms of phenomenological understanding in general. We studied in this part the bodily, temporal and intersubjective features of lived experience to help us to understand depression as a way of existing, in order that we might bring it, as a phenomenon, into articulate perception. Before we could begin a phenomenological description, though, we needed to address the phenomenon as it has been understood historically, and to see what features it might have in common, we needed to specify the very thing that we are trying to describe, and this specification cannot be separated from the way it has been interpreted. This is Part 2 of the thesis. The goal of Part 3 is to unite these two parts, to take the features of lived experience, in other words, and unite these with the features of the phenomenon as specified on the basis of a historical consciousness. This union is my main accomplishment, and is my own attempt to produce a phenomenological interpretation of the experience of depression. Part 3 is this interpretation and it is oriented toward demonstrating that the phenomenon can be understood as the inter-relation of the four fundamental features I concluded with in Part 2.

Part 3 contains four main sections, and these correspond to the four features I have identified. But these four are not described as distinct features, separate from one another. Instead, I contend that these four make up a single living, moving phenomenon. Each of the four has a ‘role’, a particular way it relates to the other three, so that each works together to make up a particular, albeit troubled way of existing. The movement of depression is catalyzed by the inability to act, and the direction it takes toward isolation is its driver deeper into self-loathing and a suffering that make it a closed, seemingly impenetrable experience. My approach is then to describe each feature in turn while also demonstrating their inseparability. I
will conclude several things from this phenomenology and these will be based again in several lines of argumentation.

First, depressed perception is the perception of oneself as everything in experience, and at once the perception of oneself as nothing at all. The depressed person becomes only a presence to himself, and not a presence for others or for a world, and this presence to himself makes him all that is visible for him. In being a presence only to himself, he remains on this side of the visible, and his alienation from others and the world is his reality, not a "sensation" or feeling. However, because this presence cannot act, because it does nothing, it is an empty presence - and he experiences himself as nothing. The loathing of himself that makes connection with others impossible erodes the capacity for expression (and here we refer to the expression of speech but also a more primordial expression, that expression which is one's flight into the world), and creates suffering.

A second layer of argument regards temporality. The temporality of depression - which includes a present which is not, in reality a present, the lack of flow and movement of time, an effortful enduring, a halting of original action, the perseverance of a past, and the lack of a future - is deeply imbedded in the experience. Indeed, the tempo of the experience itself can be described. Ultimately, I argue that we are not able to take up a general and objective time without the expression and creation of intersubjective time that makes the former possible. Drawing from Part 1 of the dissertation I develop an account of a depressed self that cannot continue itself.

Also imbedded in my description is an argument related to depressed 'desire'. The desire described in Part 1 was the desire created out of immersion with a world, an immersion with others and a desire be at home in the world. I argue that if anything is to be called 'sick' in
depression it is a 'sickness' of desire, whereby desire is directed toward perpetuating a suffering because this is what the self 'deserves'.

These arguments are given as I proceed in some detail with a phenomenological description of the four features. In each section we explore the themes we have been addressing all along: the body and its good (or poor) habits, autonomy, the ability to leap, the role of other people, and so on. But I emphasize that we are not looking for clean and final definitions of each feature, but rather a sense of the experience as it is lived. I will address underlying modes of the experience such as fear, sadness, disappointment, delusion and beauty, as well as the way the world itself stops acting as an invitation to a shared home and begins to be perceived as alien, and the depressed person as not belonging there, as not at home. With this analysis I conclude my attempt to offer an original and illuminating phenomenological description and analysis of the experience of depression.
Part A: The Nature of Perception
Chapter 1: The Bodily Nature of Perception

Introduction

When we think of what it means to perceive, we often think of our observations of the world. We see a store across the street from the coffee shop; we feel the flow of air from a fan; we hear the music on the stereo and we smell the coffee. The objects of perception take many forms, however, beyond those forms corresponding to "sense-data", those things we see, feel hear and smell. The objects of perception take meaningful forms; we perceive "things". Objects are any "thing" we reckon with: "absences, movements, orientations, others, or even a 'friendship...'," as Merleau-Ponty describes. Perception makes up the whole of our human experience. Our existence as perceptual beings is non-negotiable. However, the way we perceive will shape our experience and, indeed, shape our very selves.

To say that perception is non-negotiable is to say that perception is not up to me. I find myself in a world and, as a bodily self, I respond to the world. The world elicits or calls me to it and my response is an action that is born out of my body. Perception is a dialogue between my body and the world. Furthermore, this dialogue is mutually reinforcing, leading to more

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1 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, xlv. Further references to this book will be inserted in parentheses in the body of the text as PP, followed by the page number.
2 John Russon, *Bearing Witness to Epiphany: Persons, Things, and the Nature of Erotic Life*. Russon writes, "Our perceptual life is our unavoidable thrownness into the world of things" (33). Further reference to this book will be cited in the notes as BWE, followed by the page number.
sophisticated perceptions, that is, leading to experiences in which I understand better the phenomenon that is inviting me. Through the process of perception itself, perception can itself be transformed.

In this first chapter, I will emphasize the nature of perception as an active practice, one that, as a dialogue, builds upon itself. The dialogue itself structures what is to come, as it transforms the subject and object. I will emphasize that perception is as much an opening to new objects as it is a new understanding of the present object. This is the power of perception — to open the subject up to a new world and so reveal it to the subject through this, his own power.

This chapter will proceed through three sections. Section 1 emphasizes the object of perception. I stress that perception is an action that determines the object as it also opens us to what is beyond the object. I will begin in this section also to define "good habits of perception" (and this definition will be carried through and expanded on in the remaining two sections of the chapter, as well as in Chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis). "Good habits", I will argue, open me up to new things and to the world; they do not fix on the object. Good habits are habits in which my action is sustained, rather than ones in which discrete actions start and stop. Finally, good habits enable actions that allow the world into me: I become saturated with things of my perception. These last points show that while we have introduced the object of perception as a notion to be studied, we cannot do so without frequently falling back to discussion of the subject of perception. In fact, the perceptual experience is a whole in which the subject and object are integrated in their very natures. Nonetheless, these two "poles" of experience can be discussed separately. In Section 1, then, I consider the object of perception, and in Section 2, I consider the subject, and we will see in both of those sections the ways these two features of perception are integrated.
Section 2 will explore the subject of perception. I will argue that the subject crosses the threshold into the world when she experiences her perceptual field as resolved into a meaningful, determinate situation, a situation in which she recognizes what she is experiencing. In her recognition, she could to be said to understand better what she is experiencing. At the same time as she recognizes or understands the object better, she is open to the new world beyond it, and this strengthens her powers of perception. Drawing from Merleau-Ponty, I will show how the joining of subject and object in the unity of perception is a capacity for action: "I can" take up the world's invitation for my plunge into it. In this section I will also further develop the notion of "good habits" of perception, arguing that good habits develop and deploy the subject's powers of responsive action. I will also begin here a definition of another kind of habit that I call "leaping habits." These are habits in which one deliberately takes up one's freedom by responding to a new call, that is, habits in which one recognizes an otherwise fixed situation as precisely an invitation to novelty. "Leaping habits" do something crucial in the development of our powers for they reveal to us our autonomy.

The final section of this chapter explores the ways that a subject can be "immersed" in an object and in the world. I will be showing that when the world is perceived as welcoming and inviting one's immersion in it, one can in turn welcome it, and become absorbed and attentive to it. Importantly, in the subject's welcoming of the world, she welcomes a form of "otherness". I argue that any tension between herself and this other (any "thing" or the world) is resolved through her absorption, and this offers to her the sense of being at home in the world in such a

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3 Kant describes the understanding as "the synthesis of recognition." He claims that we synthesize impressions by recognizing them a priori in a pure concept of the understanding. (This is the third of three syntheses in the A Edition of the Critique of Pure Reason, pp. 230-234 (German A103-110)).

4 Susan Bredlau's paper "A Respectful World: Merleau-Ponty and the Experience of Depth" was helpful in the development of this idea, and I will refer to her work in this section.
way that she can forget herself. This forgetting is her freedom from the original tension between herself and the object, and this "forgetting" is made manifest as her free expression. I go on in this way to consider how "good habits" of perception must also be those habits that welcome the other, and through this, give to the subject her freedom of movement and expression, and her ability to be at home in the world.

Section 1. Perceiving the Object: The Action and Practice of Making Sense of the World

To perceive is to believe in a world. (PP, 311)

This section will emphasize: (i) that to perceive is to respond actively to a call from an object or thing in the world; perception is an action; (ii) that the object is made more determinate, is understood better than it was prior to this action, and (iii) that such resolution of the object as a more sophisticated understanding can be both the beginning of a habit of perception and also the opening up to new objects and things. While this section focuses on the objective "pole" of perception, it is again important to emphasize that the "subject" and "object" are only abstractions; that, in fact, the phenomenon is integrated in an always dynamic tension between the "poles." Perception is our embeddedness and connection with an object. Furthermore, the object with which the perceiving subject is involved is not simply an isolated and fixed object, but is, on the contrary, an object inherently embedded into a situation: it is an object integrated with other objects. For this reason, the explicit perception of the object is simultaneously an implicit invitation to the others: it is an opening toward new objects, new worlds and new understandings. Our study of these ideas in this section will lead us, finally, to a consideration of what it takes for us to have "good habits" of perception.
I am in my apartment listening to music but from the apartment above I can also hear a bass and sound. I want to hear the song I listen to, but there is a tension involved as I try to discern what is my music and what is my neighbour's. The "tension," or the "vague feeling of uneasiness" as Merleau-Ponty describes it, is a call from the object to recognize it; the tension comprises the "questions merely latent in the landscape." (PP 20) This tension, or call, motivates me to determine what is my music and what is my neighbour's. With some effort, I actively engage in the discerning of the sounds. If I accomplish this discernment, I bring my music out from its indeterminate horizon, and I join in its atmosphere. I situate myself in regard to it, and this perceptual situation gives rise to my motivation to clarify the different sources of sound. The tension the perceptual object gives rise to may be the confusion about the distinct sources of the musical sounds, as in the example here, or it may be tension involved in making an important life decision or the emotional and interpersonal tension involved in resolving one's relation to a family member with whom one is in conflict. The perceptual conflict is experienced as something that puzzles us. We attempt to discern its parameters clearly and distinctly, differentiating it from the other aspects of our life with which it is involved within the horizon of our life — those other details of our work, other friendships, etc. But whether it be the music on the stereo, or a conflict in our life, resolving the tension will give me a new insight or understanding, and one that once accomplished will not make me naive again: my music will no longer be confused with my neighbour's and the argument with my family member will at least have a clarity to it such that I cannot return to certain confusions that perpetuated it.

Once the perceptual tension is resolved, I become open to yet another call from another object. I may sing along to the music and become absorbed in a memory, or I may begin to plan for a deeper resolution with my family member. But before we investigate into the opening that
the active determining of an object of perception gives way to, let us take a step back and look at action in its more primitive forms; that is, let us look at the role of the body as it involved in perception. In particular, let us consider how these issues of resolving the perception of objects are intrinsically related to the formation of habits.

When we spoke above about a new understanding that perception gives way to, we meant by this not an intellectual understanding, but one to be found, at least initially, in the body. Merleau-Ponty describes the sensing body as one that acquires a certain "attitude." (PP, 219) He writes: "Blue is what solicits a certain way of looking from me, it is what allows itself to be palpated by a specific movement of my gaze. It is a certain field or a certain atmosphere offered to the power of my eyes and of my entire body." (PP, 218) Here, we see the "object" blue solicits or calls a certain attitude of my body, and such an attitude is an active movement, or action, of my gaze. Further, the body's active attitude is a joining with the object:

Myself as the one contemplating the blue of the sky is not an acosmic subject standing before it, I do not possess it in thought, I do not lay out in front of it an idea of blue that would give me its secret. Rather, I abandon myself to it, I plunge into this mystery, and it 'thinks itself in me.' I am this sky that gathers together, composes itself, and begins to exist for itself, my consciousness is saturated by this unlimited blue. (PP, 222)

Seeing "blue," or adopting the attitude of "blue," as such an embeddedness in blue, or as "blue's" embeddedness in me, is just this — the seeing of blue, but it also prepares me for the next occasion of blue. In such a way, the body begins to develop habits of sensing and
perceiving. The next time I am solicited by the blue sky my body will again adopt this same attitude.

Note that the body's attitude toward an object required, initially, an effort, namely, an 'abandoning' or a 'plunging.' Many of our daily habits, such as speaking English, driving a car or turning off the lights when leaving a room, required initially our attention, and sometimes were painstaking. These "things" initially announced themselves as alien to me, and it was required that I plunge into them and practice my engagement with them. Habits of a grander scale, such as the habit of feeling at home in my apartment or in my city, also required that I initiate an effort to make the original alien experience a familiar one.

Once the object is determined, I will be able to find that object again without such effort. I can talk with a friend and never need to be attentive to the language I am talking in, I can drive a car while attentively listening to the news and I can flick the light switch on my way out the door without a second thought, without even knowing, perhaps, that I have done so. Those grander habits as well become second nature. I can walk from one side of my apartment to the other with my eyes closed if need be, I know my home so well, and perhaps this extends out to my neighborhood, or to the home of a very close friend; this habit of being at home allows me to engage in those parts of my life that are meaningful to me. Importantly, then, these habits that are now automatic and given to me leave me open to invitations from new objects and things.

5 Maria Talero writes: "Habit is our body's power of carving its own paths through the sensuous multiplicity of being, so that we are not directly assailed by the radical novelty of each passing moment but instead able to rely upon structures of repetition that hold onto the past and recreate it for us, and in doing so, create a stable situation in which we can function." Through habit, the experience of "blue" "makes sense." (in "Merleau-Ponty and the Bodily Subject of Learning", 195. Further references to this article will be in the notes as BSL followed by the page number.

6 Talero, BSL 195.

7 Talero writes "Our habits of perception induct us into a world of distinctly bounded entities through which we can navigate and among which our motor and interpersonal projects can be played out" (BSL, 195).
The body in habit is a power of bringing what it has learned from the past effortlessly into the present, where it can then engage with something new. Talero writes that our ability to be aware of new objects and engage in other projects is born of the "fundamental power of habit to remain continually committed to certain favoured patterns of experiencing."\(^8\) The "habit-body" that we are describing is a body anchored in its past, and "it is this very power that establishes us in a human world in which change and novelty can take place."\(^9\) With ever increasing sophistication the habit-body can perceive and learn to determine objects and things once out of its reach, and in this way, the habit-body is our power for transformation.

We have given a very brief account of the habit-body, showing it as an evolution beginning in a body's effortful attitude toward objects and things. Now, a focus on the way that perception takes a figure and ground structure, and how this very structure opens us to new objects will be helpful. We arrive at new objects through the discerning of a particular object. It is through determining that the object I see is a reflection of a tree, for example, that I may come see the tree itself, and the shoreline it sits on. The object is taken out of its horizon, which is to say that as I focus on something, I let those other things surrounding it fall out of my gaze. In trying to find the coffee shop I am meeting my friend at, I stop looking at those other happenings on the street that might otherwise have caught my attention. I take the object - or figure, out of its horizon—or ground. Susan Breadlau writes that "figure and ground are not characteristic of objects themselves; certain objects are not inherently figures and others ground…our bodies' capacity for giving the world a figure/ground structure is…fundamental."\(^10\) We give the world this structure so that we can make sense of an object, and ultimately make sense of the world.

\(^8\) Talero, BSL, 195.
\(^9\) Talero, BSL, 195.
\(^10\) Susan Breadlau, "A Respectful World: Merleau-Ponty and the Experience of Depth", 414-415. Further references to this article will be noted as ARW, followed by the page number.
"I close up the landscape and open up the object." (PP, 78) Merleau-Ponty states, "objects form a system in which one cannot show itself without concealing others...the inner horizon of an object cannot become an object without the surrounding objects' becoming a horizon." (PP, 78)\footnote{Susan Bredlau writes: "far from being overwhelming, my constant contact with the world is generally quite supportive, allowing me to navigate it successfully. Yet if this constant contact with the world is not overwhelming, this is due, at least in part, to the figure/ground structure of normal sense experience. The figure/ground structure gives depth to our world by insuring that most of what makes contact with us stands back from us rather than standing out at us. Thus although I am immersed in the world, most of this world is not at all invasive." (ARW, 414). In this sense, the world helps us to navigate it with this structure whereby we discern objects first and then situate them in their world.} Once revealed, however, those surrounding objects are opened up again.

There is a resolution accomplished when I take hold of an object. Determining something out of its ground not only resolves the tension that initially called for my action, but this determination creates resolution \textit{in the body}, and this becomes a platform for further action. Habits are built on resolution, and we will discuss more the nature of habit formation in section 2. For now, we note that the horizon opens up again, and, this is to say, that I am able to move from the resolution of a present object to what is beyond it. I can look (again) at the tree above the reflection, or I can, having found the coffee shop, notice the hustle and bustle of the street. My effort and attention are able to migrate once I have determined the object, and I can perceive something new.

Perception opens up an object as it closes down the horizon surrounding it, but importantly, my action toward that object is \textit{also} an action toward its surrounding. Both the object and its horizon — those other objects surrounding it — together form a world, and indeed, the object (any thing), writes Russon, "is a thing by sharing reality with the other things with which it resonates."\footnote{Russon, BWE, 35-35, my emphasis.} Russon proceeds to explain that "things...announce through themselves their embeddedness in and dependence on a further ‘absolute’ — this ‘world’ to which they..."
belong.” In perceiving the object, we are taken into its world. Understanding the thing we perceive includes the background that surrounds it, and must do so, for that background is the world that has given the thing to us. When I am able to hear the sound of the song on my stereo out of the mass of noise that includes the music coming from the above apartment, I do so still with that other music playing (though it may impede my enjoyment of it!). I understand it to be my music in the context out of which it comes, I understand it in its world.

Perception, thus, is not simply "fixed" on one thing. Russon writes: "the pressure to perceive the thing—the chargedness in our bodies called forth by the rhythm of things—is as much the pressure to perceive the interweaving of things as it is the pressure to become immersed in the unique, singular isolation of each. Things draw us to perceive them beyond their singularities in their togetherness." When we cultivate habits of perception, we are cultivating not only more sophisticated ways of seeing things in their singularity, but also the world more generally.

What we have seen is that perception is not simply a passive reception of the given form of the world. On the contrary, perception is an activity, and it is precisely the activity in which the experienced world acquires a determinate form. Since perception is an activity, the way the perceiver behaves is constitutive of the perceptual result. For that reason, more and less successful forms of perception depend on better and worse forms of perceptual behavior. I have already indicated that our perceptual practices are matters of habituation, and it for this reason that we need to distinguish between better and worse perceptual habits. My ultimate concern throughout my study of perception is precisely to identify the character of good habits of perception.

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13 Russan, BWE, 35. Russan, BWE, 35.
14 BWE, 35.
Good habits of perception, I argue, in their nature open me to new things and to the world. Good habits of perception are those in which my action is sustained, rather than involving a starting and stopping in relation to a particular thing. If my habit is good, I do not stop at a certain spectacle and fixate on it. Rather, I allow it to be, and to be within its world, and my action may now change its direction. This will (as we will see in Chapter 2) have a temporal element to it as well — I do not, in other words, become fixed on any present perception, rather, I keep going. Good habits of perception allow the world into us, the way that I can become blue in the way that Merleau-Ponty describes through immersion. But the world does not itself stop at certain spectacles, it also continues. Our definition of good habits of perception will be expanded on in the next two sections when first we see how good habits of perception develop a subject's powers to transform the world for her, and second we see how in the immersion of subject and world the subject is able to forget the tension that arose out of her distance from it, and in doing so, forget herself. She is able to be free and "at-home" as she welcomes the other (the world), and as she immerses herself in it.

Section 2. Perceiving Oneself as Autonomous—the Habit-Body and the "I can"

We have seen in Section 1 how the determining of an object of perception is at once the opening up of that object's horizon. Action is an effort to discern something, but which has the result of moving the subject beyond the thing she discerns and toward new things. The effort of acquiring a new habit, was, as we saw, an effort that was forgotten once the habit was in place, and further this habit gave to the body a power to engage with something new. For the subject, the object has become, in and through its resolution, a threshold that opens up the world. This
section will study what happens for the subject in and through the action that takes her beyond the object. Again, the subject understands the object to be what it is, but what it is in virtue of what surrounds it— it situates the object. The subject, in responding to the object's call, develops the power to cross that threshold, to become open to the new world that lies beyond the object. The subject's powers of perception are determined and transformed. The subject now can respond to a particular call. I will, in this section, expand on our current definition of good habits of perception, to include the habits of developing and deploying a subject's powers of responsive action. Further, I will suggest and define a particular kind of habit: those habits that deliberately take up a freedom to be gained by responding to a new call, one that perhaps had never been seen before, and, in part, the ability to respond to calls such as these begins with perceiving them in the first place. These are habits that reveal to us our autonomy and abilities, and I will call them "leaping habits."

The formation of habits, in Merleau-Ponty's account, occurs as "the motor grasping of a motor significance" (PP, 165), and not as intellectual comprehension of what the body should do in a situation. Forming the habit of dancing, for example, is not a discovery, by analysis, of "the formula of the movement in question" (PP, 165), as though the dancer reconstructs on such an analysis the ideal way of moving her arms and legs. Instead, "it is the body which 'catches' (kapiert) and comprehends movement" (PP, 165), as it is solicited by the music being played. The body "catches" movement; movement is the response of the body to the call of the object (and the task it solicits). Merleau-Ponty points out that a woman may, without calculation, keep a safe distance between the feathers in her hat and the things that might break them off, or that a seasoned driver may drive through a narrow passage without needing to check the distances between things or the size of the vehicle (PP, 166). In both cases, knowledge of how to move, or
drive, is not a calculation of the mind, but knowledge is in the body itself. Another example
given by Merleau-Ponty explains this idea well. He says, "It is possible to know how to type
without being able to say where the letters which make the words are to be found on the banks of
keys. To know how to type is not, then, to know the place of each letter among the keys, nor
even to have acquired a conditioned reflex for each one, which is set in motion by the letter as it
comes before our eye" (PP, 166). Similarly, I may pick up an instrument (perhaps a flute) I
played many years ago, thinking I will not be able to remember how to play a scale, or where my
fingers should be placed. But my body remembers. I pick up the flute and find that familiar grip
immediately; my hands find their way to its proper holding place. My fingers move naturally to
the first note of the scale, and, from there, they find their way to its completion as I blow into the
mouthpiece. Merleau-Ponty writes, "If habit is neither a form of knowledge nor an involuntary
action, what then is it? It is knowledge in the hands, which is forthcoming only when bodily
effort is made and cannot be formulated in detachment from that effort" (PP, 166). This
discussion shows how the habit-body is literally strengthened. The more I practice the flute, the
more my body 'remembers' and understands, and the more I am capable of playing the flute.

The formation of habits can be more or less sophisticated. The habit of distinguishing an
object from a reflection in water, for example, does not offer a great deal of transformative
power to an individual (though it is essential to her development in all kinds of ways). However,
developing the habit of being open to another person's perspective, for example, will have greater
significance for an individual's life. The habit will be a formative development, and the
individual will become much more developed in this process. This more sophisticated perception
relies on the development of the more basic forms of perception, and the development occurs
through habits acquired by the body as it becomes more skilled at perception.
There will be some habits that develop a subject's powers to transform the world, and these are "good habits of perception". Good habits of perception develop a subject's powers to transform the world for her. When the object of perception becomes more determinate through her response to it, when its reality appears for her through the utilization of her powers, her relationship to herself and to the object alters; she experiences a familiar relationship to herself and the world, she becomes more at home in it, and, as well, more open to its next appearance. In short, the more the subject develops her powers to be in the world, the freer she becomes.

There is another way that we can express the idea that good habits develop a subject's powers to transform the world. We can say that the subject, when she exercises her good habit of listening to other people when they speak, *can* listen. When the subject exercises his good habit of controlling his rage, *he can* control his rage. In both cases, the subject, in being able to respond in these good ways, is transformed into a person who can listen (and learns from what she hears), or who can control his rage (and learns something about himself in doing so). It is not that the first subject thinks herself into listening, or the second thinks himself into controlling his rage. Instead, it is through engaging in the action of doing these things, and repeating those actions to the point that they become habitual, that the subject has a consciousness, rooted in the body, of the power and ability to do. "Consciousness is in the first place not a matter of 'I think that' but of 'I can'" (PP, 159), says Merleau-Ponty. Good habits develop and strengthen the consciousness of a subject's "I can."

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15 Kirsten Jacobson argues that "while being-at-home is essentially an experience of passivity—i.e., in that rests in the background of our experience and provides a support and structure for our life...being-at-home is also a way of being to which we attain...We are beings whose experience of home is that of an essential and inherent background and foundation, but this foundation has been developed through our very efforts of learning how to dwell." ("A Developed Nature: A Phenomenological Account of the Experience of Home," 356. The result of our developing of our powers of perception to include ever more sophisticated ways of being-in-the-world, I contend, may be this very process of "learning how to dwell."
As we will see, a particular kind of good habit — a "leaping habit" — takes this one step further still: it is the ability to explicitly exercise one's autonomy (one's "I can"). Writes Russon,

We do exercise direction within the deployment of our powers; that is, one of our given powers is to be able, to some degree, to initiate and regulate the employment of these powers...we exercise this freedom as a bird soars into the air and lands in a new location; that is, our powers are not unlimited but are the spaces for free development opened up within the determinacies of our reality.¹⁶

Our reality may at times seem fixed with little opportunity for something completely new. We have habits that are second nature and we employ them regularly — driving our cars, speaking, walking, etc. But to "exercise direction," to deploy our powers in new situations, will be to exercise a freedom to change ourselves and our world; it will be to leap into new situations, ones whose transformative powers are great.

Let us imagine now a small child undergoing a new experience that transforms her experience of herself. The child is told by her mother to take a nap. Her friend calls in the meantime and invites her over to swim in her pool. Up until this particular occasion, the child would not have said "yes" to her friend: how could she when her mother has clearly told her it is nap time? On this occasion, however, she does say yes to her friend. She goes to her dresser and finds her bathing suit. She sneaks into the garage and changes into it and then runs over to her friend's house. This action depended on numerous habits previously developed by the child. The child, for example, needed to know how to pick up the phone, and, indeed, how to understand what her friend was saying to her. She needed to know where to look for her bathing suit, how to dress herself, where to go to hide from her mother in order to make her exit. She needed to know

¹⁶ Russon, BWE, 49.
how to walk (or run) and how to get to her friend's house. All of these habits were developed by
the child in her past and contributed to her ability to successfully arrive at her friend's house. But
the child is not focused on these things: she is focused on her goal of swimming in her friend's
pool and is actively engaged in getting herself there. Like the practiced typist, the action of her
body is directed at her task. She knew how to do these things "through a knowledge bred from
familiarity" (PP, 166), as Merleau-Ponty puts it. Her hands, fingers, mouth and legs glided
through these activities; her body was 'catching and comprehending' these movements in
response to the objective: getting to her friend's house.

The child's being-in-the-world was dilated, and her existence was changed as she
engaged in a new experience. It can be said that the child was practicing deception, but she was
also practicing autonomy. Though her initial object, her task, was to get to her friend's house, the
new object of her perception was the recognition that she could do this, and this has enormous
transformative power for her. She was discovering through her actions her own ability to be
autonomous, to make decisions on her own outside of her mother's influence. Of course the child
gets caught quickly, since she is not practiced at thinking through such a deception to its end,
however, the child has undergone a transformation, for she has perceived something of her own
autonomy through her autonomous action, and she has radically changed her very way of being-
in-the-world. 17 This last point regarding autonomy bears consideration. Like the dancer

17 "Being-in-the-world" is the Heideggerian expression that Merleau-Ponty uses to describe the situated reality of
perception. The notion of "being-in-the-world" for Merleau-Ponty, expresses not a "perception or an objective
consciousness of the world...its total sense is not possessed [but is a] bodily recognition. It is lived as an 'open'
situation." (PP, 81). The fact that perception does not first posit an object of knowledge, and is instead an intention
of our "total being", signals a "pre-objective perspective" that he calls "being-in-the-world." Furthermore,
Merleau-Ponty describes the notion as the "junction of the 'psychical' and the 'physiological.' "(PP, 81-81) When we
say that the girl's being-in-the-world was dilated, and radically changed, we mean no less than her entire lived being,
hers very way of being a body and a psyche was radically opened up; the way she is, and will be 'in-the-
world' will never again be as it was. This is transformation. See also, Heidegger's definition of being-in-the-world in Being
and Time, § 12.
understands the music in her body, the child could not have learned about her autonomy by merely thinking it. Her knowledge was to be found in the body. She had to engage in all of these actions and, ultimately, get herself to her friend's house. Says Merleau-Ponty:

it is the body which 'understands' in the acquisition of habit...the phenomenon of habit is just what prompts us to revise our notion of 'understand' and our notion of the body. To understand is to experience the harmony between what we aim at and what is given, between the intention and the performance—and the body is our anchorage in a world (PP, 167).

The child understands in her body, through her actions, that she is autonomous. This understanding could not have been achieved by thinking it; her understanding is the harmony between what she aims at (her friend's house) and what is given (the world she meets getting herself there). Her body anchors itself in the world, and the world is now new, for it has shown itself to be a reality that offers her freedom. She understands herself as free in every object she encounters along her path.

Perception, as an understanding, and as a bodily accomplishment of action, is that power to "absorb a new meaning" (PP, 169). Such a power occurs at various "levels" of existence.

Merleau-Ponty writes:

The body is our general medium for having a world. Sometimes it is restricted to the actions necessary for the conservation of life, and accordingly it posits around us a biological world; at other times, elaborating upon these primary actions and moving from their literal to a figurative meaning, it manifests through them a core of new significance: this is true of motor habits such as dancing. Sometimes, finally, the meaning aimed at cannot be achieved by the body's natural means; it must then build itself an instrument,
and it projects thereby around itself a cultural world. At all levels it performs the same function which is to endow the instantaneous expressions of spontaneity with 'a little renewable action and independent existence'. Habit is merely a form of this fundamental power. We say that the body has understood and habit has been cultivated when it has absorbed a new meaning, and assimilated a fresh core of significance" (PP, 169).

The child, in the action that is at once her absorbing of a new meaning, has potentially begun the cultivation of a new habit — a leaping habit. The new meaning she has absorbed is a much more explicit recognition (or understanding) of her own powers. Her being-in-the-world has opened up toward a living enactment of her autonomy. This example is an explicit example of the formation of her powers, for it is not only that she has made the formation of new habits a possibility, but she can: she can understand her friend on the phone, hide from her mother, get herself to her friend's house. She can, in other words, act on her own intentions. But we can change the emphasis here: she can. In other words, the significance she is grasping here is her very self. She has learned something about her own power to make something happen, indeed her own powers to transform the world. She has, to paraphrase Merleau-Ponty, arranged around herself a world that speaks to her of herself and gives her own thoughts their place in the world (PP, 152-153). She has begun the ability and the habit to leap into her autonomy, to be the director of her own powers.

Just as each habit cultivated to make this experience possible needed reinforcement, so, too, will this new understanding need reinforcement. These powers are not absolute since, as we will see, they are always paired with vulnerability to the world and to other people. They need to be cultivated in order to make them stronger; and there are things that one can do also that will make them weaker. The child can strengthen this new understanding (and thereby develop a
habit of autonomy) by incorporating the things that she perceives into this new power. In other words, she can, after this experience, begin to perceive things in a way that will strengthen the perception of her own autonomy. When the bully at school orders her to do something the next day, for example, she may not be so complicit as she once was. She may perceive this order as something she _can_ refuse. Conversely, she might weaken her understanding of her powers if she does not refuse the order and becomes habituated to turning away from her autonomy.

It is essential that the "I can" receive recognition in order to continue to develop its powers: the reinforcement of an action by others, in other words, plays a vital role in the development of a leaping habit. We will say more about this in Chapter 3 of this thesis, but we might hint at this idea now. Let us imagine some scenarios involving the child and her mother after her escape to her friend's pool. The mother will presumably be angry and scold the child for the deception and for the danger involved in leaving without adult supervision. However, there are still a variety of ways that the child's decision to "branch" off on her own can be dealt with. The mother might go so far as to positively recognize the child's autonomous action while still scolding the behaviour (for example, she might say "I bet it felt good to make that move, it sounds very exciting, but you still need to remember that you should ask permission until you are old enough to leave on your own"). Or, the mother could scold the child for the dangerous activity, but in relation to the deception and autonomous action, make the child feel guilty (the mother might, for example, say "I don't know how you could do that to me, it hurts me tremendously that you would lie to me"). The latter might undermine the child's "I can," making
her feel that there is something quite terrible about her autonomous action and changing her focus from the powers of her autonomy to a pervasive feeling of guilt.\textsuperscript{18}

When the powers of the "I can" are strengthened, so, too, is the habit that it initiated. The strengthening of one's powers allows for the cultivation of more and more sophisticated habits. Such increasing sophistication is the development and enrichment of the subject. We have said earlier, in perception both the subject and the object are made more determinate. In Section 1, we saw how the object's determination opened up a world for the subject. Here, we can see how the child herself becomes more determinate with the perception of her ability to do something very different.

Before we move to the next section, we can use the themes we have been discussing to elaborate further upon the nature of the habit-body and the "I can." The "I can" is not merely a repetitive response to habits already acquired. The child, if she resists the bully's order, does reinforce her good habit by repeating the same response she learned the day before. However, the cultivation of her "I can" moves her to another stage of development altogether if she is ready to welcome the unexpected, to receive more new meanings. It is in her habit-body that she can experience the strength of herself moving into a new world. More will be said about this in section 3 of this chapter. We can also notice here, that the past and the future are represented in the habit-body. The habit-body has a past that strengthens the "I can" (or weakens it) in relation to its ability to receive the unexpected; that is, in that direction that either strengthens or weakens its relationship to a future. We will discuss the temporal nature of habit formation in Chapter 2 of this thesis. Now, we will move on to consider the subject's accomplished immersion in the world. And the freedom this affords.

\textsuperscript{18}See D. W. Winnicott, \textit{The Child, The Home and the Outside World}. The theme of the importance of thoughtful parental reinforcements of the child's habits of independence runs throughout the book.
Section 3. Reading and Dancing—Perception as Immersion, Forgetting and Freedom

Our investigation into the bodily nature of perception so far has taken the following form: in section 1 we learned how the body perceives things and things within their world, how things in the world are immersed with each other; in section 2 we learned how the subject immerses herself in her own powers. Now, we will see more clearly the nature of perception to be the immersion of an empowered subject with things and with the world.

Perception is the immersion of subject and world, it is a call and response that never lands in one place but continuously moves, generates and fulfills. I will go on to show that when the subject is immersed in the object, she is able to forget herself. The world that she has "let in" and which sustains her action is no longer alien to her, and so in this forgetting, she is able to live freely in it. Perception is not the fixing upon any particular object, but includes the immersion of objects with each other, and neither does it fix itself on the subject: the subject's development of powers are ones that actually take her "out of herself." The main point to be taken from this section is simply that immersion in the world allows the subject to "forget herself," and in this forgetting she is free (we could say she is free "from herself"). We will also expand on our definition of good habits of perception to include those habits that give to us our free movement in the world.

When we are immersed in objects, we are absorbed in them. I am absorbed in the glasses I try to fix, in the calculation of my current bills, in a particular duty in my job, or in my relationship with my partner. Russon writes of absorption: "In our absorption of the individual
things, we lose sight of the structural demands of our normal life, and we 'forget ourselves.'”

The forgetting that happens when we are absorbed is like the habit-body's forgetting of the effort initially required of it. The habit-body is anchored in a past that it is still immersed in, but is free to move in a way that allows it to engage with something new.

I will give two examples of how we can become absorbed in things. The first example is how we can become lost in a good book. This example shows well our point from section 1; that is, determining an object opens us up to its horizon, to the objects that surround it. When I absorb myself in the fluidity of the writing in a book, I am carried by the first sentence almost seamlessly to the next. The second example I will give is dancing. This example is noteworthy as highlighting our point from section 2, in that, the body (the subject) is united with the world in a way that allows her powers to be directed, and here it is emphasized that these powers are directed toward, in a sense, every thing: when I dance, I am immersed in the world. In both examples, we can observe the action and reversibility of the call and response to a degree that the subject is able to forget herself, despite the powerful enactment of her "I can."

When an individual reads a very good (and probably difficult) book, for example, when he reads Plato's *Republic*, he opens himself to the potential for enormous transformation, at the same time as the object — the meanings in the text — are brought into reality for him. Such a reading is a dialogue between the subject and the object; and the transformation of subject and object is brought about by a reciprocal reinforcement of each. The themes of "inherence" and "immersion" are at play here — for this example demonstrates, I will show, the body's immersion in the world: to perceive an object is to "plunge" into the object.

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19 Russon, BWE, 38.
When the individual attends to the words on the page (and note here this attending requires the past cultivation of many habits, including the ability to read at all, the ability to concentrate, to sit, to interpret, to speak a language, and so on), he is carried by them. He is carried, in other words, by the meaning inherent in the words. He does not need to focus on each individual word, or sentence (though he may do this at times), but rather, the meaning is to be found in the text as a whole. These meanings, inherent in the words, sentences and paragraphs, are meanings that the subject inheres himself to. The reader is absorbed. He is, we might say "with the meaning" rather than with himself. "To be a consciousness," writes Merleau-Ponty, "or rather to be an experience is to hold inner communication with the world, the body and other people, to be with them instead of being beside them" (PP, 111). To be immersed and absorbed, to be carried, to be able to pay attention — these are all descriptors for ways that we become free. I go on to briefly describe freedom in this context.

In our example, the text offers itself as something within which to move (the reader, as we said, is carried from sentence to sentence through their meaning), and this freedom of movement allows us to creatively take up the object to which we pay attention. Merleau-Ponty writes:

Attention, therefore, as a general and formal activity, does not exist. There is in each case a certain liberty to be acquired, and a certain mental space to make the most of it. It remains to bring to light the object of attention itself. There it is literally a question of creation (PP, 34).

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20 Eva Simms writes on the phenomenology of entering a text (In “Questioning the Value of Literacy”). She refers to Ingarden's descriptions, and his suggestion that "out of the component parts of textuality (phonemes, words, sentences, and the textual unfolding as a whole) a particular world arises, and it is this world (which transcends the author's intended meaning) which the reader finds compelling—or not. The [reader] has to be able to 'climb aboard' and 'accept the given perspectives' (Iser, 1972, p. 282), while at the same time be willing to collaborate with the text to allow it to come to fruition in the imagination" (Simms, p. 28).
What is created when we pay attention is something new, the meaning of the text which beforehand was not clear, and this new understanding creates something new for me — a new power. "I can" (now) understand what Plato is saying there, for example.

The freedom to move and create belongs in a certain sense to me, but it is a freedom given by the world, as my powers of understanding are powers given by the text itself. Russon writes:

the power to see is just as much the visible making itself available to us; the power to grasp is just as much the fact that the thing's own nature is such that it offers itself to our grasp... 'our powers' are just as properly described as powers of the world.

This last point is noteworthy of the call and response nature of perception that we have been describing: my powers and the powers of the world together — immersed, in a dialogue that neither one is alone responsible for — is the expression of reality. It is an expression, in other words, of the real appearance that calls and my real response to it.

Dancing is an excellent example of a free movement of the subject that is also an expression of reality — it is an appearance, itself a thing in the world. Let us consider this example now. When I dance, I do not think of each bodily movement — how I will move my arm or my hip (at least if I am immersed in the music without 'thinking' about how to dance properly, or, about how I appear). Instead, my whole body moves, and it moves toward no particular object, but as well, to every object. I dance in the free spaces around me, I am immersed in the flesh of the world. And this dancing I do is my free expression, but also, as we

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21 In a reciprocal way, the reader gives to the book its powers to do this. Simms shows well this reciprocity when she writes: "A book takes on its full existence only in its readers (Poulet, 1969). If it receives their full participation, it allows them to absorb new experiences" (Simms, p. 28).
22 Russon, BWE, 47.
have said in section one, following Russon's description of dancing, it is the music itself that moves me. "To receive music as music is to dance," writes Russon. The music

\[\ldots\text{shows itself as something compelling, something that dictates to the body how to behave. When the body dances, its limbs are moved by a power not its own. The music itself is the guide. The music is a reality}\ldots\text{But this epiphany [of the music] rests upon the properly supportive anticipative openness of the body. The music is real, but it cannot exist without the body's acts of preparation and realization}^{23}\]

The body and the music are, we might say "in sync." They are immersed in each other, each giving itself to the other. The dance itself is a reality — it is an expression of a reality, a happening. And it is the expression of the body's being at home in the "world" of the music.

The "habit" of dancing, we might say, is exemplary of free movement within the world. It is an example of how the habit-body (in this case the dancing body) is free; it literally moves without constraints.\(^{24}\) This body forgets itself and joins the world. This body "leaps" into the unknown, and it perceives what is beyond itself and beyond particulars; this body is developing and deploying its powers, and while the body forgets itself, it, at once, realizes its autonomy.

Conclusion

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\(^{22}\) Russon, BWE, 11.

\(^{23}\) Scott Marratto writes about Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on the "living movement" of the body that is engaged in the acquisition of habit. Marratto writes that the acquisition of a "habit" is the acquisition of a new form of behavior. It is a new meaning, but one which is also, at the same time, a new way of discerning meaning in the world and in the movements of one's own body...The acquisition of a habit is not exactly the acquisition of a new 'knowledge'; but rather it is a new way in which living movement lets 'itself' be moved (The Intercorporeal Self: Merleau-Ponty on Subjectivity, 73). The example of dancing that I have given is a demonstration, I contend, of the body engaged in habit formation, not in the strict sense of specific movements, but precisely as free movement. In dancing, the body is acquiring a habit not directed toward a particular thing, but as directed toward the very freedom of the body to live and move in the world. (Further references to this text will be cited in the notes as IS, followed by the page number.)
We have been developing throughout this chapter a definition of "good habits" of perception. Section 1 demonstrated that good habits open the subject up to new things and worlds, that they sustained her action and that they "let the world into her". We might summarize this to say that good habits allow the world to welcome us.\textsuperscript{25} Section 2 highlighted the leaping habit as one that opens the subject to her own powers of autonomy. We might summarize this to say that leaping habits allow the subject to welcome the unexpected, and so developing the powers to respond to a world that welcomes it. Finally, the habit of immersion, or forgetting oneself, is the good habit that allows the subject to be free, to be at home in the world. This being at home is precisely to be at home in the unexpected, in the other, that prior to this immersion, was alien for the subject.\textsuperscript{26} We might summarize this to say that good habits allow for our free movement at-home-in-the-world.\textsuperscript{27} In the next chapter, we will explore these themes in a temporal way. The "leap" or "plunge" into the object is a "leap" into the present, and this present opens up to a future (like the object opens up to what surrounds it). When I deliberately take up my freedom by responding to a new call, I deliberately take up a future that I do not yet know. Further, I leap into myself, but as always outside of myself and toward the world. I become the time of my action in the world; I am a time, moving forward.

\textsuperscript{25} Again, this idea is beautifully written about by Susan Bredlau. See "A Respectful World: Merleau-Ponty and the Experience of Depth."

\textsuperscript{26} For Hegel, "(F)reedom is: being at home with oneself in one's other." (Encyclopedia Logic, §24A). And, "Only this way," Hegel says in his most concise definition of freedom, "is the spirit at home and with itself in...externally as such." (The Elements of the Philosophy of Right, §187R).

\textsuperscript{27} Jacobsen, we have noted, writes about the home that is an essential and inherent foundation, but "a foundation that has been developed through our very efforts of learning how to dwell." (A Developed Nature: A Phenomenological Account of the Experience of Home," 356). In this sense, the one that has learned to dwell is, perhaps, the one that has attained the freedom Hegel refers to in the note above. Learning to dwell, may be learning the ability to be at home with oneself in the other, and this is freedom.
CHAPTER 2: THE TEMPORAL NATURE OF PERCEPTION

It is by being unrestrictedly and unreservedly what I am at present that I have a chance of moving forward; it is by living my time that I am able to understand other times, by plunging into the present and the world, by taking on deliberately what I am fortuitously, by willing what I will and doing what I do, that I can go further (PP, 529).

Introduction

Everything we do, we do in a present. I am at my present as I write this page. I am at my present as I make something to eat and when I go to the bar to meet a friend. All my actions happen, now, in this present. This present, though, as we will see, has a thickness to it. It is thick with a past and future that overlap it and run into its boundaries. I am in this moment writing, but this moment has behind it the horizon of the day that has elapsed. In front of it is the evening and the night (PP, 483). The present, in its thickness, is where I make contact with time; it is where I carry my past forward and where the possibilities for my future are opened up. How I take this present up will depend on the way I carry my past forward and on my openness to a future that I cannot yet know. The present is the site for my possibilities, the site in which I can change and develop. We will see, though, that I may have hang-ups and habits that I bring to my present and that inhibit my ability to let the present be a sight for my openness to such a future.

In Chapter 1, we studied the object of perception and showed how the resolution of it as a determinate thing, better understood by the subject through her action, includes the objects that
surround it. Perceiving an object opens the subject up to the world beyond it. In this chapter we will put this in temporal terms. Perception, we saw, is an activity, and action takes time. The object that calls us is itself an object that is appearing in this time, in the present. Resolving the object opens up what is beyond it; and what is beyond the object is the future. How we perceive our situation is thus a matter of how we negotiate temporal relationships. We will see that the notion we introduced in Chapter 1 of "good habits" of perception is itself a matter of temporality. If we do not have good habits that enable us to perceive the object in its openness, we will be unable to "leap" into the present. Our past habits of perception give us either the ability or the inability to perceive the call of the present. As we investigate into the nature of action in temporal terms, we do so with a question behind it: what is it to let the present be what it is in reality, that is, to let it be a present that is open to a world and to a future, instead of as a site in which we are stuck in our past? What is it, in other words, to plunge into a present as present?

This theme of the 'plunge' into the present is illuminated by our discussion, from Chapter 1, of "immersion." When the body immerses itself in the object, it "lets the object in."

Paraphrasing Merleau-Ponty, we can say that when I abandon myself to blue, plunging into its mystery, it "thinks itself in me." (PP, 222) What I am abandoning myself to is a call from the present, a call from the blue that appears. My immersion, or plunge into the object, is at once my plunge into my present. My present exists as the site in which I engage with a world: it is the place where I come into contact with objects that call to me, where I open myself to these objects, and where I respond to them through my bodily action. I am, when I take up the present, in the realm of the real, the place where the world presents itself to me.28 When I engage with the

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28 Bredlau writes about the world as it presents itself "simply by virtue of having eyes and ears and skin, we are in contact with the world, and at the level of sense experience, this contact is primarily initiated by the world. As long as my eyes are open, for example, the world will appear." (ARW, 416). And yet this receptive stance, for most of
world, I am open to the transformation that it offers me; I am open to seeing the world that is beyond my present scope; I can develop more sophisticated habits of perception that open me to new perspectives and, ultimately, to my own freedom to change and grow. *It is, I will argue, the same thing to be open to a world and to be open to change; and it is the same thing to be stuck in a world and stuck in one's own past.*

I will, in this chapter, discuss this openness to transformation and to the world that is accomplished through action in a present. The action of perception *takes time*: it took time for the young girl in our second example from Chapter One to get to her friend's house, and this action, in its resolution — after the time it took — allowed her to perceive something of her own autonomy. Similarly, it took time for the individual in our third example to read the excellent book, after which he possessed an enhanced understanding of it. The transformations undergone in those examples did not happen in an instant. But such transformations required an active "plunge" into the object. In the first case, the girl leaped into an unknown object (she leapt without a clear idea of what was to come). In the second case, the reader plunged into the book. He paid attention to it and it carried him. To plunge into an object is also a *plunge into a present*, and into the time of the very self that opened up the possibility for transformation.

This chapter will have three sections. In section 1, we will discuss the overlaying of the present with the past. I will highlight Merleau-Ponty's contention that we "reckon with an environment" when we are at our task in the present, and I will look at the notions of the "field of presence," of habit and of trauma. The way that my past overlays the present can enable or

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us, she says, "is balanced with a more active stance toward the world at the level of what I, following Merleau-Ponty, will call personal experience. If our eyes are open, we will of course, see the world. Yet if we, for example, see the television, this is usually because we have sat down in front of it and turned it on... At the level of personal experience, our contact with the world is primarily initiated by us." (ARW, 417). The present appears to me as I take it up in action. .
disable me from reckoning with an environment of the present. It can enable or disable me from the possibility of transformation and from an engagement with reality. To experience the present as present is to have the past behind us as a platform for our present action and for change. If, on the other hand, our past impedes our engagement with the present as it is — if the present is occluded by a past that does not serve as a platform — we are closed off from the transformation the present, as present, might offer.

In section 2, I will discuss the way the present is also overlain with the future. The present as present is a site for my possibilities; it contains the horizon of a future and of a world. It opens me toward that future as it moves me out of myself toward reality. Good habits of perception involve the coherent sustaining of my action, such that the present and the future form a coherent system. At times, though, plunging into the present will be a more "radical" plunge, and this kind of plunge is affected when we have developed what I have termed "leaping habits." When I plunge into the present in this way, I deliberately take up my freedom by responding to a new call. If my autonomy is revealed to me through this action, and such plunging becomes a habit, I may develop the kind of confidence it takes to leave my comfort zone and leap into an unknown and perhaps, frightening, future (when such a response seems necessary to me).

Leaping habits enable me to welcome the unexpected. Such an ability allows for the world to appear as a place for our subjectivity to develop, as a home in which we can become someone new. Whether by good habits that sustain my action, allowing me to steadily move into a future, or through a more radical leap that plunges me into an unknown future, I begin in the present that is always open and overlain with the future.

In section 3, we will discuss subjectivity as the very effecting of time. The subject is to be understood as time, and time as the subject, says Merleau-Ponty. (PP, 490) As I plunge into my
present, I effect the passage of one present to the next, and since this passage is my passage, I effect my very self. When I make myself a time, by plunging into the present, I become free; I can express and transform myself as I move freely in a world that changes but in which I am always at home.

Section 1. The Overlaying of a Past with a Present: Habit, Trauma and the Openness to the Present as Present

~ The past weighs upon me with all its weight (PP, 483)

Merleau-Ponty describes the thickness experienced in any present. "The present itself is not posited in the narrow sense. I am not", he says,

for myself, at this very moment, I am also at this morning or at the night which will soon be here, and though my present is, if we wish to consider it, this instant, it is equally this day, this year or my whole life. (PP, 489)

This present, thick with a past and future, is what he calls the "field of presence." This field is "the primary experience in which time and its dimensions make their appearance unalloyed…it is here that we see a future sliding into the present and on into the past." (PP, 483)

These three dimensions are not given in discrete acts. (PP, 483) I do not, as I write now, form a mental picture of yesterday's work, but it "weighs upon me with all its weight"; nor do I think continuously of the time of completion; yet, "it is there, like the back of a house of which I see only the façade." (PP, 483) The past "weighs upon me." The past is here, in my present. We can see clearly how this is so by looking at the nature of habit.

Habits are developed through repetition. A child learns to walk by repeatedly getting up, standing, falling, and then trying again. The effort the child makes is at first strained and
awkward. Once the child has learned how to walk, however, action is automatic. As walking becomes increasingly effortless, he loses sight of the activities that got him there. Indeed, he loses sight of himself (recall from Chapter 1 how the subject is able to "forget herself" in good habits). What was at first a very new and alien activity is no longer new or alien once this habit is cultivated. Having learned to walk, the child is now open to something else — he can now confront a new alien, perhaps the dishes over there that were once out of reach when he could not walk. When he does confront something new, his past is carried forward through this ability. He makes contact with this past when he walks to school years later and when he walks years later still with a romantic partner. Indeed, he makes contact with this past in many of his future activities. He may, for example, do what the young girl in our earlier example did and have a transformative experience. In all cases, the individual is still living out of the experience of learning to walk. Note that in confronting something new, something alien in the world, he was open to the world showing itself, or presenting itself. The dishes may have always been there, but when he sees them in this moment, he is at home in a world that that has literally expanded. His ability to be at home in the world now incorporates new things, his home is enlarged.

Habits, in this brief description, are activities engaged in a present, but which are carried forward into the future as they themselves become past. They open us to transformation and a radically new way to take up a present, and they open us to the world. The relationship of the openness to transformation and to world can be stated as follows: the abilities I develop through habit open me to a world that presents itself as the site for my transformation, as the site of my possibilities and of my future. We will discuss this future more in the next section, but for now we can look at what occurs when we do not develop abilities that lead to a smooth uptake of a new alien.
We said earlier that the child who learns to walk is still living out of the abilities and powers (or the disabilities) developed in the formation of this habit. This structure is seen in all habit formation. I live out of my past through the habits I have cultivated in that past. All past, I suggest, is congealed capability or congealed disability. In this sense, we are still living out of certain past moments, even in our new present. How, we might ask, is it that some past moments can be platforms for change — for transformation that opens up a new future — and others inhibitors? Later, we will consider the present for which its past is a platform for growth and openness to reality. First though, by looking at the nature of repression, we can see how the past can also serve as an impediment to an openness of the present, and to growth.29

Merleau-Ponty describes trauma as an event that results in a certain past that keeps being played out in the present, and one that overshadows other presents.

One present among all presents thus acquires an exceptional value; it displaces the others and deprives them of their value as authentic presents. We continue to be the person who once entered on this adolescent affair or the one who once lived in this parental universe (PP, 95-96).

When trauma occurs, I become locked into one world, the world of the adolescent affair, for example, and I repeat the form my experience took in this past affair in my future relationships. The world of my past to which I am held captive structures my life. The way I related to the

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29 Talia Welsh gives a definition of "repression" that accords with Merleau-Ponty's psychology. She writes that Merleau-Ponty claims that "to understand the psychological reasons behind human behavior, one must address the general structure the subject exhibits in her behavior." Every subject has a certain structure of behavior, and the “normal structuration means a harmonious interaction, or dialectic, between the individual, naturally perceiving subject and the symbolic, intersubjective social order...[on the other hand] abnormal and pathological behaviors reveal a restructuration, usually not a successful one, of the subject's behavior due to a psychological or physical injury." Welsh goes on to define "repression" on these grounds to occur when: "the integration of past experiences is so disharmonious that the subject is unable to unify it with present experience. Since it is impossible to remove oneself from one's situation, abnormality ensues" (The Child as Phenomenologist: Primal and Primary Experience in Merleau-Ponty's Psychology, 14-15).
world at the time of the trauma is never passed over; I continue to live as though that were my present reality. Merleau-Ponty writes,

I forgo my constant power of providing myself with 'worlds' in the interest of one of them, and for that very reason this privileged world loses its substance and eventually becomes no more than a certain dread…New perceptions, new emotions even, replace the old ones, but this process of renewal touches only the content of our experience and not its structure. (PP, 96)

Recall from Chapter 1 our discussion of the determination of an object of perception. We noted that an object presents itself as a threshold. It calls the subject to resolve it (to understand it better). In doing this, in crossing that threshold, the subject moves to the other side of the object into a new world. When Merleau-Ponty speaks of forgoing the power of providing myself with worlds (in the interest of one), he is speaking of that threshold becoming fixed. As fixed, the subject is locked into it. Thus, there is no beyond, no other side, no new perceptions that touch the structure of his experience.

John Russon discusses the case of a child who learns to dread eating meals with other people after being abused by his brother whom he would encounter at dinner hour. This past traumatic experience affects his life at college. He continues to live out of these childhood experiences in "new" presents. Afternoons at college bring about "a crippling sense of apprehension that inhibits [his] ability to interact well with [his] college friends at dinner."30 It is not so much that he has an explicit memory of these traumatic events whenever dinner-time looms. The fixation on a past trauma, writes Merleau-Ponty,

30 Russon, BWE, 120.
does not merge into memory, it even excludes memory in so far as the latter spreads out in front of us, like a picture, a former experience, whereas the past which remains our true present does not leave us but remains constantly hidden behind our gaze instead of being displayed before it. (PP, 96)

These pasts of the boy in the example, hidden behind his gaze, are triggered instead by the rhythms of his afternoon, rhythms which began in his earlier school days. The pasts hidden behind his gaze and experienced in the rhythms of a day compel the college student to withdraw from the company of his friends. Perhaps he may go on in his future to avoid restaurants and to declines dinner invitations. His "new" presents are deprived of their value as authentic presents. The reality he is faced with (dinner with his college friends), in this present, does not appear to him as a desirable possibility. He is instead crippled by his understanding that meal time is unpleasant and frightening, and so he is unable to respond to the situation of his present.

Key to note here is that this individual's understanding of the world arises from his personal experience, but he does not see it this way. He sees instead a reality as it was in the past, and that does not necessarily portray an accurate picture of the present. Indeed, as Russon states, were he to share meals with his college friends, those friends could redefine for him what it means to be with other people. He might find through pleasant experiences with them at meal time that his understanding in fact arises from his own experience, rather than a structure of the world. There is a reality to shared company at meal time, and he is closed to this reality and what it affords.

The traumatic experience survives as a manner of being and with a certain degree of generality (PP, 96), which is to say that the present as present, as rich with a content as the

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31 Russon, BWE, 120. Russon, BWE, 120.
appearance of reality itself, is occluded; the present exists in form only. The present, in other words, paraphrasing our earlier passage from Merleau-Ponty, touches the *content* of experience, but not its *structure*. The person who has undergone trauma may experience the present moment in a certain way, but not as something he takes up fully. A "true" present involves me in a world. I am really at my present when I am immersed in it.33

We have said that trauma leads to the inability to experience the present as present, and it inhibits the opportunity the present gives to engage in transformative projects. We can appreciate the significance of this more fully if we remember that the present is itself not just an isolated "piece" of our experience." Let us look at what Merleau-Ponty calls "a field of presence" to further develop the idea of the present.

The world presents me with a *situation* — a field or environment. This environment solicits my action. I may, for example, call out to an acquaintance who passes by my house as I sit on my porch, or I may endorse and mail cheques when I discover my bill payments are late. In either case, it is not so much that I perceive the objects (the cheques, the pen and stamps, or even the friend herself), but rather, says Merleau-Ponty, I *reckon with an environment*. I am engaged in the task of getting my friend's attention, or paying the bills. I am, he says, "at my task, rather than confronting it." (PP, 96) Indeed, as I write this chapter, I reckon with an environment. I do not focus on the keyboard, or the books or pens, but again, I use them as tools.

33 Maria Talero, in "Merleau-Ponty and the Bodily Subject of Learning" offers a compelling alternative to this reading of the present. While she recounts a similar story of the way a traumatic past may take the form of living itself in a present, she also shows that we sometimes engage in a process of "selectively anchoring ourselves in the past," and actually refusing sectors of present experience, *not* out of illness or difficulty. We can anchor ourselves in a past "precisely to engage with the present," she says. Furthermore, she argues that "to say that our existence takes the form of being in the world is to say that our bodies preserve in them a fundamental form of escape from the present, a permanent power of withdrawal into past meanings, and it is this escape that allows us to be present." (200, my emphasis) We can, from this withdrawal, she suggests, carry out our deliberate choices and commitments in the present (200). The idea that we may escape the present in order to be present, is a very interesting one.
The room itself is a tool, as is the furniture and even the placement of these. I am situated here. I am at my task. The present, in part, is the site for my engagement in projects. It is also the site where my situation, as a reality, is given to me as this site.

It is this field of presence that is affected by trauma. Trauma closes me off from whole fields or environments that might otherwise solicit my attention and move me along in valuable projects. Trauma makes it difficult to even perceive a call in the first place because it takes the present out of its environment. New contents continue to come in, but their overall form is a repetition of a past situation.

In order that the field of presence is experienced by me as a site for my action and ultimately of transformation, instead of as a place which fills me with dread, as it was for the college student, in order that it provide me with a situation with which I can reckon, my past must remain at a certain distance from me. The child who walks over to the table to see the dishes on it is no doubt united with the very past in which he learned to walk. This past "weighs behind him." But this past has provided him with a sense of his ability. He can walk, and with this as a platform, he can walk over to the table to look at the dishes. The child's past is at a distance in that those pasts in which he cultivated the habit to walk are not themselves unnecessary to his present task, but have nonetheless cleared the way for it. The traumatic past, on the other hand, is not kept at a distance, but is in fact alive in the present.34 The disabling effect the abuse had on him as a child continues. We can see something of how a past can be

34 Ludwig Binswanger discusses a case involving a woman, Ilse, whose traumatic past becomes very much alive when she burns her hand as a way of coping and of presenting to her father his "injustice". Binswanger writes that in this event, Ilse was faced "with the total impossibility of allowing the further consistent unfolding of experience". She is frozen, but in a present that is alive with the past, she is frozen, he writes "by a model in accordance with which all newly emerging experiences are shaped—as references to self, as wrongs perpetrated upon the patient, as torments, as persecutions ("Introduction to Schizophrenie", in Being-in-the-World, 261). We will see a relationship of this idea of "freezing" again in Chapter three when we study R.D. Laing.
fully alive if we consider crippling emotions such as anger or jealousy — emotions that were perhaps responses to calls in the past but which launch themselves into a present with such force that one may be unable to control her behaviour. Inside these emotions, past behaviour is repeated. It inhibits the present and its transformative qualities.

A past that does not leave room for a "fresh" present does not provide me with a sense of my ability, but rather my disability. We can put this idea in terms of the call and response nature of perception. Situations wherein a present call is saturated with a past response make any resolution or new understanding of the call impossible. Indeed, the particular situation presents itself as a call that is an impossibility. If we are to say that the call is indeed resolved somehow (if it is understood), it is resolved or understood as impossible. In our current example, the call to eat meals with friends is resolved as impossible. The call presents him with his disability. He cannot eat meals with friends. Instead of structuring the present in a way that enables, the past in trauma becomes manifest as a problem: the man is stuck at the call, but precisely as not able to answer it.

We have been working on a definition of "good habits" of perception, and our current discussion allows us to add to it. Thus far, we have said that "good habits" a) open me up to new objects of perception and to the world more generally; b) sustain my action; c) allow the world into me; d) develop and deploy my responsive action (this is particularly important for the development of the specific kind of good habit I have called a "leaping habit"); and thereby e) reveal to me my autonomy and f) give to me my free movement in the world — the ways that I am able to express myself, just as my meaningful expression with the world is itself an expression of reality. We now add to this definition that good habits g) enable me to reckon with an
environment and h) open me to a future, to my future. We can expand on this definition to include the particular ways that good habits can be said to be "healthy" habits.

We have discussed how good habits of perception open me to a world, involve sustained action, and how they enable my power to reckon with an environment. This latter point—that good habits enable my power to reckon with an environment—points our understanding of good habits toward an element of perception which can be put in the terms of a "situation." "A self, is", as Marratto puts it, "first of all, a being-in-a-situation." Good habits can be said to be healthy when they enact a response to a situation that supports (rather than undermines) an embodied "I can." But it is not only my ability to respond in a way that supports my activity that make my habit healthy; it is the very way I am enabled to find in a situation (perhaps a new one) such a way, and the way that I am not bound to my self, but able to be as thrown into that situation. In other words, my healthy habits in part determine a situation as supportive of my action, and of my learning. Healthy habits will be those habits that find a correspondence in a situation or in the world. We explore these ideas by contrasting it with the ways a habit might be said to be "unhealthy."

A child is abused by her alcoholic mother when she arrives home from school may respond to her situation in a number of ways. She may, upon returning home, retreat to her room. She may stay at school late, or find activities that delay her. She may arrive home and retreat into herself, not really listening to her mother, but imagining herself elsewhere. In each

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35 Marratto, IS, 20.
36 This is an example of the structure of communication and metacommunication that Gregory Bateson describes. Bateson outlines six aspects of this structure, emphasizing "a primary negative injunction" at play in a relationship in which one person is victimized. This primary negative injunction takes the form of "do not do so and so, or I will punish you", and he writes that the "context of learning [is] based on avoidance of punishment rather than a context of reward seeking." He also emphasizes a secondary injunction that conflicts with the first at a more abstract level but which like the first injunction are enforced by punishments or signals that threaten survival. The
case, she has developed a habit of avoiding a situation that causes in her a sense of confusion, anger, pain or powerlessness; and importantly, this habit is (initially) a healthy response to the situation. This good habit sustains her avoidance of the negatively charged situation, and opens her up to an alternative to it. Later in life, this same healthy response to her situation is no longer needed, save perhaps when she visits or speaks with her mother. Now these original habits put to use in a different situation, say for example, with romantic partners, fail to elicit the healthy outcome they once did. A variety of situations may elicit these habits in this example. She may be triggered by her past when her partner expresses anger at a certain behavior, or more generally she may have the habit of disengaging at moments of possible intimacy because these led only to disappointment as a child. Her romantic partner finds her disengagement at certain times to be hurtful, and her inability to communicate or receive criticism intolerable. She finds herself to be incapable of responding to the demands of her partner, even when such demands might lead to the kind of intimate relationship she might desire. Now this original habit is neurotic, it is unhealthy.

Importantly, the habit is neurotic or unhealthy since it is a response to a former situation, and since the self in question is bound to that situation, rather than a being a self that is pushed out into the world. Marratto argues for what he calls a "situated cognition," and describes that "cognition necessarily occurs in some kind of meaningful 'situation.'" This means in part, that the bounds of the self "are indeed out into the world," rather than a representationalist cogitivism that has a too narrowly constructed locus of cognition. (IS, 19-21)
significance. This new significance is not only an understanding or a cognition of the situation, but a way finding oneself moved toward a new meaning. As Marratto puts it: "the acquisition of a habit is not exactly the acquisition of a new 'knowledge'; rather it is a new way in which living movement lets 'itself' be moved." But part of the nature of the child's acquisition of her habit is precisely a movement that does not let itself be moved; her habit (in part) is to bind herself to herself and is a movement then away from her situation. Though initially it was a healthy way of moving for her, it nonetheless was a movement that was not, as Marratto put it, 'a living movement that lets itself be moved.'

Let us consider briefly one further way one might develop a habit that is a constraining of itself, one that does not let itself be moved. The child responded to her situation by withdrawing from it. Some situations, though, may not enable a response at all—we might say that the object was never properly resolved, or the meaning of the situation never understood. We see such example of these types of habits in the writings on schizophrenia by Bateson. In these cases (and this will be discussed in further detail in chapter 3 when we consider the role others play), one cannot make sense of a particular situation because he is receiving contradictory messages. The schizophrenics' seemingly inappropriate laughter (for example) may be a response to another's gesture that contradicts his interpretation of what this other said. His subsequent retreat into his own internal processes rather than an outward immersion in the external world is

39 Marratto, IS, 73.
40 These two examples, as we will see, need not be so differentiated. The child of the alcoholic may indeed have responded because she was unable to understand the situation she found herself in. I separate them for the sake of drawing out the ways a habit may be said to be unhealthy.
a habit created out of this prior inability to make sense, and perhaps to his failed attempts at responding in those situations.\(^{41}\)

Healthy habits, in contrast to the above examples, are those habits that not only make the world appear in a meaningful way, but are themselves open to changing themselves, to finding new ways "of discerning meaning in the world and in the movements of one's own body."\(^42\)

What healthy habits give to us is this ability to move in ways that are meaningfully understood by us as our living response to the world. I experience myself as real and whole. I am the body that moves. I experience myself as consistent in time: it is the same 'me' that moves in different situations. I experience myself as alive: I have the sense of a consistent identity that I understand to be me. These descriptions, which are also descriptions of "ontological security" according to Laing, are descriptions of autonomy, but not the autonomy of the Stoic who accomplishes selfhood on his own, but an autonomy given in and through our relationships to others. The development of healthy habits of autonomy is not accomplished in isolation from others, and indeed others can undermine the developing of such habits. This can be seen in examples such as the ones that Bateson gives of the schizophrenic, and specifically in his study of the impact of the relationship such a person may have had with his mother. Bateson shows the significance that other people have in the development of our habits, and ultimately in our ability to experience ourselves as an autonomous and consistent identity. We will look at the crucial role others play in these developments in Chapter 3.

We have discussed habit and its capacity to bring the past into our present. This was seen most acutely in the example of trauma. The present is overlain with a past. Merleau-Ponty writes,

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\(^{41}\) As Bateson says, "he cannot win." (TTS, 8) If he responds to his mother in a loving way, she might dismiss him; if he responds by withdrawing, he may be punished. This will be studied more in Chapter 3.

\(^{42}\) Marratto, IS, 73.
The specific past, which our body is, can be recaptured and taken up by an individual life only because that life has never transcended it, but secretly nourishes it, devoting thereto part of its strength, because its present is still that past (PP, 98).

The nourishing of good and healthy habits, rather than the kinds of habits that disable me, allow me to live the present as present, while allowing the past to serve as a platform that clears the way so that I can leap into new worlds and to a transformed self.

Section 2. The Overlaying of the Future with the Present: Possibility, Transformation and Reality

[The future] "is there," like the back of a house of which I can see only the façade. (PP, 483)

When engaged in my present, I still nonetheless have a sense of my future. I am aware of the time that is to come: I will see a lover tonight; I will go to a job interview tomorrow morning. I do not have a solid picture of what these futures will hold: I can only form this picture retrospectively. These futures are given to me in my present as possibilities. They call me to move outside of myself, to accomplish certain projects and to, at certain times, leap out of my familiar world toward something unknown.

The present as present, then, has a horizon, a beyond of what is presented. To be in a present is at once to be presented with a future, with possibility. The future itself calls me to action. It calls me to engage with my present in a way that is open to it. "A past and a future spring forth when I reach out towards them," (PP, 444) writes Merleau-Ponty. In order to bring my future into being, I need to reach out toward it, I need to be "ecstatic"; I need to be outside of myself. Often times this will take the form of working toward a knowable future: I have the goal
of mailing a letter. I perform the actions to accomplish this, all the while reaching toward the task's completion, toward the future. Sometimes I will need to leap out of my familiar world and into new situations that offer me more dramatic possibilities for growth. I will now look more closely now at "leaping habits," those that, I have argued, create a future that reveal to the subject her autonomy. I stress these leaping habits because I contend they are critical if we are to effect ourselves as a time, if we are to navigate through life's contingencies, hardships and surprises well. Leaping habits give us the confidence to move into the future.

I will return to the example given in Chapter 1 of the young girl; I do so for three reasons. First, the example shows how the girl is carried by her intention toward the future, how this future in a certain way is her very guide. Second, the example demonstrates how the actions she performs along the way are each manifestations of her "I can" — they are manifestations of powers of deploying responsive actions that give her free movement and also allow her to forget herself, all while she moves toward the future. The third reason I point to this example is that her action as accomplished is a demonstration of her ekstasis — her move outward from a familiar "comfort zone" into a radically new and alien future. She has accomplished not only the task of getting to her friend's house, but she also accomplishes a strong affirmation of her powers: she has become more free. Since this previously unknown world (the world wherein she can leave the house and go for a swim at her friend's house) is now revealed to her to be a future possibility. Not only is it possible that she could repeat this action and develop it as a habit, but she may be more prepared, more free, to take on more unknown worlds and futures in very different situations. Let us return to the details of this example.

This girl was at the task of heading to her friend's house. Of course, much was at stake for her in this project, for in deceiving her mother, and in making the choice to do something
other than what her mother had asked her to do, she was about to discover something about her own autonomy. Indeed, it is through the action of going to her friend's house, rather than through the thought of it only, that she will develop a habit related to her ability — "she can" go to her friend's house, and it is through this action that she herself will be transformed: she becomes someone different than she was before.

Through the action of going to her friend's house she discovers something about her autonomy. The girl's motility, her actual projection into the physical world through her movement in all of its nuances (finding her bathing suit, changing in the garage, walking down the street), are movements based in her intention to complete her task. Her intentions are embodied in the actions that get her there. The motility of her body is the projection of her intention to go to her friend's house. This intentionality, this consciousness, is not a "matter of 'I think that' but of 'I can.'" (PP, 158-159) Her powers of autonomy are to be found in the successful completion of her series of action taken as a whole.43

The girl's intentionality, her "I can," is directed toward her friend's house. Every action she performs in her project reflects this intention. As a result, it is not so much that she perceives each and every object along the way, but rather that she reckons with an environment. She is anchored in the environment as she seeks support in the tools that environment provides (the bathing suit, the garage, the road), and she is at her task rather than confronting it (PP. 483). She begins to reckon with her environment when she directs her actions toward her friend's house, when she initiates this intention, presumably at the moment when she says "yes, I can" to her

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43 Simone de Beauvoir discusses women's alienation from "an apprenticeship of freedom". Women may be less able to be free and develop her autonomy (than men) in these ways I have been describing, since, women have been "kept in a state of servitude and ignorance...they have no means of breaking the ceiling which is stretched over their heads...[she] can exercise her freedom, but only within this universe which has been set up before them, without them." (The Ethics of Ambiguity, 37).
friend on the phone and is already at her task. Notice here, as well, that the beginning of her action, of her reckoning with the environment, is just the beginning of her power to accomplish this task. Each of the tools used by her while she is at her task is presented to her as an object with which she can move closer to the realization of her intention. As she puts the phone down, she is already in the process of running quietly and nervously up the stairs. She enters her room, opens her dresser drawer and rummages for her bathing suit, all while listening to sounds that might indicate her mother is near. Upon finding the bathing suit, she runs back down the stairs, opens the side door and escapes into the dark garage. There, she rushes to take off her clothes and she puts the bathing suit on. She opens the door nervously, slides out of the garage and bolts down the street.

Each of these moments contained within the thickness of her field of presence is driven by her intentions toward the future. Each of the stages along the way — each situation she responds to with a new action — is a move closer to her accomplishment. As she accomplishes these present actions, she brings her future, the future of her very self, closer to her. The actions she performs are her own "perceptible self-determination or self-articulation." (BWE, 132) The girl is effecting her transformation through these actions.

While her "I can" is enacted in each stage of her larger action, it is only with the following through of this action that she will be able use it as a platform for further habits of autonomy. It is retrospectively that the truth of her initial intentional "I can" will be seen, for it is only after she has completed her task that it is possible for the girl to confirm, "I can go to my friend's house instead of complying with my mother's request."

It is the girl's action, taken in its entirety, that may go on to become the kind of habit that is itself a "leaping habit." The accomplishment of her task not only gives her a better sense of her
independence and autonomy, but it also increases her sense of confidence in her ability to confront an unknown, and perhaps even a frightening future. The leap into the future was at the same time a plunge into the present. Thus, her very capacity to reckon with her environment is heightened. The world itself becomes less frightening, and she is better able to see the world as a home. She has accomplished the very capacity to be open to transformation and to the world.

This is precisely what the college man is unable to do. His past has impeded his ability to reckon with his environment and to engage in the action he finds so frightening. He has great difficulty plunging into the present and an unknown future. In order that he may become able to make such a leap, he will need to recognize that the world as he sees it is his own personal structure and not the world as it actually is. He will need to see that something personal has taken on an anonymous structure, or he will continue to blame the world. He will be closed to a world as well as to his own transformation.

We have seen how the present is a site for the possibility of transformation and of world. Transformation and the ability to let reality appear as sites for future possibilities are accomplishments of action. It is through my active plunge into my present that I become open to such a transformation and to reality. When I plunge, I make contact with a future that guides me and propels me. This plunge requires good habits that both serve as platforms for this contact and as structures that enable ekstasis, or a leap out of the self.

We have said that in some ways the future guides me. We can now be more specific, drawing from our discussion of attention from Chapter One, in order to see more clearly the union of my future with reality. We said there that to "pay attention" to an object of perception means to immerse oneself in the object. We said that attention is the subject's active perceptual immersion in the object that solicits his attention. This attention is "the active constitution of a
new object which makes explicit and articulate what was until then presented as no more than an indeterminate horizon." (PP, 35)

When I leap toward an unknown and indeterminate future, my attention is directed forward. I am directed, but I also inhabit a world offered by the future. My very comportment adjusts to these futures. When attending to a particular situation — the project of writing this chapter, for example — the act (the writing) fills the scope of my possibility. I adjust myself toward it, and it is a world that is open to me. The writing becomes my environment. Once absorbed, I dwell in it. I cannot form a solid picture of the future: this picture (the future's active constitution made explicit) will only be known retrospectively. But there is a seed or germ of what is to come, and I open myself to it. I adjust to a new level, a new sense of my situation and its context. I inhabit this world, as I write, and I am letting something happen through me. I am living on its terms, playing by its rules, and I do not know precisely how it will play out. I am doing the writing, but the writing is a reach toward reality itself. It is an expression of the world and not only of myself. In other words, this expression does not only belong to me. The leap into my future is also a leap into the world, into "otherness." And since I do not know yet what the expressed meaning will be in the end, my leap is only a leap, an openness.

To bring this idea back to the terms of temporality, my "true" present is a necessary openness to change and to world. I am always anticipating future presents, but they will not be real and living until I am there. A solid picture of my present can only be known retrospectively; my true present includes a horizon of the future. My proper engagement with such a present, my plunge into it, in other words, is an accomplishment of my attentive action; and this action is the very openness to the horizons of my future and world. The attentive reach toward a future is the reach toward reality itself.
Section 3. Plunging into the Present: My Self as the Upsurge of Time and Freedom

I am myself time, a time which abides (PP, 489)

We have highlighted the present as the site of my action, the site in which I reckon with an environment, carrying my past in my habit-body and projecting myself into my future. My present is the site where reality as it is presents itself. I have argued that the openness to my transformation is one and the same openness to such a reality, that to be stuck in the past is the same as to be stuck in a world. I have discussed the nature of habit; how good habits enable the reckoning one "can" do with an environment or world, and how we can, through the accomplishment of transformative actions, develop the kinds of habits that are themselves "leaping habits." These leaping habits enable our initiative to plunge into a present and, through that plunge, to take on an unknown future and an unknown world. I have also discussed the kinds of habits that inhibit a plunge into the present and inhibit us from making such leaps. Finally, I have discussed the relationship between my future and the world itself, showing how the attentive reach toward a future is indeed a reach toward reality itself. In this section, I will show this last point to be identifying something about the nature of subjectivity itself, according to Merleau-Ponty. He writes that "subjectivity is not a motionless identity with itself; as with time, it is of its essence, in order to be a genuine subjectivity, to open itself to an Other and go forth from itself" (PP, 495). We must, he says, "understand time as the subject and the subject as time" (PP, 490). We might connect this idea with one of our definitions of "good habits." Good habits of perception are actions that are sustained: they are part of a flow of action such that while they may change direction, they do not start and stop. If time is me, and I am a time, then I likewise may shift and change, but I do not stop the flow of my life; I carry it on.
We will begin this discussion by emphasizing another point made by Merleau-Ponty. He writes that "the passage of one present to the next is not a thing which I conceive, nor do I see it as an onlooker. I effect it; I am already at the impending present as my gesture is already at its goal" (PP, 489). I effect the passage of one present to the next when I respond to the call of the object, when I move forward in the world. The young girl in our example effected the passage of one present to the next (within her larger field of presence) when she plunged into each of the objects she used as tools for her larger project. In a sense, she brought these presents to life, she made herself into a lived time, her actions were sustained. The college man, on the other hand, was not able to plunge into objects, or into his present, since the past that remained his true present — the past of his trauma — occluded the present as present, as the site for his possibility of transformation. In this case, objective time continued its course, but his personal time was arrested. We can, then, say something about how the subject can herself be a time and how her time is the taking up of reality. In effecting the passage of one present to the next, she lives her personal time, but this time, as engagement with her present as it is (and there is nothing else but the present to engage with), is the taking up of reality itself. To be present, in other words, is to be present to the world as it appears, as it presents itself.

We have also emphasized the overlapping of the past and future with the present.

Merleau-Ponty writes,

We are saying that time is someone, or that temporal dimensions, in so far as they perpetually overlap, bear each other out and ever confine themselves to making explicit what was implied in each, being collectively expressive of that one single explosion or thrust which is subjectivity itself (PP, 490).
We noted in section 1 that the present is the site where time and its dimensions make their appearance unalloyed. A plunge into the present is required for the temporal dimensions to make their appearance. Without such a plunge, we remain outside of reality, but also outside of time, and, I suggest, inside ourselves, since we do not "open ourselves to an Other and go forth from ourselves." To be a subject requires such a plunge into the present, since the plunge is my effecting of time, my making of myself a time. When our personal time is arrested due to the inability to plunge, we lose our immersion with the world, and with it our very subjectivity, perhaps experiencing ourselves as "unreal." We will look at this idea further when we discuss R.D. Laing's notion of ontological insecurity in Chapter 3. For now, we can notice that the idea of a subjectivity is one that involves a move out from ourselves toward an Other, toward a world, but also toward one's own capacity for transformation and change. Says Russon, "Our nature is to grow by learning, and to learn by growing. In other words, we become persons through coming to know the world."\(^{44}\)

As I plunge into the present, and take in the world as it really is, I become open to that world's horizons, to what lies beyond, and so become open to how my engagement with the world might help me to grow. As I plunge into the present, I bring my past with me, a past that enables this plunge to occur at all. And when I plunge into the present, I effect time. I meet up with objective time and make it the time of my very self. We can put this last point in terms used by Merleau-Ponty: when I make objective time into the time of my self, I am showing time to be "the affecting of self by self" (PP, 494). He writes,

what exerts the effect is time as a thrust and a passing towards a future: what is affected is time as an unfolded series of presents: the affecting agent and affected recipient are one,

\(^{44}\) Russon, BWE, 49.
because the thrust of time is nothing but the transition from one present to another (PP, 494-495).

An initial plunge into a present is required for this. When I make myself a time, by plunging into the present, I become free. I can transform myself as I live out of a home that is reality itself.

**Conclusion**

I have argued that it is the same thing to be open to a world and open to change, and it is the same thing to be stuck in a world and stuck in one’s own past. The healthy formation of the habit-body is anchored in a past that serves as a platform for immersion in the present. This present, we have seen, is the site wherein I can change, and indeed if I am able to develop leaping habits, I may be open to seeing (and responding) to a call I may have otherwise been closed off from. Such a call—one that offers to me my transformation— is not one that guarantees a certain future, but is precisely an openness to the unexpected, and to novelty. These are calls that welcome my plunge into the present. If, however, I have not cultivated such good habits of perception, and if I live out of a (perhaps traumatic) past that inhibits my plunge into the present, I become fixed in an identity, as well as fixed in time. The next chapter explores these themes as they relate to our inherent intersubjective nature.
CHAPTER 3: THE INTERSUBJECTIVE NATURE OF PERCEPTION

Introduction

In this chapter, I will use R.D. Laing's definition of "ontological security" in order to develop an account of how it is that our relationships with other people are involved in the construction of our identities and in our perception of reality more generally. R. D. Laing describes the "ontologically secure" person:

A man may have a sense of his presence in the world as a real, alive, whole, and, in a temporal sense, a continuous person. As such, he can live out into the world and meet others: a world and others experienced as equally real, alive, whole, and continuous.\(^{45}\)

The ontologically secure person can go out into the world and meet others, but others, as we will see, have already had a great deal to do with this ability in the first place. Drawing from Merleau-Ponty's account of perception, and expounding on themes from the first two chapters of this thesis, I will conclude that when we are deprived of the kinds of relationships that support the healthy development of our habit-body — relationships that support those "good habits" of perception we defined in Chapters 1 and 2 — we are unable to have the sense that we are alive, whole, continuous and real, and as such we are unable to be at-home-in-the-world.

\(^{45}\) R.D. Laing, The Divided Self, 39.
This chapter will proceed in four sections, corresponding to the four features of Laing’s definition. I will make three arguments about the role of other people. (i) Others give us the ability to act (that is to perceive, to respond to objects). They do this by initiating us into our habit-bodies and by giving to us the possibilities of interrupting the actions of the habit-body as worthwhile through, and with, the help of those others. When we feel that we are of worth, we are able to act because we believe our actions themselves matter. Action requires a body integrated with the sense of itself as autonomous; it requires an embodied subject with the sense of himself as whole. Further, the other inaugurates me into time — the time of intersubjectivity gives me to myself as a time and allows me that sense of being alive. (ii) Others, through their perspectives, give us the ability to be in continuous transformation, instead of being stuck in a perspective belonging to our past. They do this, again, in a temporal way — by initiating us into the present, to reality, and in joining us there where we are open to a future. We thereby feel ourselves to be, in a temporal sense, a continuous person. (iii) Others with me allow for the possibility of new meanings and realities created together. We can create a bond together, or have a new understanding of something after an excellent conversation. Since the new reality — the bond or the new understanding — is one that neither of us could have created alone, we feel ourselves to be, a part of that reality in an essential way. We will see that the erotic relationship is a particularly powerful example of how, through and with others, we are able to "leap" and feel ourselves to be real. Finally, I will argue (iv) that it is as ontologically secure (as whole, alive, continuous and real) that I can have the sense of being at-home-in-the-world, since it as ontologically secure that I can immerse myself (my whole, alive, real and continuous self) into the world at all. It is as ontologically secure that I join with the world and enable a perception of reality wherein I am able to freely move toward my own transformation. Others have not only
made this possible, but they are there, as part of reality, too. We are at home with them, in a shared world.

Section 1. The Sense of One's Presence in the World as Alive and Whole: Mattering

Other people have a remarkable power in our lives, for the helping in the creation of our identities, for their ability to immerse us in a shared world and for providing, or removing, the very sense we have of ourselves as whole and alive. The other orients me to my attitude about myself and for my experience of myself as mattering — or not. We do not use the word "power" lightly here. It is the other who, in the power of his own existence, gives my existence to me, of delivering to me own powers of being; I am, to paraphrase Laing, "exquisitely vulnerable" to the other. Laing's definition of ontological security provides us with a means for breaking down the experience we have of ourselves as existing and mattering. He says, as we noted above, that the "ontologically secure person senses himself to be whole, alive, continuous and real." In this section, we address two of these features: the sense of wholeness and the sense of aliveness.

Others help to give us the sense that we are whole and alive, I contend, by initiating us into our bodies such that we can act in such a way that mirrors back to us our sense that these actions matter. In this way, we experience ourselves as bodies that move in the world. Others also inaugurate us into a time that is itself intersubjective and gives us our own abilities to be temporal selves that join with the world. In this way, I contend, we have the sense of being alive. We will, in this section, explore these ideas, using Laing's work to demonstrate the power of the

46 Laing, DS, 37.
other in the absence of their supportive existence. The other, just as it can give our powers to us, can engulf us, depersonalize us, or turn us to stone, eradicating our powers and beings.

We begin with a brief discussion of the experience of ourselves as a body, in a world with other bodies. When I initially perceive another body, and see it uses objects in a similar way as I do, I recognize that this other is *like me.* The other body, says Merleau-Ponty, is "a second self." I know it is a second self, he writes,

because this living body has the same structure as mine. I experience my own body as the power of adopting certain forms of behavior and a certain world, and I am given to myself merely as a certain hold upon the world; now, it is precisely my body which perceives the body of another, and discovers in that other body a miraculous prolongation of my own intentions, a familiar way of dealing with the world. Henceforth, as the parts of my body together compromise a system, so my body and the other's are one whole, two sides of one and the same phenomenon (PP, 412).

Merleau-Ponty goes on to describe an adult taking a baby's finger into his mouth and playfully pretending to bite it. The baby's response, he says, is to open its mouth. Merleau-Ponty remarks that

the baby's own mouth and teeth, as it feels them from the inside, are immediately, for it, an apparatus to bite with, and my jaw, as the baby sees it from the outside, is

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D. W. Winnicott stresses that the first (and most important) of our relationships to another body must surely be the relationship between mother and infant. He writes with considerable detail regarding the processes occurring within the relationship, and in virtually all of its manifestations from breast feeding, to holding, crying, playing, and on to the child's development of instincts and morality. Winnicott writes that the mother is needed as a first relationship in several ways. The first of these is that "she is needed as a live person" (my emphasis). Her baby must be able to feel the warmth of her skin and breath, and to taste and see her. "Psychology and physical care," Winnicott writes, "join here". Second, for Winnicott, the mother is needed to present the world to the baby, she is, he says, the baby's introduction to external reality (*The Child, the Family, and the Outside World*, 89-90). The mother for the baby is *like him*, in that she is *alive* and she provides a *world* for him. The mother, for Winnicott, is the initiation, I contend, into what Laing calls "the sense of being alive and whole", and it is through her body, and with him, that she does this.
immediately, for it, capable of the same intentions. 'Biting' has an intersubjective
significance. It perceives its intentions in its own body, and my body with its own, and
thereby my intentions in its own body (PP, 410).

This example points to the immediacy of our openness and connectedness to others through our
bodies. We are, as John Russon says, "inherently open to other people."48 The child, Russon he
goes on to say, "lives its own body out of a kind of inherent sympathy for the adult's mode of
behavior."49 We can anticipate a similar story in the baby's determination to learn to walk. The
child perceives the adult's intentions to walk in his own body. He perceives the adult, to
paraphrase Russon, as a "centre of action," and he responds to this action with his own. We have
looked at the habit-body in Chapter One, but we will return to this topic again in order to see the
other's role in its development.

The baby has a bodily response to the adult before ever conceiving of himself as a
separate body.50 We might say that while the baby perceives the adult's intentions in its own
body, it is also assuming the "I can" of the adult.51 The adult can open its mouth and playfully
pretend to bite; so, too, can the baby do this, or at least, begin to do this. Such a "transfer" of "I


46 John Russon, Human Experience, 56. Russon,
49 HE, 56.
50 Kym Maclaren puts it this way: "Our social being or affective being-with-others is fundamental, for it is through
others that we are both initially drawn into new forms of bodily intentionality (in imitation), and given back to
ourselves (through the other's reflection of us). It is, in other words, through others that we are enlivened in our bodily

51 Talia Welsh writes of this adopting of the adult's intentions through an infants' bodily contact with her mother:
"We witness in the infants behavior with her mother this original ability to form a sense of the mother's intentions
and not...to merely engage with the situation...perception [for] Merleau-Ponty does not mean merely the
stimulation of our visual system. Rather, it is the perception of the mother: the mother who is desired when she is
absent, who comforts, who feeds. Perception is foremost normative...the mother is imbued with significance" (The Child as
Phenomenologist: Primal and Primary Experience in Merleau-Ponty's Psychology, 8-9). The mother's face is
the basis for the child's perceptual constitution of the world, and importantly, I am emphasizing, the mother's intentions
are given to the infant, beginning where Welsh describes—in the infants' seeing of her face, and in imbuing it with
significance, the infant begins her own intentions.
cans," I suggest, is one way — the earliest way — that the other is required for the development of our habit-body. In this early beginning, the adult supports the child's "I can" through his own body.

The adult must continue to support the child's "I can," beyond the explicitly bodily. Ideally, the adult does so with his own healthy and more sophisticated habit-body. Other people in the child's life will also play a role in her development. Let us look at an example involving the different and complex ways various, multiple others can have an effect on a person's habit-body.

A father encourages his child's interest in creating works of art. The child's sense that she can create art is supported by him. If, however, the same child is laughed at for her artworks by other students in her class, this could undermine her sense that she can create artworks. This child will need to negotiate between the two responses she has received by these others, and her ability to negotiate well will also be the result of the healthy development of her habit-body through the support of others. Her parent, for example, may have encouraged the child's ability to judge for herself whether she likes the art she produces, thus potentially lessening the negative impact of the laughing children on the child's sense of the worthiness of her art — and ultimately the worthiness of herself. If the parent has not encouraged the child's ability to judge for herself the value of her work (for example), the laughing children may successfully undermine the child's sense of worth. "The central issue for development — for raising children —", says Russon, "will thus be whether the child has a route constructed for her by her parents that allows her to develop appropriate options for self-interpretation; this growth needs to be "fed" as much
as does physiological growth." What the child in the example potentially learns is that her actions (in this case, the making of artworks) are of worth, and because she is also encouraged to interpret this action for herself as worthy, she can begin to experience herself as of worth. The above example shows how the development of a healthy habit-body, or put another way, the strengthening of the "I can" in the direction of a healthy engagement with the world, cannot be done alone and requires, especially during the vulnerable childhood years, active nurturing by the parent. 54

The negotiating I do with the multitude of behaviours that support or undermine the development of my habit-body is a life-long process, and though there is no final firm sense of identity, at the end, if all goes well, there may be a habit-body that is developed enough to give me a sense that I matter. The movement toward this is one that, we have seen, began as an inherent interconnectness to other bodies. As habits become more and more sophisticated, building on such primary bodily habits as walking, the child begins a process of becoming autonomous and of experiencing his body, indeed his powers of being, as separate from the adult's.

I will once again return to an example given in Chapters 1 and 2. Recall, then, the example of the young girl who defies her mother's request to have a nap in order to respond to

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52 John Russon, Human Experience: Philosophy, Neurosis, and the Elements of Everyday Life, 61. Further references to this book will be noted as HE, followed by the page number.
53 Melanie Klein discusses the ways that psycho-analysis of children can also contribute to an interpretation that "relates the energy which the child had to expend on maintaining repression." While the analysis given to adults may allow experiences to be reconstructed, the experience is shown by children as an immediate representation (The Psycholanalysis of Children, 9).
54 Welsh offers insight regarding the degree to which children are affected by trauma. She writes that "childhood traumas are much more disturbing than adult traumas because they have hindered and original and harmonious structuration" (CNP, 16). Recalling our discussion of repression in Chapter two, where we learned that repression is the inability to integrate a (traumatic) past in the present, we can add to our emphasis on the role the adult plays in the child's development. The adult contributes to this integration by helping the child negotiate his "I can", if perhaps the children did laugh at his artwork. The developing of one's "I can" will be, I contend, the very way one is thus able to integrate past experiences in the present. The "I can" as the thrust into the present is at once the integration of a past (even if traumatic) into a present, and this is ideally learned in childhood.
her friend's invitation to come to her house for a swim. The two others of particular importance in this situation are the girl's friend and her mother. The friend was the initiator of the girl's action, calling her into a present situation. Implied in her invitation was the support of the girl's "I can." "You can come over", she said. And, in an important way, the girl's action was buoyed by the friend throughout all of the actions required to accomplish the goal. Each action, from the finding of the bathing suit, to the sneaking into the garage, was implicitly supported by her friend — she could do these things. But also, importantly, these actions were experienced as meaningful and worthwhile, because they led her to a friend, who, she felt, recognized her as someone who matters. The mother also played an important role, though after the fact. The mother's response — whether supportive or unsupportive — will have a significant impact on the girl's interpretation of her actions. What is interesting to remember here is that the transformation that the girl underwent in this project as a whole was an important step in her becoming autonomous, in her developing habits of confidence and an ability to experience herself as someone of worth. This habit was exemplary of a "leap," and, if she repeats this kind of leap, one which involves the risk of an unknown future, she may repeat and develop the kinds of "leaping habits" which are, at times, called for.

Let us examine the ways that others have the power to undermine our powers. When this occurs it appears to us that our actions, and, in fact, our very existence, are of little or no worth. Following this discussion, we will connect the notion of wholeness with aliveness and these still, to temporality.

Our vulnerability toward others can, for some, and at particular times, threaten to eradicate our being. Laing provides insight into the nature of an alienation from others that leads potentially to "ontological insecurity." Such alienation takes different forms. The "ontologically
insecure" person is one whose identity is precarious. It remains constantly under the threat of what Laing calls "engulfment," "implosion" or "petrification."

In the first case, for the ontologically insecure person, any relationship with another person, however minor or apparently harmless, threatens to overwhelm, or engulf him. Laing writes of an argument that occurred between two patients in the course of an analytic group:

Suddenly, one of the protagonists broke off the argument to say, 'I can't go on. You are arguing in order to have the pleasure of triumphing over me. At best you win an argument. At worst you lose an argument. I am arguing in order to preserve my existence."

If one does not have a firm sense of one's own autonomous identity, any relationship threatens the loss of identity. One form this takes can be called engulfment. In this state, he dreads any connection with other persons. "The individual," Laing says, "experiences himself as a man who is only saving himself from drowning by the most constant, strenuous, desperate activity. Engulfment is felt as the risk in being understood, loved…or seen." The fear of destruction can be described in certain images, Laing notes. Such images as "being buried, being drowned, being caught and dragged down into quicksand" all attempt to describe the feeling of being destroyed.

In the case of "implosion," the individual feels that, like a vacuum, he is empty, and this emptiness is him. He dreads being with others, and all reality offers the threat of implosion.

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55 Laing, DS, 43.
56 Laing, DS, 44.
57 Laing, DS, 44.
58 Binswanger's discussion of "Ilse", noted briefly in Chapter two as an example of the freezing of a past in a present, is also relevant to this idea of "implosion". Binswanger writes: “The consistency of experience breaks apart from one of its existential directions, leaving…a vacuum" ("Introduction to Schizophrenie", 260). Importantly, this vacuum is filled again, he says, "but filled by a mode of experience that, though to a degree related to the
"Petrification" is the dread of being turned to stone, treated as an object and depersonalized. In these manifestations of "ontological insecurity," the individual is threatened by reality and has no means of experiencing himself as whole or alive.

We addressed the possible ramifications of "ontological insecurity" in order to show what is at stake: how the other who can enable our good habits, leading to an autonomous sense of ourselves, can also present as threats to this very project of identification. The crucial role that others have in this way begins in the very formation of our habits. We have seen through the writings of Winnicott, Bateson and Laing the ways that familial relationships in early life are crucial to the development of the child's autonomy. We have described the "ontologically secure" individual as one who has a sense of himself as real, alive, continuous and whole. By looking further at early childhood relationships and the ways they can lead to unhealthy habits that deprive a person of this consistent and autonomous identity, we can see the crucial role of other people in habit development. We look in particular to Bateson's study of the schizophrenic and to his development of the notion of the "double-bind". We will also look at the ways that situations of mutual recognition foster the development of healthy habits.

Bateson approaches the phenomenon of schizophrenia by looking at the intersubjective context the schizophrenic lived in as a child. He focuses not only on the experience of the schizophrenic himself, but also on the experience and role of the mother in those early times, and more generally to the patterns and habits of communication formed in that relationship. The experience preceding it, is nevertheless completely inconsistent with it, namely, that mode of experience that we describe as the patient's becoming a victim at the hands of others" (260). The past trauma that makes of the present a vacuum, leaves room for new "injustices" by others. The present does not thus contain the injustices of Ilse's father, but the vacuum the latter leaves for her allows for the continual (and new) implosions of her by others.
child may, Bateson says, threaten the mother in some way. The very approach of the child needing her love may trigger in her feelings of anxiety and hostility. Though Bateson says that time spent exploring the reasons for the mother's reaction need not be investigated at length, he points to several possibilities, and notes that what is common is that for the mother these responses are not acceptable. She attempts to deny her anxiety and hostility by simulating a loving relationship with the child. She tries, through this denial, to persuade the child to respond to her as loving mother. He writes: "The mother uses the child's responses to affirm that her behavior is loving, and since the loving behavior is simulated, the child is placed in a position where he must not accurately interpret her communication if he is to maintain his relationship with her." He cannot win, for if he accurately interprets her as loving, she may withdraw, and if he does not, she may punish him.

An example that Bateson gives demonstrates the nature of the double-bind the child is in. If, he says, the mother begins to feels hostile toward the child and also feels compelled to withdraw from him, she might say "'Go to bed, you are very tired and I want you to get your sleep'". "This overtly loving statement," Bateson writes, "is intended to deny a feeling that could be verbalized as 'Get out of my sight because I'm sick of you.'" He goes on:

If the child correctly discriminates her metacommunicative signals, he would have to face the fact that she both doesn't want him and is deceiving him by her loving behavior. He would be "punished" for learning to discriminate orders of messages accurately. He therefore would tend to accept the idea that he is tired rather than recognize his mother's deception. This means that he must deceive himself about his own internal state in order...
to support mother in her deception. To survive with her he must falsely discriminate his own internal messages as well as falsely discriminate the messages of others.\textsuperscript{60}

The problem goes further still, since the mother, in defining how he feels, is really controlling the child's definitions about his own messages, as well as his definitions of his responses to her. If he contests, she might insist that she cares only about him and not about herself. The easiest path for the child is to accept the mother's simulated loving behavior as real, and his desires to interpret what is going on as undermined. The result is that the mother is withdrawing from him and defining this withdrawal as the way a loving relationship should be at the same time as she is placing him in a double-bind—he cannot win.

This kind of double-bind situation may have the consequence of disallowing for the child's sense of a consistent identity. He may develop a psychosis, which seems, in part, Bateson remarks, "a way of dealing with double bind situations to overcome their inhibiting and controlling effect."\textsuperscript{61} This psychosis, this "ontological insecurity," is precisely the lack of an experience of a body that is real and whole, continuous and alive. There is no firm sense that I am the body that moves in a world of meaning. The individual cannot experience himself as autonomous since the very nature of his relationship to his mother was undermining of this ability. He was powerless to respond to her, and so the only response was to sever his identity, to retreat into his own internal processes (which themselves are not interpreted as his own) and to suffer the lack of a meaningful world.

\textsuperscript{60} Bateson, TTS, 8.
\textsuperscript{61} Bateson, TTS, 9. Note that psychosis as a response to this situation is exemplary of what we described as a "healthy habit" in Chapter 1, since it is a response to an impossible situation. However, here this as the only response is, of course, unhealthy in an extreme way since he becomes, in his powerlessness to interpret meanings in himself and others, unable to change this habit; he is unable to be a self, at all.
We have seen how others, and in these examples, can undermine the embodied "I can", and undermine self-identity itself. Others, as we have seen in this chapter, do play a crucial role in the opposite experience of the self—others can, through their recognition of us, allow for our own movements that lead us toward our autonomous identity. For example, a small child runs into the room quite distraught and crying "she [my sister] just called me stupid." The father slowly and calmly asks, "and, are you stupid?" After some moments, the girl declares "no, I am not," and suddenly stops crying. The father's tacit agreement with her declaration reinforces a new understanding of herself that she has accomplished. Other people may help us to recognize that our actions matter, while also instilling in us the sense that we have some authority in regard to our own interpretations. In more sophisticated scenarios, such as the example of the young girl who goes to her friend's house, the mother plays a significant role in affirming the girl's autonomy and sense of herself as real when she does not confuse the girl's interpretation by throwing her into a double-bind. Intimate others in friendship and healthy romantic relationships also lend themselves to this sense as we will further see later in this chapter. Within a situation of mutual recognition, we are able to respond as a consistent self. Let us return now to examine how the other, in situations of mutual recognition, contributes to our sense of autonomy by initiating us into our lives.

Others give us the sense that we are alive by initiating us into time, I contend, and I further argue that it is as living an intersubjective time that I am able to myself "be" a time and live the time of the world. In Chapter Two, we discussed how the plunge into the present, in an active response to objects in the world, inaugurates us into time. The present is a site where I meet up with other bodies, where my actions are often tied to the actions of others. In relation to this theme, Merleau-Ponty writes:
Another will never exist for us as we exist for ourselves: he is always a lesser figure, we are never present at the thrust of temporalization in him as we are in ourselves. But unlike two consciousnesses, two temporalities are not mutually incompatible, because each one only knows itself by projecting itself in the present, and because they can intertwine there (PP, 457).

The intertwining of my own temporality with another, in the present, is a means to sensing ourselves as alive, as moving and acting expressions of ourselves as we respond and engage with those others. When we are healthy or "happy," we find ourselves thrown into our days — our bodies guide us and carry us toward the tasks we wish to complete, the friends we wish to meet and the work we want to do. There is a felt purpose to these activities, a sense of aliveness. I not only meet the other when I plunge into my day, but the other can elicit my plunge in the first place, drawing me into the present with a call that demands my living response. My actions are called for and matter just in this way alone; the other has the unique capacity of bringing me to where she is now, of responding with my meaningful action.

Section 2. The Sense of One’s Presence in the World as Continuous in Time: Perspective and Continual Transformation

In this section I will argue that other people, through their perspectives, give us the ability to be in continuous transformation, instead of being stuck in a perspective belonging to our past. They do this by initiating us into the present, to reality as it is, and in joining us there they enable an open future. We thereby feel ourselves to be, in a temporal sense, a continuous person. This
section will highlight how the other is involved in my ability to be continuous, to be, in other words, a becoming whose identity partially consists of change and transformation.

While it is indeed essential to us that we develop a coherent and consistent identity, this is not accomplished by becoming rigidly "fixed" in an identity; rather, a healthy identity is also an identity in an ongoing process of becoming. I will argue that it is the perspective of the others of the present, the others, for example, with whom I am in close relationships and share time, that enables my ability to perceive reality as a reality that we share, but each with a different perspective. It is these others who can also, by showing us reality from their perspective, get us "unstuck" from our past, and help us to move toward a continuous opening toward a future; to be not a fixed identity but a continuously transforming identity. It is not that we have to adopt the others' perspective, but rather be open to its unique vision so that I may perhaps transform my own understanding and interpretations of my history and my underlying assumptions and interpretations contributing to the identity I assume. It is through others, then, that we have the sense that we are continuous beings.

I experience myself as continuous when I am immersed in a project; perhaps, for example, in the writing of this chapter, when I cycle to work, when I read a book or when I fall in love. My past is there behind me, but it does not hold me, does not prevent me from projecting myself forward. Just as the previous sentence of the book seamlessly guided me to the one I am currently reading, so, too, does this one compel me forward to the next. I am there behind this movement, or with it, but as continuous. Perhaps, though, a particular sentence "strikes a nerve," reminding me of jealous feelings I have or throwing me into a past when my friend told me I was weak. Suddenly, I have stopped reading. I am stuck in the current sentence and cannot move on to the next. This example shows a halt in my sense of being continuous. In situations of great
severity, the past perspective may dominate so fully that all aspects of life are affected. A person such as this inhabits the perspective she had there and is closed off from other perspectives. Time, in a certain way, has stopped for this person and with this his identity and self.

Let us return briefly to our discussion of the present as outlined in Chapter 2 and expound on it. The present, we said, had a thickness to it. It is where I make contact with time; where I carry my past forward and where the possibilities for my future are opened up. The present is the realm of the real; it is where reality presents itself to me. When I plunge into the present through my action, I open myself to the world, and discover (again and again) other persons. I discover other persons as bodies, but I also make contact with other persons in the cultural objects I use in my daily life, from my coffee, table and chair, to this computer. I see the others from different times — historical others — in the old building I pass and the painting I see on my wall. I am in contact with other persons even when I perceive the natural world. I perceive the tree in my backyard as the site that contains the fort in which I play with my friends, or I see the lake as the place where I swim with my family. Even more remote aspects of nature (not tied so directly to my life) contain others. I experience a sunset, for example, in terms that are shared with others. Finally, I am in contact with others even when I am alone; for this sense of aloneness is experienced in contrast to the time when my lover was here. Every present is thoroughly entrenched with other persons. We share the present with others.

We cannot forget, though, that when we plunge into a present, and into the world or reality of the present, we plunge into the world as bodies. As a body, I am in the world and situated here in this particular present, in this particular place. And as situated here, I see you over there. As bodies, we are situated in a shared world. I cannot see the backside of the flowerbed that separates us, but I know in principle that I would only need to walk around it in
order to see it from that side, which is to say, to see it from your side. There are multiple perspectives on reality, for the "vantage point" the other has in their situatedness will always be different than mine. When I open myself to a world (by plunging into the present), I open myself to the world as it is for other people, and so open myself to the ways these perspectives might shape me.

Though we in fact inhabit a world inherently open to the multiplicity of other perspectives, it is nonetheless the case that we can act as if our own perspective were sufficient to define what is 'real.' It is precisely when we act in this way that we fail to engage with the 'true present.' Good habits of perception are the challenge to this attitude. The habit-body that is developed in the direction of health will have the kind of leaping habits we discussed in Chapter 2. Healthy relationships with other people offer us the means or the encouragement to leap into a new present and a different perspective. They encourage us to develop the kind of "plasticity" that Kirsten Jacobson describes (when she refers to the notion developed by Edith Cobb).

"Plasticity in play or in life," Jacobson writes, "involves the ability to be something other than what one typically is or to be open to responding to unexpected things in creative, rather than habitual ways." When others help us to leap beyond neurotic habits or develop plasticity by giving us a new perspective, we may indeed, as Russon suggests (when he describes the therapeutic relationship) "be propelled beyond ourselves to the realm in which we recognize that for ourselves the other's perspective is an essential value and something for which we must

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62 Kirsten Jacobsen, Perceptual Change and Therapeutic Exposure: On the Existential Importance of Play," 8. Jacobson further suggests that, "the neurotic person's 'recovery' begins with being lent a new and revivified way of seeing; her health returns, in other words, through a form of joint attention with her therapist" (3). This joint attention, involving the play that opens the neurotic person to a more plastic response, can also be achieved with a good friend (Jacobson later describes the therapist taking on the posture of a good friend). We will see in section 4 how the lending of "new and revivified ways of seeing" are indeed part of what constitutes our close interpersonal relationships, and contributes to the transformative nature of our identities.
care." This recognition in itself may reinforce the plasticity originally involved in the transformation. Let us see now how the other is able to initiate my plunge into the present in the first place (to bring us toward their perspective).

We are, as we saw in section 1 "inherently open to the other." We are directed to the perspectives of others, and as Russon says, this is a key fact about our reality as persons. "Our essential reality," he says, "is to be drawn out of ourselves by others", and further, "we only thereby arrive at ourselves" and not in a static way but in the sense of self we have spoken about — we arrive at ourselves, but as never finished, as continuously becoming.

We might now ask, how do others call us into the present and "expose" us to their perspective in ways that we are attentive and open to? They may do so in a literal way — by calling us over for a swim, as in our well used example of the young girl. If I have the habit of leaping into a new possibility, a new "I can," I may do so and become transformed through this action. Perhaps the call will be in the form of a book — the other of this cultural object beckons us to read it and transforms our perspective through it, perhaps by nudging and intriguing us in ways to which we are able to respond with plasticity. Perhaps it will come in the form of a spectacular sunset, as though the other is saying "come and witness our shared world." Perhaps the call will come more as a demand — from a teacher to complete an assignment, through which we can learn and grow. And sometimes it may come through a direct interpersonal engagement. Laura McMahon writes:

You share with me things about yourself that are important to you — stories of your childhood, for example. In hearing your account I am both brought into your world and am compelled to recognize it as your world; I am compelled to recognize that each of

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your stories belongs to the entire context of a life not my own, that is has an 'external' horizon that will always escape me. At the same time, in hearing your account I participate in the shaping of its meaning for you; my reflection on what matters to you has the power to transform its place in your life. I can be included in the ambiguous reality of the thing, in its rich 'internal' horizon that can always bear new perspectives. We join each other in conversation only as separate perspectives which bring to one another different ways of seeing. 64

The other initiates me into a present which I share with her. When I respond by plunging into it, I open myself to the constant transformation her perspective offers to me. In so doing, I can become my own time, becoming myself as I let the past pass over into the present and this present flow into my future. I have the sense that I am engaged in my world and with others through this sense of myself as continuous.

We have seen how Laing's notion of ontological security contains the sense one has of himself as continuous in time, and we have seen also how the other calls me away from the fixing of my identity in one time and one perspective.

Section Three: The Sense of One's Presence in the World as Real: Bonds and Conversations

In this section, I will pick up on a particular way that we can be with others — namely, as immersed in close and meaningful interpersonal relationships. I will argue that it is here that the sense that we are "real" is most profoundly given and cultivated. These relationships open us to new realities; indeed, they are themselves often the new realities, the real bonds that we have

64 Laura McMahon, "The Miracle of Expression: Language, Perception and Interpersonal Relations in Merleau-Ponty", 75.
created together. The conversations that I have with an intimate other might give both of us a new understanding of something and a new reality is made in the form of this understanding. In both the case of the bond and the new understanding, the new reality could not have been created without the participation of each of us. We are able to sense ourselves as real through these involvements, I contend, because we are a real part of the new reality. Furthermore, we will see, following from Merleau-Ponty, that these realities bring us back to the sensible, back once again to our bodies, and so we experience our nature as intersubjective beings in and through the manner in which our bodies inhabit each other.

First, I will develop the idea that interpersonal relationships are the domain where new realities (or meanings) are created. Meaningful interpersonal relationships, we should notice, are examples of the most sophisticated form of the "I can" of each person in them. In other words, persons who have developed a healthy habit-body, that is a habit-body that supports the freedom of that body, can engage in relationships that themselves will be healthy. We can say that these relationships reflect our most sophisticated or developed selves because it is here that we see the reciprocity involved in the cultivation of our identities. The other calls us, and we cannot fail to respond. Moreover, my response is a likewise call to that other. We are always already calling and responding to each other, giving (or not giving) each other recognition that we are persons who matter. The creation of new meaning in and through close relationships is an achievement that can only occur when we recognize ourselves and each other as also meaningful, when we are meaningful to each other. We can now address the question of how new realities are created by us.

\[65\] Russon, HE, 56.
Let us begin by looking at the nature of dialogue, one essential way that we can create new realities. Consider what Merleau-Ponty says about expression:

The process of expression, when it is successful, does not merely leave for the reader and the writer himself a kind of reminder, it brings the meaning into existence as a thing at the very heart of the text, it brings it to life in an organism of words, establishing it in the writer or the reader as a new sense organ, opening a new field or a new dimension to our experience (PP, 212).

Expression between myself and the other in dialogue may likewise open up a new field to my experience. In dialogue, Merleau-Ponty writes, "there is constituted between the other person and myself a common ground; my thought and his are interwoven into a single fabric, my worlds and those of my interlocutor are called forth by the state of the discussion, and they are inserted into a shared operation of which neither of us is the creator" (PP, 413). The shared operation of dialogue is not created by either you or me, but is the becoming of something new. Of course, not all conversations create a new reality or understanding, and so we should describe the kind of dialogue we are referring to.

We refer to the kind of dialogue that is careful, thoughtful and respectful. We have said that healthy and meaningful interpersonal relationships are formed by persons who have developed a strong habit-body (which is not to say that this process is now finished). Part of what this means, then, is that each person, to some degree or another, has developed abilities of how to be with other people. Interestingly, the developing of the skills needed to be with each other in constructive and healthy ways is partially learned through the relationships that helped the person cultivate a healthy habit-body in the first place. Those persons who support the development of my "I can," my parents, teachers, lovers and friends, support my ability to speak
clearly, to think carefully, to respond in ways that encourage the development of the conversation (rather than ways that dogmatically shut down the possibility, such as in the earlier example given by Laing). These others have also enabled me to respect others, which is, to be more specific, to recognize that the others' perspective is different than my own. They have done this by supporting, with their own perspective, my abilities and my becoming.

It is dialogues that are the achievement of persons with a healthy and well-developed habit-body, then, that we refer to now. These dialogues are the ways that these persons form the kind of deep and close relationships we now speak of (and here we should note that dialogue can have a broader meaning, persons may be in healthy and reciprocal "dialogues," which take the form of erotic experiences). These persons in dialogue with one another are forming new realities that take the form of new understandings, but also these realities are the form of the relationship itself: they create, in other words, a bond. Let us look at another passage from Merleau-Ponty regarding what occurs in dialogue:

We have here a dual being, where the other for me is no longer a mere bit of behavior in my transcendental field, nor I in his; we are collaborators for each other in consummate reciprocity. Our perspectives merge into each other, and we co-exist through a common world (PP, 413).

To say that we co-exist through a common world is to suggest that some new reality has emerged: this is the reality just of our co-existence, it is the reality of our bond.

The reality of these bonds, and the experience they create, I argue, are what give us the sense that we are real, because we have contributed to a new reality that neither of us could have created alone, and because we experience this new reality as giving each of us our realities as
individuals. "The bonds between us are real" says Russon.66 Further, we do have an experience of their reality. The realities that we create together give me my self. Russon writes,

There is an epiphany of love, an experience of a reality between us that exceeds any self-conscious choice or action either of us has made…to experience [it] is to bear witness to the birth of a miraculous interreality that is us, even as it exceeds what either of us could be singly.67

The bonds of love and friendship, the new ideas that had not occurred to either one of us, a moment of intense humour that we share, these bring us back to ourselves, they make us feel real because we — as individual selves — are part of a shared reality, and because those invisible co-created realities, to paraphrase Merleau-Ponty, cannot be detached from the sensible: from each of our bodies; and the power and authority these realities have lie in the heart of the sensible.68 I feel myself as real when I feel my lover's hand on my back, when I smile after days without seeing a friend, when I feel a shiver of excitement upon realizing our conversation has led to a new understanding or when my whole body shakes with laughter. Erotic relationships are a powerful example of this idea. While the reality intimate others create is "invisible," we together have a mutual experience of this in our bodies, giving both of us an acute sense of our own realities.

Erotic relationships play a particular role in the developing of my autonomy, as well. The erotic other shows us our powers of "leaping." "Leaping habits," as we defined in earlier chapters, give us our powers of going beyond ourselves into unknown futures. They are habits that might ultimately afford us the ability to move beyond pasts we are particularly stuck in, and

66 Russon, BWE, 88.
67 Merleau-Ponty, The Visible and the Invisible, 48-50. Further references to this book will be noted as VI, followed by the page number.
they do this, in part, simply, by initiating us into the present, as we said in the first section, but also by being the unknown future *themselves*. In other words, the deep bonds that transform us are often the ones that, through a call in which our emotional fabric is at stake, we find ourselves having *already responded* — we have already leapt. This relationship has the capacity to show us the ways we are autonomous, the ways we have leapt (with them perhaps), to show us the powers we have (and this in part because we see the powers *we have over them* — our actions, indeed, matter with gravity here, for we know their vulnerability as well as our own), and, finally, because in our erotic relationships we forget ourselves in a more complete way than many other ways in which we engage. In other words, we are immersed in a thorough way — a way in which the call and responses themselves are not explicitly shown to be either mine or yours — we express our relationship and we are an appearance and expression of something real.

*Section 4: The sense of reality itself: Being at-home-in-the-world*

Recall from Chapter 1 our discussion of the subject's immersion into the object of perception. Other people play a crucial role in my ability to be immersed and, indeed, to be immersed with them, the freedom of action and expression that immersion affords is highlighted. We are able to forget ourselves — to be outside of ourselves such that the calls and responses (especially of erotic relationships) may not be clearly my own or the others. We are at-home-in-the-world when we are immersed in it; we are opened up to our own free expression as someone who matters.
The other, we have said, is involved in the construction of my identity, and in the development of my relations with them I can become "ontologically secure," such that I am able to act and such that I understand those actions as mattering. To be autonomous, to understand my actions as mattering and to be ontologically secure; these all say the same thing. The achievement of ontological security is the result of particular ways others respond to my vulnerability, and of the ways that others support the development of good habits of perception. When this goes well, when my habit body is developed in the direction of my freedom, I experience my presence in the world as alive, whole, continuous and real.

In this section, I will argue that it is only as ontologically secure that we can perceive reality beyond our own perspective and thereby have the experience of being at-home-in-the-world. We are able to be at-home-in-the-world, I will further argue, when we have recognized that our own perspective on the world is a perspective on a shared world that offers a different perspective to the other with whom I share it. We are at home when we recognize this because we are able to perceive, and thus to engage with, the objects in the world as objects meaningful and belonging in some sense to me, but also to derive a comfort and familiarity with how these objects are meaningful and belonging to you. For ontologically insecure persons, on the other hand, the world is out of reach, it is not a home, and even objects themselves are a source of alienation.

Let us explore the above ideas further. I am in my room, surrounded by many things: bookshelves, lamps, candle sticks, furniture and clothes. These objects are all cultural objects, they are all made by persons who share with us the meaning of these objects — and so the bookshelf is for putting books on, the lamps for providing light as I read, the candle sticks hold the candles I light when in a certain mood, the furniture for sleeping on and the clothes for
protection, modesty and style. We, the other and myself, have agreed on these meanings, more or less. And the "we "referred to here is also comprised of historical others — indeed it is these others who designed the particular things we call a bed and a bookshelf, and we have inherited their meanings from them. However, it is also the case that I will take these objects up in my own particular way, which is to say to give them my own personal meaning, derived out of my own personal history. I will, for example, when I look over at the bookshelf, see a book there of great value to me; it was a book that I loved, perhaps, or one that my lover gave to me. There will also be the kind of significance to the shelf that comes from familiarity. I know well the look of the books on it, and they, along with the shelf itself, have been "with me" for some time. I am at home here. However, this "homy" feeling is only available to me if I have developed the kind of habit-body that recognizes shared meaning as well as the perspective of others, and if I have the sense of presence in the world, evoking Laing again, of being alive, whole, continuous and real.

We can see better how it is that I have recognized the others' perspective if we take the above example and apply it to the greater world (simply because the other will presumably not feel at home in my bedroom, at least not to the degree that I will). And so, as ontologically secure, which is to say as recognizing that others have a different perspective than mine — as well as recognizing a shared intersubjective domain — I am also able to feel at-home-in-the-world wherever I am (to some degree or another). I walk down streets scattered with cultural objects — houses, streetlights, cars and sidewalks, for example. I still may take them up in my own personal way: I have walked down this street before, I like this intersection, I do not like the design of that house. However, I also recognize that the others around me have their own personal perspective, or way of taking up, these very same things. I am comfortable and familiar
in the world, despite the fact that others may like the design of that house, despite the fact that the way they perceive this street is different than mine. I recognize, at least implicitly, that the other has a different perspective. The form that this recognition takes is the sharing of this space and a sharing of the underlying intersubjective meanings of the things in this space that we have together created.

This sharing of space and the sharing of underlying intersubjective meanings is most explicitly observed in healthy interpersonal relationships (which are, again, some of the most sophisticated forms a habit-body can take if cultivated correctly). Jacobson describes this well:

a good friend is someone with whom the objects we encounter "come to no harm"… This is not to say that we need or want someone to agree that a particular song or book or a certain pathway is the best or even good; it is not a matter of consensus. Rather, the good friend is marked by being able to let our world, the ways we experience objects — a cup of coffee, a personal library of books, a time of day, a busy city square, the subway — have their room to breathe.69

To let the objects we experience together "have their room to breathe" is to share with our close friend their underlying intersubjective meanings.

We have said that it is only as ontologically secure that we can perceive reality as it is, and thereby have the experience of being at-home-in-the-world. We are able to be at-home-in-world, because we have recognized that our own perspective on the world is a perspective on a shared world, which offers a different perspective to the other with whom I share it. The ontologically secure person is able to do this because she, with the support of others, has developed a habit-body that is able to experience its own worth, and so has the sense of being

alive and whole. She is able to respond to the call of others and plunge into a shared present, and so open herself to their perspective, open herself to a future, and experience herself as continuous in time. She can create new realities with others in her close and meaningful interpersonal relationships. Since she experiences herself as part of the reality she participated in creating, she senses that she is real. She experiences her presence in the world as alive, whole, continuous and real; she is at-home-in-the-world.

Conclusion

Overall, then, we can speculate briefly on the experience of home and reality for the person deprived of the kinds of relationships that support the healthy development of our habit-body. Let us begin with Jacobson's definition of being-at-home. She writes:

being-at-home is the way in which we have established and continue to establish a sense of our own-ness in the larger world. To be at-home is to find ourselves reflected in our setting and our situation and to experience this reflection as giving us a place where we can be ourselves”.

This description nicely captures the experience of being-at-home-in-the-world, and it points to the opposite experience, for it is these aspects Jacobsen describes that the ontologically insecure person lacks: there is no reflection of himself in his setting and situation — instead, his setting and situation reflect only his alienation from them; they glare at him from their distance, shouting out his lack of own-ness, his lack of belonging there. He cannot be himself in this setting, for he is not really in it. Moreover, he does not experience himself as a self at all, and so he cannot be himself. He does not have the sense that he is real, alive, whole or continuous. The

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world for him is not a home, but a reflection of his alienation, a reality that seems to belong to every other *but* him.
Part B: Depression
Chapter 4: The Phenomenon of Depression: The Development of Both a Historical and an Individual Consciousness

Introduction

Part A of this thesis studied the nature of perception. In particular, it looked at the bodily, temporal and intersubjective dimensions of perception. My approach in those introductory chapters was to seek out what might be thought of as an ideal incorporation of those three features of human experience into an individual life. To perceive in such a way that one is engaged in a continual project of action, to develop ways of bringing one's personal history to an active present and to create bonds and maintain relationships with others in such a way that endorses one's own sense of worth are the ideals of perceptual life.

Much of our experience does not follow this path, however, for many and complicated reasons. This thesis is an inquiry into one of those more problematic developments, that one where a person is said to be "depressed" (or, says of herself that she is "depressed"). In particular, this chapter seeks to answer the following question: what is the phenomenon of depression? This question, as we will see, is an immensely complex one. In part, it is complex because it invites many further questions: Are we looking for a description of depression or an understanding of its causes? Are we seeking to understand an individual's experience of depression, or a societal understanding of depression? Are we looking at underlying factors like
biology, developmental factors like childhood experience, or much broader factors such as cultural forms? Are we seeking to understand the historical literature in order to try to make sense of past conceptions in contrast to, and in likeness with, contemporary theories; and, if so, to what end? I am introducing "depression" with this series of questions, not in order to make the phenomenon more confusing, but to emphasize that an attempt to answer the original question must address these other questions, and more. My objective is not to answer exhaustively all of these questions, for that is beyond the scope of this thesis. My objective is to touch on them, to provide an answer wherein different forms of thoughts on the subject (historical, sociological, philosophical and psychological, as well as anthropological) are engaged.

Commentators of theoretical and historical writings on depression and melancholy often engage with yet another set of questions. Namely, they ask whether the "melancholy" of the Renaissance is the same phenomenon as what was described as melancholy by the ancients; and whether what was referred to as melancholy by the ancients and during the time of the Renaissance is to be distinguished from the modern conception of clinical depression. I propose that these questions can be answered, and that the answers to be found open toward the possibilities of an enhanced understanding of the phenomenon of depression, and to the value to be found in performing a phenomenology of it. I will argue that while the "melancholy" of Ancient Greece is, in an important way, not the same phenomenon as the contemporary phenomenon of depression, they do share similarities in their focus on the organic, rather than the lived, body. Furthermore, it is the melancholy of the Romantic Era that might in a more explicit way point to the need to turn to a phenomenology. In any case, I will argue that while these understandings differ from each other in important ways, the Ancient, the Romantic, and

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71 See Jennifer Radden's *The Nature of Melancholy: From Aristotle to Kristeva.*
the Modern conceptions of melancholy and depression share an existential backbone, and this
makes them, in certain respects, very similar experiences. Their differences will be shown to be
differences that reflect the consciousness of both society and the individual, over time. My goals
are to show these differences, while I also identify what are the existential features that they
share, and to defend my claim that a phenomenological approach to this problem is of worth.

I will divide this chapter into five sections which correspond to important historical and
theoretical transformations in the interpretation of the phenomenon of depression My analysis of
this material will be based primarily on the research of Jennifer Radden, in her work *The Nature
of Melancholy: From Aristotle to Kristeva*, supplemented by my own study of original texts in
this history and of the writings of other psychologists. The five sections will be, respectively: 1.
Ancient Greece to the Romantic era: Melancholy as Imbalance and Suffering; 2. Emerging
Subjectivity in the Romantic Era and Freudian Theory: Melancholy as Loss and Self-Loathing;
Causation Theories: Depression as Alienation and the Tendency to Self-isolation; and 5.
Conclusion: the Developed Consciousness of Depression: Suffering, Self-Loathing, the Inability
to Act and the Tendency to Self-Isolation; Depression as Mal-Adjustment.

The above mentioned transitions in thought on the phenomenon of melancholy and
depression reflect and bring to the forefront, I contend, depression's primary characteristics. The
introduction of these characteristics into the thought on depression is not an arbitrary or random
development (though this is not to say that they were inevitable). Instead, what they introduce is,
in each case, a growing awareness of what is really happening in depression. Moreover, the
historical development of the concept of depression is reflected in the individual's experience of
depression and in her own understanding of herself as a depressed person. But the above
mentioned transitions, it should be emphasized, also reflect the dominant theories of depression — ancient and medieval theories of 'imbalance,' and more modern theories of loss, cognitive theories, and cultural causation theories. The first theories, those of ancient and medieval times, are theories of 'imbalance'.

My broad goals in this chapter are to identify the phenomenon of depression by briefly tracing its development throughout history and to look at some of the most prominent contemporary theories on depression, themselves representing the conceptual changes in history. This said, neither the historical picture I give, nor the accounts of prominent theories, will be exhaustive — that is beyond the scope of this thesis. My aim is to give an impression of depression, thereby illuminating some of its various details, but also its overall configuration. I will show how it is a vastly complex phenomenon, which can hardly be so narrowed down to details, but which can, even at this broad level, help us to see where branches of thought on depression are good and necessary.

This chapter will conclude by drawing from this historical reflection a definition of sorts. I will suggest that there are four main aspects of the depressive experience, each shown in various parts of the literature. These aspects are: (1) a suffering, (2) an inability to act; (3) self-loathing; and, (4) a tendency to self-isolation. These aspects of the depressive experience are deeply connected and overlapping. Yet, each of them is an experience that is, at times, separated or, at the least, highlighted. The movement between these experiences better represents the overall experience of depression. Indeed, we might say that this movement, which is a person's living experience of depression, is what best gives us an impression of depression. This movement, I argue, has been shown to be an inner labour that reinforces itself and reinforces its alienation from the world and other people. I will also suggest that a phenomenology of
depression will be fruitful since it will help to fill out the living experience of depression. It will
be valuable — not only contributing to our understanding of depression, and so also for its
therapies, but also, perhaps, for its contribution to phenomenology. It does so as follows: the
experience of depression tells us something about what it is to be a subjectivity engaged in the
project of one's own life. I contend that all persons are subject, if not to depression as it is a
paralyzing illness, to the experiences found in depression.

Section 1. Ancient Greece to the Romantic Era: Melancholy as Imbalance and Suffering

The very first theories of depression — written as early as the 5th Century, B.C.E. — were
theories of a phenomenon that was then called melancholy, or melancholia. These theories were
causal theories of imbalance. They attributed the cause of melancholy to be disruptions of bodily
systems. As mentioned earlier, the question of whether the melancholy of earlier times is the
same phenomenon as the one we currently identify as depression is an important one. We can
begin to address it by investigating the history of writing on melancholy and tracing its
development. We can observe that the various manifestations of melancholy and depression over
the centuries are part of a dialogue that begins in Ancient Greece. The beginnings of this history
are found in the writings of the physicians, philosophers and theologians of the time, extending
into the medieval period. I will look at some of these writings, especially emphasizing the
various and divergent ways that melancholy is described. I will argue, in conclusion of this
section, that these theorists take "imbalance" to be the origin of melancholy and depression. It is
first, as imbalance that the phenomenon is identified by them. Thus, imbalance is the theoretical
origin, for these thinkers, but it is also, I contend, the origin of the experience of depression, both
for society and for the individual. It is, we might say, as an "imbalance" between individuals and
in society that it is recognized to begin with, rather than as an imbalance belonging solely within
an individual. Indeed, this is why the problem is recognized in a very wide variety of different
situations, including cases of brilliant individuals, slothful individuals, witches, students and
monks. I will go on to argue that these originary imbalances become, for the subject of the
Romantic Era, the particular kind of suffering that belongs to depression. In ancient times, it is
not yet recognized as individual suffering, at least not in the way it subsequently comes to be
recognized as such.

I will begin this section by drawing attention to an aspect of ancient melancholy
identified in its literature and addressed by commentators. This is the idea that ancient
melancholy has been taken to have understood, almost always at its root, and perhaps as its cause
(though that is contestable), fear and sadness. Next I will outline the dominant physical
imbalance thought to be its cause. This is an imbalance between the humors of the body and, in
particular, of "black bile" (which is the literal meaning of "melancholia"). I will then outline the
variety of character traits, personality types and professional orientations of those thought to be
melancholic. I will begin with an Aristotelian conception of the melancholic genius and proceed
to Cassian and Hildegard's sinful and wretched souls, and to Weyer and Teresa of Avila's
discussions of witchcraft and possession by demons, and conclude with those writers of the late
1500's to the mid-1600's who began to describe melancholics as ones who suffer from
preoccupation with one and the same subject, who suffer from living in one's own head; as ones
whose suffering perhaps has a particular content.

We will then go on to see that what is evident toward the late 1600's is a shift in view
whereby an undefined imbalance begins to be described with more detail and with less emphasis
on character, personality or profession. The detail provided regarding the particular way of suffering is one that focuses on "mental" suffering. Though "cognitive therapy" was only developed much later (initially by Aaron Beck, who introduced it as a theory in 1976), we will see that these writings of the 1600's display the conceptual beginnings of such a theory. Alongside the changes in description that focused on the cognitive aspect of suffering came the idea that melancholics are sufferers of diseases rather than considered as outcasts, as we see in Pinel's work, and, further, that such diseases are found in the brain, rather than in the humors.

The Romantic Era begins somewhat later than this (in the mid to late 1700's). This period reinforces, albeit in a different way, a shift in understanding related to the nature of suffering. Fear and sadness as emotional attributes are not rejected as belonging to melancholy, so much as reconceptualized and differently portrayed. Let us begin with the ancient ideas of fear and sadness.

Much of the literature on melancholy during the ancient and medieval periods varies to such a degree that it seems those theorists were describing many different phenomena. However, there is consensus that melancholy's primary subjective state included "fear and sadness". Galen (whose work we will examine shortly) wrote that "it seems that Hippocrates classified all [melancholic patients'] symptoms into two groups: fear and despondency. Later, Burton named sadness and fear without cause as the true characters and inseparable companions of melancholy." The addition of the phrase "without cause" is an important one, according to Radden. Fear and sadness were viewed often to be states that existed in melancholics "in excess of what is justified by the circumstances." Radden notes that Bright, for example, in 1586 states

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72 Radden, ATK, 10.
73 Radden, ATK, 10.
74 Radden, ATK, 11.
that for the most part the perturbations of melancholy "are sadde and fearefull, and such as rise of them as distrust, doubt, diffidence, or dispaire, and names sadness and fear without a cause as the true characters and inseparable companions of melancholy." 75 Radden goes on to say that Thomas Willis, in 1672, "is offering a more ostensibly 'scientific' explanation of the fear and sadness of melancholia without challenging their centrality as symptoms" and "for Willis, melancholy is a distemper of the Brain and Spirits dwelling in it and also of the Praecordia, and of the Blood therein enkindled, from thence sent into the whole Body: as it is produces there a Delirium or idle talking, so here fear and sadness." 76 Later, in the nineteenth century, Jean-Etienne-Dominique Esquirol defined melancholia, or hypermania, as "a cerebral malady . . . sustained by a passion of a sad, debilitating or oppressive character." The "groundless" nature of fear and sadness returned again in the 19th century analyses, such as Mercier's in the Dictionary of Psychological Medicine, where melancholia is characterized by "a feeling of misery which is in excess of what is justified by the circumstances." 77 The persistence of the idea that fear and sadness are hallmarks of depression, and that these are without (sufficient) cause, hints at the subjective experience, but does not explain or describe it. In fact, these features are themselves attributable to the underlying biological imbalance. This imbalance, reflected in ancient humoral theory, was the dominant topic in early writings on melancholy.

Ancient theorists describe a vast assembly of behaviors and characteristics all attributable to the imbalance of black bile. Melancholic people ranged from "madmen" ranting on the street, heroes like Ajax in Homer's Iliad, witches possessed by demons, students and monks showing a terrible despondency, unable to work, eat or sleep, people refusing contact with other people,

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75 Bright, A Treatise of Melancholy, 89.
76 Willis, Two Discourses Concerning the Souls of Brutes, 123.
77 Radden, ATK, 10.
genius artists, and so on. Again, there is some consensus within the literature that melancholy is primarily a condition involving fear and sadness. Even Ajax "ate out his heart," and witches were fearfully possessed by the devil. However, what these people were taken to share in common, much more than fear and sadness, were those biological imbalances.

The Greek physician Hippocrates, in the fifth century B.C.E., outlined a theory based on what he termed as the four humors. These humors were blood, yellow bile, phlegm, and black bile. It was those affected by black bile that were melancholic, since the meaning of black bile was the meaning of melancholic. Indeed, "black" was meant to represent the darkness associated with the experience. The humors were thought to be linked to the qualities of heat, cold, moisture and dryness. A person's temperament could be described in terms of these qualities, and if, for example, a person's temperament was either too cold or too dry, an excess of black bile could occur. It was this excessive black bile that, for Hippocrates and some of his followers, accounted for melancholy and other disturbances of the mind. Galen, another influential physician, this time of the Roman era (130 C.E.), explicitly states that "all of the best physicians and philosophers agree that the humors and actually the whole constitution of the body change the activity of the soul."\(^78\) One such example of this can be seen in a work of an Aristotelian's writings on melancholy, as we will see shortly.

In ancient Greece, there were described a variety of melancholic diseases, as opposed to one disease called melancholia; these were epilepsy, apoplexy, despondency or fear and over-confidence. Some commentators, Jennifer Radden notes, have seen in these categorizations a secularization of a spiritual Platonic notion of "inspired madness" or "frenzy."\(^79\) These forms of madness, themselves taken to be attributable to excessive black bile, could be seen in Heracles,
Lysander of Sparta, and also the Homeric heroes Ajax and Bellerophon, according to the Aristotelian *Problems.* In a fragment of *Problems,* "Problems Connected with Thought, Intelligence, and Wisdom," the Aristotelian wrote:

Why is it that all men who have become outstanding in philosophy, statesmanship, poetry or the arts are melancholic, and some to such an extent that they are infected by the diseases arising from black bile, as the story of Heracles among the heroes tells? For Heracles seems to have been of this character, so that the ancients called the disease of epilepsy the "Sacred disease" after him. This is proved by his frenzy toward his children and the eruption of sores which occurred before his disappearance on Mount Oeta; for this is a common affection among those who suffer from black bile. Similar sores also appeared on Lysander the Spartan before his death. The same is true of Ajax and Bellerophon; the former went completely insane, and the latter craved for desert places, so that Homer wrote of him: 'But when he was hated of all the gods, then he wandered alone on the plain of Aleïum, eating out his heart, and avoiding the track of men.'

Radden points out that the question this Aristotelian poses is one echoed throughout the centuries until the 18th Century. This question comes alongside the view that melancholy brings with it compensating moods like energy, creativity and brilliance. This is seen, for example, she says, "in Delacroix's portrayal of elevated suffering of the poet Tasso," during the Italian humanistic Romantic era and in the European Renaissance more generally. It is not my intention to try to prove the validity of a connection. However, as we will see when we look more closely at the

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80 *Problems* is not generally recognized to be an authentic work by Aristotle. Radden writes that most authorities believe it to be the work of one of Aristotle's followers, perhaps Theophrastus (ATK, 55).
81 *Problems II, Book XXX.*
82 *Radden, ATK, 13.*
83 *Radden, ATK, 12.*
conceptions of melancholy in the Romantic era, the Aristotelian emphasis on a possible connection between the suffering of melancholy on the one hand, and a propensity for artistic creation on the other hand, is a hint at the dramatic shift in the understanding of melancholy to come. The Romantic era, we will see, brings with it a much more subjectivist understanding of melancholy — the individual's experience becomes highlighted through his artistic work, and in particular, the individual's relationship to the world. This is in contrast to the ancient conception which recognized the imbalance of melancholy, but which did not pursue an understanding of the individual experience. The Aristotelian's question will also be important shortly after the Renaissance when psychiatrists, and in particular Kraepelin, began a process of medicalizing melancholy in a different way: by classifying the varieties of imbalances seeming to have melancholy in common, and so introducing the condition manic-depression, which accounted for high energy and creative bursts that went alongside episodes of melancholy. Let us continue by examining further ways that melancholia was thought to be manifested in medieval times.

Cassian was raised in a Christian monastery in Bethlehem during the second half of the fourth century. He later founded two monasteries in Marseilles, one for men and one for women. He wrote about the state called acedia, which, in Greek, means "noncaring state" and which was (at least at times), interchangeable with the notion of melancholia. Regarded as a sin, acedia was a mental state of despondency, lethargy and discouragement that distracted a solitary monk from his duties. In the middle ages, acedia was further identified with the sin of sloth. Acedia, for Cassian, "injures the soul." He writes:

Our sixth combat is with what the Greeks call acedia, which we may term weariness or distress of the heart. This is akin to dejection, and is especially trying to solitaries, and a

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84 Cassian, The Foundations of the Cenobitic Life and the Eight Capital Sins, 69. Further references to this book will be noted as FC, followed by the page number.
dangerous and frequent foe to dwellers in the desert; and especially disturbing to a monk about the sixth hour...And when it has taken possession of some unhappy soul, it produces dislike of place, disgust with the cell, and disdain and contempt of the brethren who dwell with him...It also makes the man lazy and sluggish about all manner of work which is to be done within the enclosure of the dormitory.85

Such a disease of the soul was sinful, but it had a redemptive aspect because victory over acedia "brought joy, the highest of all the virtues and the state associated with mystical union with God."86 Cassian's work demonstrates quite a different characteristic profile of melancholy than Aristotle's (despite their mutual adherence to humoral theory, reference to solitariness, and some reference to sadness). Different again are Weyer and Teresa of Avila's accounts of the melancholic disposition.

Weyer was a physician practicing in the Low Countries (present day Holland and Belgium) in the mid-1500's. For Weyer, melancholy was a condition associated with imbalances of the humors, but which was also more than a disorder that involved disruptions of mood; its central feature, instead, was delusions. Radden notes that "discussions of the relationship between mental abnormality, witchcraft and lamiae (literally, witches) may be said to have been one of his enduring contributions to early medicine."87 Further, he was known for his notably humane attitude toward witches and other victims of melancholia. For Weyer, any power believed to be supernatural in nature was actually more a disorder of the imagination. He writes in a letter to a patron (by way of explaining both the public fear around witches and the accusations made of them):

85 Cassian, FC, 71.
86 Cassian, FC, 70.
87 Radden, ATK, 95.
Witches can harm no one through the most malicious will or ugliest exorcism, … rather their imaginations—infamed by the demons in a way not understandable to us—and the torture of melancholy make them only fancy they have caused all kinds of evil.

Witches, in this medieval time, stood out in a way that Weyer was able to identify as possibly belonging to the category of melancholia. We are seeing here a glimpse, again, into the nature of the suffering of melancholy — in this case, the melancholic suffers delusions. In fact, Weyer does describe a melancholy in broader categories, as well. He notes, for example (interestingly), that melancholics have undergone some kind of loss, and that what is suffered thereby is grief and an inability to overcome grief (this foreshadows Freud’s work on loss and mourning). Weyer also notes that he knew a person who recovered from melancholy by working hard and involving himself with other people, such that he eventually came to like the company of others. Weyer’s contributions to the lasting features of melancholy are strong.

Teresa of Avila was a Carmelite nun and theologian living in Spain in the 1500’s. Similar to Weyer, her accounts of melancholy favoured a compassionate tone, despite some agreement that melancholics were possessed by demonic forces. She said that one should not disturb such persons by telling them that their locutions came from the devil, but rather to "listen to them as to sick persons." Indeed, one of Teresa’s contributions is to emphasize the need to recognize melancholy as a serious illness. What stood out for her, we might say, is somewhat similar to what stood out for Weyer — a tendency toward delusions, the hearing of voices and the suffering of a kind of madness.

We have, in this section, examined the theories of imbalance, highlighting black bile and humoral theory as well as the ways that melancholics stood out for others in earlier times. I have

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88 Weyer, Of Deceiving Demons
89 Teresa of Avila, 107
suggested that imbalance itself is the originary feature of depression — it is the first indicator that something is "wrong." Apart from a narrow focus on fear and sadness, neither the nature nor the experience of that imbalance as it was for the individual was emphasized. However, as we have begun to see the particular kind of suffering that the individual undergoes was beginning to be described by Grüssseinger, Burton, and Borehaave and Butler. They described a kind of internal "mental" kind of suffering, related to thinking. Not surprisingly, there soon came to be writings on melancholy as a disease of the brain, and not much later, Emil Kraeplin radically changed societal conceptions of depression by classifying it into categories and sub-categories. The beginning of more description and emphasis on the nature of suffering is significant.

The suffering of depression, I am arguing, is one of the four unchangeable characteristics of the phenomenon. As we will see, while the nature of the suffering becomes more defined, it nonetheless remains an aspect of study and an experiential component of depression across history and culture. While it is true that this component is vague (and indeed is described as a kind of indescribable suffering at times), the suffering of depression is a kind of "umbrella category" — encompassing the other aspects of depression that I identify (self-loathing, the inability to act and the tendency to self-isolation), while none the less remaining distinct from them. We can now look at the Romantic period and the emphasis on a particular kind of suffering shown in art and reflecting the emergence of subjectivity. This is the observation that some melancholics focus on one and the same subject. Studying the thought patterns of melancholy is a major turn in itself — as we will see, the nature of the mental pain associated with depression is often associated with thinking. Cognitive theorists will take this up, but so will Freud, in his own way.
Section 2. Emerging Subjectivity in the Romantic Era and Freudian Theory: Melancholy as Mood, Loss and Self-Loathing

Radical transitions in societal and individual understandings of melancholy took place during the Romantic period (of the late 1700's until approximately the mid-1800's), when changing conceptions of human experience were occurring. Whereas for many of the centuries leading up to this point, there was not a clear distinction between society as a whole and the individual to be found within that society, now the individual was taking up a more prominent place. In this section, I will examine poetry and artworks that capture a sense of this change, and that demonstrate a radically different conception of melancholy. This will lead to an analysis of Freud's work *Mourning and Melancholy*. There, we will see how a particular aspect of melancholy depicted in art is taken up explicitly by Freud when he introduces the idea that melancholy is characterized by the sufferer's self-loathing.

Toward the end of the 1700's, notions of melancholy as a disease or imbalance were beginning to be replaced with notions of melancholy as a subjective mood state, emphasizing feelings and an experience of darkness and gloominess. This change continued on into the 1800's. It is reflected in the Romantic poetry of Goethe, Keats and Beaudelaire, as well as by painters of the era such as Caspar David Friedrich and Edvard Munch. The latter painted what Radden describes as "dark, haunting landscapes." Freidrich's "The Monk by the Sea," for example, as well as Munch's "Melancholy," depict a single person, contemplative and alone (and seemingly despairing in Munch's painting) in front of an ocean landscape. In poetry, emphasis fell on feelings including "feelings of solitude, darkness, grief, suffering, despair, longing and
elegiac sadness." The emergence of the subjective experience of melancholy through art will eventually inspire theories such as Freud's since these expressions themselves serve as a call for a different response to the melancholic person. Psychology answers this call by placing great importance on listening to the melancholic, on hearing the experience of suffering and this through analyzing with the patient, the development of the problem.

It is very interesting to note that what is happening in the Romantic era in relation to the developing notion of melancholy is, in effect, the uniting of sadness and beauty, "of sexual pleasure, energy and vitality on the one hand, with despair, suffering and passivity on the other." We might say that this shift exemplifies the reflective experience of the melancholic person — instead of being seen as a condition of illness, and this from a distance, it is now a very subjective experience, one that can only be captured by a personal expression of this experience. This expression captures beauty, as it brings the sufferer closer to her world, and we begin to see how mood can be transferred to inanimate objects. We will revisit and explore the expression that suffering can give way to in Chapter 5, and it will be my contention that the unification of sadness and beauty plays a role in the beginning of a movement out of depression, since the expression can be seen by the sufferer as her immersion with the world. It is possible to understand the suffering as an appearance of reality providing distance from the internality of the experience.

This shift toward the subjective experience is also important since it serves to help in the development of a more unified notion of depression, albeit a still complex one. In other words, the idea of a dark, or despairing "mood" helps in producing some consensus on what was deemed melancholic and what was not. We see, in those paintings and poetry, certain aspects

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90 Radde, ATK, 30.
91 Radde, ATK, 30.
found in the ancient picture — the solitude, the inertia and the pain, but this is not complicated
by reference to more delusional qualities, to random behaviours depicting aggression or insanity.
And we see in those works of art, I contend, the loss that Freud goes on to address. It is difficult
to look at Munch's painting and not bear witness to the grief that must accompany the
melancholic state.

Jennifer Radden notes the connection between suffering and beauty in the novels and
poetry of the time as well as in the art work described above. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's
*The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774), was immensely popular in its time. It told a story of
unrequited love that ended in a graphically described suicide. The book brought fame to Goethe
and had a profound effect on the public, inspiring a condition of "exaggerated sensibility that
came to be known as Wertherism."\(^92\) Keats wrote "Ode on Melancholy" and "What the Thrush
Said" in 1819. Both works exemplify the Romantic fascination with paradox: it was believed that
the soul grows and is exalted by its painful experiences, and only he who has felt the pain and
darkness of melancholy can taste fully of pleasure — bursting “Joy’s grape against his palate
fine.”\(^93\) Keats himself suffered from melancholy, as did Charles Baudelaire. Baudelaire wrote
"Autumn Song" and "Spleen" in 1857. Both poems are dark and brooding. For example,
"Autumn Song" begins:

> Soon will we plunge into the cold darkness;

> Farwell, brilliant light of our too brief summers!

> Already I hear the mournful thud

> Of falling logs on the courtyard cobbles.

> All of winter will enter my being: anger,

\(^92\) Radden, ATK, 181.
\(^93\) Keats, "What The Thrush Said", 120.
Hate, chills, horror, hard labor,

And like the sun in its polar hell,

My heart will turn a red and frozen block\textsuperscript{94}

These lines convey Beaudelaire's belief that beauty "is something of ardor and sadness…of voluptuousness and sadness,—which conveys an idea of melancholy, of lassitude, even of satiation."\textsuperscript{95} Historian Mario Praz put the Romantic notion of beauty and sadness in the following way: "For the Romantics, beauty was enhanced by exactly those qualities that seem to deny it, by those objects that produce horror: The sadder, the more painful it was, the more intensely they cherished it."\textsuperscript{96} The Romantic era, then, brought with it ideas of melancholy that emphasized feeling and sentiment, and which captured the mood of it, the images of darkness and terror of that mood, and above all, the sadness and potential redemptive qualities of it. The general shift we see across Europe at this time is a shift away from the view of melancholia in its various manifestations and imbalances of black bile toward a view understood as emotional pain.

Let us turn now to Freud, and to his "theory of loss." In \textit{Mourning and Melancholy}, Freud proposes to try "whether a comparison with the normal emotion of grief, and its expression in mourning, will not throw some light on the nature of melancholia."\textsuperscript{97} He notes that we must make a prefatory warning against too great expectations of the result: "A correlation of melancholia and mourning seems justified," he says, "by the general picture of the two conditions."\textsuperscript{98} There are several factors to keep in mind as we study Freud's work. First, is that he emphasizes self-loathing and the loss of ego, something that imbalance theories rarely

\textsuperscript{94} Baudelaire, "Autumn Song", 232.
\textsuperscript{95} Radden, ATK, 232.
\textsuperscript{96} Mario Praz, ATK, 232.
\textsuperscript{97} Freud, \textit{Mourning and Melancholia}, 247. Further references to this book will be noted as MM, followed by the page number.
\textsuperscript{98} Freud, MM, 247.
referred to. Second, Freud draws attention to the loss of a libido position, which will be important later, when we discuss the implications of a libido that cannot redirect itself, showing its link to the depressed person's inability to act. Third, Freud describes the suffering of melancholy as a kind of psychological labour.

Let us begin with Freud's comparison of melancholy to mourning, and his contention that self-loathing is the defining difference between them:

The distinguishing mental features of melancholia are a profoundly painful dejection, arrogation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-reviling, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment. This picture becomes a little more intelligible when we consider that, with one exception, the same traits are met with in grief. The fall in self-esteem is absent in grief; but otherwise the features are the same.99

In an attempt to better understand the nature of melancholy, and its self-reviling tendencies, Freud examines the process undergone in mourning the death of a loved one. The process of mourning, says Freud, is a process involving the ego's testing of reality.100 The mourner relives the memory of a loved one and discovers, or better understands with each new memory, that the loved one no longer exists. The mourner tests reality, and reality asserts itself. The consequence of such a process of coming up against reality, and losing, is the eventual withdrawal of the mourner's libido from its attachment to the loved one (the love-object). But the withdrawal does not happen all at once, "no one willingly abandons a libido position,"101 Freud contends. Instead,

100 Freud, MM, 253.
a struggle between the ego and reality ensues. In the struggle, the mourner turns away from reality and becomes absorbed in the struggle, in the labour or work which is the process of mourning. This process of withdrawal is painful but, in the end, "deference for reality gains the day," and the ego returns to being free and uninhibited.

Freud notes three differences from the labour briefly described above, and the labour involved in melancholy. First, though the melancholic suffers a loss, it is a loss of a more ideal kind. For the melancholic, the object has become lost as an object of love, but it is an unconscious loss of a love object — the melancholic does not know exactly what he has lost. Second, Freud notes that, because of this, the work of the melancholic is an "inner labour." This labour absorbs him, but we cannot see what it is that absorbs him. The third difference is the melancholic suffers an extreme decline in self-worth. His ego "becomes poor and empty, overthrowing (quite remarkably) the usual instinct to cling to life.

In grief the world becomes poor and empty, in melancholy it is the ego itself. The patient represents his ego to us as worthless, incapable of any effort and morally despicable; he reproaches himself, vilifies himself and expects to be cast out and chastised. This picture of delusional belittling, he goes on to say, is completed by sleeplessness, refusal of nourishment, and by the overthrowing of that instinct which constrains every living thing to cling to life. The instinct to live, to be a part of the world, is absent.

The first difference between mourning and melancholy (the loss in melancholy is a more ideal kind) is related to the third (the decline in self-esteem). The loss suffered by the melancholic is that of an object, but because it is not known what the object is, reality cannot be tested. As a result (and this is the second difference cited above), any testing will be internal and

102 Freud, MM, 255.
a failure, since reality cannot show itself. The loss the melancholic suffers becomes one in himself. One part of the ego sets itself over against the other, judges it critically and, as it were, looks upon it as an object. Dorothy Rowe, whose work we will examine in section four, writes eloquently of this internal battle, "we forget that it is our language that makes us think our body is inhabited by two people. This is a tug of war in which we forget that both the hands fighting are my own." The melancholic literally works against himself.

If we listen carefully, Freud goes on to say, we can see that the self-reproaches are really reproaches against a loved one — they are really "plaints" in the legal sense of the word (real self-reproaches are mixed in with these and these help to mask the others, making the true state of affairs impossible to recognize). This is why melancholics are not ashamed to complain, he says, and why they sometimes do not behave as someone with this little self worth would be expected to behave (they take offence at times, for example). Their behaviours proceed from an attitude of revolt, a process which has transformed itself into a melancholic "contrition." This revolt, what it means to have "plaints" against some object that is lost, is complex, in Freud's analysis, and it is worthwhile to proceed deeper into this, in order that we understand what is at play in the melancholic's tendency to hate himself.

Why, then does the melancholic reproach the object she has lost? While the mourner mourns death and loss in direct ways, the melancholic mourns the loss of herself, but this loss is somehow bound up with a loved object, nonetheless. In other words, something about the loss suffered by the melancholic is felt as the result of loving some other object. Noteworthy, here, is that the disappointment and sadness at losing some object, initially in the world, serves to reinforce the depressed person's turn away from the world and toward herself. We will see this

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103 Dorothy Rowe, The Experience of Depression, 5.
more closely in Chapter Five. For now, let us look more closely at how the melancholic revolts against this "love-object" that has caused pain and loss of self, and, as we will see, loss of libido. This process of revolt is described by Freud. There is first, Freud contends, for the libido, an "object-choice":

The libido had attached itself to a certain person; then, owing to a real injury or disappointment concerned with the loved person, this object-relationship was undermined. The result was not the normal one of withdrawal of the libido from this object and transference of it to a new one, but something different for which various conditions seem to be necessary. The object-cathexis proved to have little power of resistance, and was abandoned; but the free libido was withdrawn into the ego and not directed to another object.¹⁰⁴

In mourning, the ego would then find a new object to love, but in melancholy the freed libido withdraws into the ego and is not directed to another object. Though I do not ultimately define depression as an illness, it is interesting to note here that something may, in fact, be "sick";

*desire, is sick.* It has freed itself from the object that has hurt it, but cannot re-direct itself — it *withdraws itself into the ego.* It traps itself and is still bound up in some way, it can be assumed, by the love-object that brought it to its current position. It is "sick" since it is not free to direct itself into the world. The life-force itself, that desire to strive toward life, cannot be itself; it cannot move.

The freed libido has withdrawn into the ego. It has freed itself from the object, but upon withdrawing into the ego, is then a libido still bound up somehow with the object of loss. It is not

¹⁰⁴ Freud, MM, 259.
"freed" at all. Instead, there is an identification of the ego with the object of loss. "Thus," writes Freud:

the shadow of the object fell upon the ego, so that the latter could henceforth be criticized by a special mental faculty like an object, like the forsaken object. In this way, the loss of the object became transformed into a loss in the ego, and the conflict between the ego and the loved person transformed into a cleavage between the criticizing faculty of the ego and the ego as altered by the identification.\(^{105}\)

The ego — that driving force behind living, is shadowed by the lost love-object. The ego can now be criticized (like the love object) because there is no worldly love object to blame. The ego is now bound up within itself, and is absorbed with itself. It is absorbed with a libido, a desire, that is tainted by disappointment, rejection, loss, and is unable to act freely, and so other mental faculty can now come in and not only observe it, but notice its weaknesses. The love object may have been criticized for being "cruel" (for leaving), but the ego does no better, it remains attached to the loss, and this is weak, stupid, worthless, ridiculous and worthy of cruelty and hatred. Some faculty of the mind notices that the ego is not able to free itself from an object, even though that object was a source of pain, and is judged for not being able to do so. The ego has, in some way, rejected the love object, but it hangs on, and this hanging on, unable to redirect its attentions elsewhere, is itself worthy of disdain.

Freud notes that the resistance to the object-cathexis is not strong, implying that the cathexis is narcissistic in nature — as soon as it presents obstacles it is abandoned. This may be the clue as to the root for the melancholic — a tendency to direct one’s desire toward an object

\(^{105}\) Freud, MM, 259,
that cannot help but to fail at satisfying it. It is in this respect, I contend, that desire is sick: it has learned to seek objects that cannot satisfy it, so it may retreat again into itself.

The object-choice gives rise to hatred, but this is an enjoyed hatred, claims Freud — it is sadistic. The free libido is getting *pleasure from punishment*. Freud writes of this:

The occasions giving rise to melancholia for the most part extend beyond the clear case of a loss by death, and include all those situations of being wounded, hurt, neglected, out of favour, or disappointed, which can import opposite feelings of love and hate into the relationship or reinforce an already existing ambivalence. This is a conditioning factor of melancholia. If the object-love, which cannot be given up, takes refuge in narcissistic identification, while the object itself is abandoned, then hate is expended upon this new substitute-object, railing at it, depreciating it, making it suffer and deriving sadistic gratification from its suffering. The self-torments of melancholics, which are without doubt pleasurable, signify, just like the corresponding phenomenon in the obsessional neurosis, a gratification of sadistic tendencies and of hate, both of which relate to an object and in this way have both been turned round upon the self (p. 289).

Freud's theories will be important for our phenomenology in several respects. The loss of libido and the idea of desire being sick will be noticed when we describe the depressed person's inability to act. Self-loathing is also deeply connected to the tendency of depressed persons to isolate themselves, and this is both obvious, and also complex, as we will see. The inner "labour" of self-loathing will in some ways define the nature of the suffering, as it does for Freud. This labour of self-loathing supports my argument that the depressed person perceives herself as everything in her experience, but that this everything is also nothing. She is *all* she can see, and this *all* is empty; it does nothing and is worth nothing.
We have, in this section, looked at shifts in the conception of melancholy that began during Renaissance times. The subjective nature of the melancholic experience was highlighted in art works, when the particular nature of suffering was highlighted. Responding to this was a shift in theory. Especially noteworthy was Freud's contribution to this shift when he showed an essential feature of melancholy to be self-loathing. Depression becomes, through this shift in understanding, a "mental illness," rather than a physical one. There is another crucial dimension of melancholy that theories of loss give rise to. They show loss to be, in many respects, deeply associated with other people. Whether through death, disappointment or trauma, relationships with others take their place as critical in the development of persons. The role of other people is taken up much more explicitly by theories of cultural causation, as we will see in section (iv) of this chapter. Next we explore how theories of loss give rise to yet another changing conception of melancholy and depression. A response to theories of loss was the growing study of the thought processes going on in the suffering.

Section 3. Cognitive Theories and the Inability to Act

Cognitive theories respond to theories of loss, taking aspects of the latter theories as significant, and developing accounts of how loss contributes to the troubled thinking associated with depression. Cognitive theories place emphasis on thought processes that make up the internal work of the depressed person. These theories describe the work at play, examine its development (as loss, and usually beginning in childhood). I will look at these, but the consequence I emphasize as an important contribution of cognitive theory to our understanding of depression is that these processes of cognitive work help to create an attitude or mood in
which acting — doing anything at all — becomes impossible. We note that there is a severing of the body from cognition for these theories, and we will explore this idea later in this section.

For cognitive theorists, there is a labour to depression. The depressed person is engaged in thinking propositions, images, etc. that only reinforce their suffering and are themselves the nature of the suffering in many respects. Author Lesley Dormen, in an essay describing her own experience with depression, makes note of the pain being akin to work, and we begin this section with her description. She writes:

One of the many things I hate about the word "depression" is the assumption of blankness attached to it, as if the experience of depression is as absent on the inside as it looks to be from the outside. That is wrong. Depression is a place that teems with nightmarish activity. It's a one-industry town, a psychic megalopolis devoted to a single twenty-four-hour-we-never-close product. You work misery as a teeth-grinding muscle-straining job (is that why it's so exhausting?), proving your shameful failures to yourself over and over again. Depression says you can get blood from a stone, and so that's what you do. Competing voices are an irritating distraction from the work. No wonder depression doesn't get invited out much. Not because it's not the life of the party, it knows it's not that, but because self-absorption as a work ethic is so prickly and one-eyed. That's okay with depression—it figures, who'd want to be friends with it, anyway? 106

Depression, for Dormen, is so all encompassing an effort that doing anything else is impossible, indeed anything that comes in the way of the "activity" of depression is an irritating distraction from the work.

106 Dormen, in Casey's Memoirs on Depression, 256.
But what is the nature of the work? Whereas for Freud the work was an internal dialogue of one part of the ego and another, for cognitive theorists the emphasis is placed on, to some degree, faulty reasoning. A feedback loop is played out, and this loop comprises the depressive thinking at root in depression. Medical theorist Aaron T. Beck developed a theory that offers insight into the processes at play behind the mental pain and labour. Beck introduced the complex depressive constellation — those beliefs, feelings, wishes and physiological responses — that are part of the chronology of depression. This chronology is causal, Radden notes. There is first a precipitating event related to loss. The individual has an awareness of this event and this leads to cognitive states, these states effect mood states and, eventually, physiological reactions ensue. Beck introduces some of these ideas:

The thought content of depressed patients centers on a significant loss. The patient perceives that he has lost something he considers essential to his happiness and tranquility; he anticipates negative outcomes from any important undertaking; and he regards himself as deficient in the attributes necessary for achieving important goals. This theme may be formulated in terms of the cognitive triad: a negative conception of the self, a negative interpretation of life experiences, and a nihilistic view of the future.

Beck goes on to describe the emotions associated with the loss, and also the resulting sense of being trapped in unpleasant situations. Further, "as the sense of being enmeshed in insoluble problems increases, spontaneous constructive motivation dissipates...the broad range of spontaneous desires and involvement in activities are eclipsed by passivity...interest and

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107 Radden, 317.
108 Beck, in Radden's ATK, 317.
involvement in activities are converted into avoidance and withdrawal." There is something of a feedback loop in place here, since this withdrawal and the eventual physiological symptoms that arise give way to a replay of the thought patterns once again and an increasing difficulty in performing activities.

Philosopher Matthew Ratcliffe gives an account of the inability to act that falls into theories of loss and, in particular, more contemporary theories of loss such as Beck’s cognitive theory. Depression, Ratcliffe says, is attributable to a loss of free will. He points to Husserl's suggestion that our ability to experience possibilities "is enabled, at least in part, by our having certain kinds of bodily disposition. The body [Leib] is the "medium" or "organ" of "all perception" and thus shapes all our experiences of the world. The implication is that a loss of free will here will also entail the loss (in certain respects) of that medium of the body, and so, furthermore, a loss of experience itself.

When certain kinds of possibility are absent, the result is that everything looks somehow different in ways that are difficult to describe, Ratcliffe contends. The overall structure of one’s relationship to the world is altered. Loss of possibilities amounts to a detachment from the body since it is possibilities that draw one outward with the body. We have addressed several aspects of perception consistent with Ratcliffe’s discussion. We noted, for example, that the body is ecstatic, moving out into the world and immersing itself there. We noted that good habits of perception enable us to recognize those calls from objects that might elicit our continual action, as they also strengthen our capacity to respond. Part of what I have argued regarding leaping habits is the perception of potentially transformative calls, without knowing what consequences

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109 Beck, in Radden's ATK, 318.
110 Matthew Ratcliffe, "Depression and the Phenomenology of Free Will", 8. Further references to this article will be noted as DFW, followed by the page number.
111 Ratcliffe, DFW, 5.
responding will have; in other words, we can develop the good habits that lend themselves toward perceiving possibilities rather than impossibilities.

Defending the view that all our actions are experienced as free, Ratcliffe notes that the impaired ability to act encompasses not just those actions that are preceded by deliberation or choice, but even activities that are ordinarily habitual, unthinking and effortless: "To get out of bed at midday was an ordeal."

Taking Sartre's claim about freedom, that to experience involves being presented with a world that incorporates various kinds of possibilities, Ratcliffe notes that a situation appears to us as lacking in some way and thus solicits a certain kind of action — it is still presented as something we could do, rather than as something we are compelled to do.

The loss described by Ratcliffe is the loss of significant possibilities and the replacement of possibilities with a threatening world. He writes:

What is missing from experience [in severe cases of depression] is not simply the practical significance of however many entities…That kind of significance is altogether gone from experience. It is not merely that one fails to experience entities as significant; one can't. Everything one encounters is stripped of experienced possibilities for action that it previously incorporated, and world experienced as a whole is thus altered in structure. This loss is at the same time an impoverishment of freedom, of the world as a realm of possibilities that might be actualized by one's activities."

When one loses possibility, what is lost is the sense of what it is to act *purposively*, to find things significant and respond to them accordingly. "Practical significance", Ratcliffe says, "is not the

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112 Ratcliffe, DFW, 5.
113 Ratcliffe, DFW, 14.
only kind of experienced significance that is altered in depression.” Here, he notes the impaired ability to relate to others. The inability to act in relation to others is a loss of a different kind of significance — in this case, a significance that is ultimately tied to perception itself; insofar as it is through others that we are able to perceive in the first place. We will see much more how this is the case in the section on isolation, and, later still, in chapter five. For now, we move to theories of cultural causation, which also take up the importance of other people.

Section 4. Contemporary Cultural Causation Theories: Depression as Alienation, and the Tendency to Isolation

Following a tradition Emilie Durkheim began when he studied the linkage between integration and suicide, recent sociologists have considered the ill effects of a society characterized by radical individualism. Theories of cultural causation look at the emotional health of individuals belonging to societies in which community is not emphasized (they also study the health of society more generally). The phenomenon of depression for these theories is to be stressed in terms of an individual’s relationship with other people. A person's immediate community — those in closer interpersonal relationships and those who make up the fabric of her particular culture — will come into play; moreover, her relationship to herself in light of these other relationships will also be a factor.

These theories, then, do not focus on imbalances in the body, nor do they look into the psyche in the ways that psychoanalytic movements of the very late 1800's and early 1900's did, especially in terms of subconscious elements like the Ego and the libido. They do acknowledge

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114 Ratcliffe, DFW, 15.
the influence of childhood experience and of feelings like grief, fear and sadness. Theories of cultural causation do not so much focus on cause, despite their emphasis on societal factors; rather, they look at the interplay between the causes and consequences of depression at the intersection between the self and society. In this section, I will outline some key points made by sociologists in this field. In particular, David Karp's theory will be highlighted. We will examine what Karp refers to as "the paradox of depression," and, as well, his insight into the depressed person's development of an "illness identity." Alongside these ideas is Karp's sharp and clear emphasis on that aspect of depression that is the sufferer's tendency of self-isolation. I will begin with a brief look at the sociological background to Karp's theories. I will also emphasize the theory of learned helplessness.

Classical sociological theorists (of the 1800's) shared a common interest in the changing nature of social integration as agrarian societies were being transformed into urban, industrial societies. They were interested in how the health of the societies and their individuals were compromised as a result of the transformations. The progressive weakening of the individual's ties to society was of concern. It was of concern especially since a dominant belief in sociological theory is that we are transformed from biological to social beings through interaction — "our very humanity is a product of social interaction…In all of this," Karp writes, "the presumption is that the emotional health of individuals — and ultimately society itself — is related to how firmly individuals feel embraced by and connected to communities large and small."¹¹⁵ Sociologists argue that if deprived of interaction and human connection, children cannot acquire the traits we generally recognize as human. Isolation, or weakened social ties,

¹¹⁵ Karp, Speaking of Sadness, 27. Further references to this book will be noted as SS, followed by the page number.
then, is a major study of current work in social psychology on depression, because the depressed person's tendency to self-isolation is one of the phenomenon's primary features.

Karp's method of study is to undertake an extensive interview process with people suffering from "clinical depression". Says Karp, "it was impossible to listen to depressed people without being struck by the frequency with which themes of 'isolation,' 'withdrawal' and 'disconnection’ arose. He writes:

As with all feelings and emotions, isolation is experienced in different degrees and hues. Some individuals feel obliged to withdraw from virtually all arenas of social life. Most people though, unless they become hospitalized, struggle through their daily obligations, sometimes heroically maintain a façade of "normalcy." Others may continue to associate with friends and family while nevertheless feeling disengaged, uncomfortable, marginal, and profoundly alone. Indeed, as everyone knows, sometimes being in the presence of others and ritualistically moving through the motions of interaction can dramatically magnify a sense of loneliness and isolation.

Karp introduces and stresses, in light of these findings through the interview process, that there is a central paradox of the depressive experience: the need to withdraw and the distress of isolation.

Karp notes that depression's complexity lies in part with the multiple feelings it engenders: "grief, loneliness, anxiety, marginality, and danger." Nevertheless, he notes, a hierarchy of feelings is intimated by the frequency with which they are mentioned and the

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116 The emphasis on the term "clinical depression" will be explained further. It is important to Karp's theory, and to the sociology of medicine more generally, since each studies the dialectical relationship between illness and social experience. Those interviewed had been diagnosed with depression (hence the term "clinical": deemed so by a clinician) and had experiences that resonated with this diagnosis. They experienced themselves as "ill," in other words, and "clinical depression" is a term describing not the conditions of depression most humans can relate to, but a more severe form in which the depressed person has developed an "illness identity."

117 Karp, SS, 34.

118 Karp, SS, 34.
intensity used to describe them. One common feeling related to the matter of social connection is safety. He writes:

To live comfortably, people must trust that they will be protected by the individuals and structures making up their daily worlds. A culture provides its members with a set of guiding principles for living, for making life's uncertainties and ambiguities manageable. However, many of my interviewees do not feel protected by a group's embrace…Chief among the consequences of depression is social withdrawal. Depressive feelings make interaction arduous and sometimes the need to withdraw from others overrides the realization that self-isolation will only deepen one's anguish.\(^{119}\)

Recall Ratcliffe's discussion on the threatening world that replaces the world of possibility. A threatening world, akin to a lack of safety, and I contend may indeed be, as Karp contends, a lack of protection by a group's embrace. This lack leads to a weakened sense of possibility, to the sense of the *impossibility* of doing things. We see here a way that two features of depression (the tendency to self-isolation and the inability to act) are deeply connected and overlapping. Another feature of depression overlapping with self-isolation is self-loathing.

Karp goes on to describe the above connections between the inability to act, self-loathing and self-isolation. He notes that in the immediate sense, "the urge to withdraw, to be alone, seems sensible when 'it hurts even to talk,' as one person described the difficulty of interaction."\(^{120}\) However, withdrawal eventually turns out to be a false emotional economy. Although providing momentary respite from social obligations that seem impossible to carry out, withdrawal's long-term costs are negative. Like drugs that have good short term effects and debilitating long term consequences, "social withdrawal becomes part of a crucible melding fear

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\(^{119}\) Karp, SS, 35.  
\(^{120}\) Karp, SS, 38.
and self-loathing, a brew that powerfully catalyzes hopelessness. Hopelessness, in turn, makes
the urge to withdraw still more powerful. And so it goes—a truly vicious cycle."\(^{121}\) Self-loathing
is tightly connected to the need to withdraw. Lack of safety is also experienced in a sense of not
belonging, of not being worthy. Moreover, the depressed person is all too aware of their
abnormality in contrast to others; his self is not worthy of presentation to others.

Karp adds that "the paradox of depression I am describing is that its victims are well
aware of the double bind they are creating for themselves. They withdraw and isolate themselves
while realizing that this response to the feelings of depression will only make them worse."\(^{122}\)
The following is a quotation from one of his interviewees, one that exhibits this paradox:

Oh I was so alone. I played basketball. I was a member of a team. I had a roommate, but I
was so alone. I had a lot of friends, but I was completely isolated. And that's what, like, I
believe depression is—a disease of isolation that tells you to withdraw, stay away, don't
be a social person. *Stay away from the people who are going to make you better* [Karp's
emphasis]. Yeah, the need to be alone, to withdraw. That's one symptom. But I was like,
just so alone. I can remember walking around, walking around in the rain one day, just
like, "what the hell? What was wrong with me? What is wrong with me?" [male
salesman, aged 30] (Karp, pp. 37).

But it is not a simple strategic therapy to force immersion into social life. Indeed, as mentioned
earlier, this can sometimes only serve to deepen a sense of loneliness and isolation. We may be
reminded here of Freud's "reality testing." The mourner, in Freud's analysis, goes through a
process of testing reality against his reluctance to accept that the loved one is really lost.

Eventually, reality wins for the mourner and life can go on. For the depressed person, sometimes

\(^{121}\) Karp, SS, 36.

\(^{122}\) Karp, SS, 37.
the testing of oneself in reality serves to enhance self-loathing, if the interaction is not experienced in positive ways. The mourner has lost connection with a loved one, the depressive has lost connection in general, and there is no end to that mourning process since there is no redirection to another human connection (in Freud's analysis, the mourner redirects his libido, while the melancholic does not).

Another parallel to Freud's analysis relates to the internalizing of ambivalent feelings toward the lost object. In theories of cultural causation, self-loathing is reinforced with, what Karp terms, an "illness identity": it is precisely the internalizing of societal norms of mental health. Karp notes that it is impossible to understand how individuals attach meanings to their own behaviors apart from the responses of others to those behaviors. He explores the interactions between those with depression and others, revealing, he says, the social processes deepening the isolation of depression. The decision to keep depression private casts others as strangers — others become near and distant at the same time.

The interview material that Karp presents illustrates, he says, "that peoples' experience with clinical depression is an exercise in negotiating ambiguity and involves the evolution of an illness consciousness often extending over many years." How those living with depression interpret and respond to their problem over time sheds some light on the ways and processes through which illness realities are socially constructed.

Karp noted four generic stages through which all respondents interviewed moved as they tried to comprehend their life situations. Everyone initially felt discomfort and emotional pain, which they could not name as depression. This was followed by the recognition that something was "really" wrong with them. In turn, people experienced a crisis (usually that resulted in a

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123 Karp, SS, 75.
thrust into the world of mental health professionals). And, finally, the crisis precipitated a stage of coming to grips with a mental illness diagnosis. This whole process is the way that individuals come to view themselves as "damaged" and in need of repair. They are "identity transformations," according to Karp. This mirrors the four categories that I have identified and their development into consciousness by society as well as within the individual. In the first place, there is an imbalance that is not really named; a loosely categorized observation regarding persons that are somehow unwell. Second, something is identified as "really wrong" (art works of the Romantic era revealed the subjective nature of melancholy). Third, there is a crisis, such that many academics began to delve into the nature of the problem. Fourth, there is (for the individual) a mental illness diagnosis and, for society, the potential for a new recognition that something on a more massive scale is in need of repair. As the individual develops a consciousness of this illness identity, so, too does society.

Section 5. Conclusion: The Developed Consciousness of Depression: Suffering, Self-Loathing, The Inability to Act, and the Tendency to Self-Isolation; Depression as Mal-Adjustment

A general objective of this chapter was to glimpse at the phenomenon of depression as a historically developed idea, as, then, a changing concept, but also the concept of a real and lived experience subject to change itself. The melancholy of 400 B.C.E may be different than the melancholy of 1800, and this different still from the clinical depression of 2000. But perhaps, I have argued, there is something about what is meant when we use the term "depression," or what is meant when we describe a person as "depressed", something that remains, that crosses over temporal and cultural developments. Depression is a fundamentally human experience — any
and all people are vulnerable to it. However, while it is a potential experience, it is also one that admits of a large range of degrees, and depression, in its final understanding, and so in its most critical form, is indeed not one that is a temporary or fleeting recognition of some of its main characteristics, but a persistent life-altering mal-adjustment, or inability to being a self. It is a particular form of an ill subjectivity. There are, in other words, things we can say about it that distinguish it from other phenomena and other experiences. I have argued that there are four primary features we can use to describe depression, and I have also argued that those four features that are definitive of depression make up the developed consciousness of depression as a society and therefore also as individuals wherein we see this larger consciousness reflected.

These four features are in need of further development, however, and this is what I will go on to do in Chapter Five. The approach there will be phenomenological. We will investigate the experience of suffering. It is the suffering of this imbalance under which all other features of depression belong and which is, for the depressed person, a prison. We will see that self-loathing is the "adhesive" joining together all of four aspects, ultimately preventing a temporal self from its development. The inability to act will be described in relation to the call and response nature of perception, emphasizing poorly formed habits that make beginning and sustaining action difficult, and which is the catalyst of depression. The tendency to self-isolation will be shown to be depression's driving force — taking society and the individual deeper into the experience. Self-isolation is the aspect of the phenomenon of depression that is most paradoxical and most reinforcing. These four characteristics will be shown to make up the living and moving experience of depression, indeed the labour and suffering of depression. It is as entangled and yet distinctive that they make up the depressive experience.
Part C: Phenomenology
CHAPTER 5: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION INTO THE NATURE OF DEPRESSION

Let us again pretend that life is a solid substance, shaped like a globe, which we turn about in our finger. Let us pretend that we can make out a plain and logical story, so that when one matter is dispatched — love for instance — we go on, in an orderly manner, to the next.

*Virginia Woolf, The Waves*

The phenomenon of depression is so vast and contains so many countless nuances that we would be hard pressed to do justice to its complexities. The themes that may be called on in any phenomenology of experience are also called on here — the depressed person comes head on through experience with the themes of life, the relationships one has to psyche and body, with time, with intimacy and the presence of other people, and with the world. It is with some irony that we might emphasize at the beginning of a phenomenological account of depression the ways that the experience of depression is teeming with life. But a depressed life, is, after all, one way of living a life, and while the depressed person may play at being dead, she brushes up against the notion of life in a most raw form. As in life the way Woolf describes above, where it is implied that we cannot discern a plain story, neither can we discern a plain story in depressed life. While there are patterns and commonalities, there is no exact order to be found, either in its development, or in its living. This phenomenological investigation does not seek an ultimate
definition of depression or clean classifications. Instead it seeks to explore the ways depression meets up with the notion of life, and to describe and explore some of the fields of human experience to which its living out gives way, so to better to understand the phenomenon, if not to know it completely. As complex as the experience of depression is, we might start with the simple, deep, troubled, and tenuous tie it has to life.

Let us begin by describing a possible moment of experience for someone in a serious depression:

*A depressed man wakes up in the morning. He opens his eyes to his environment and finds it hateful and dark. The things in his room are repugnant to him. They hover in the midst of a foggy and dim light, even the light itself seems ugly, for it too is an object in his vision; and one that only accentuates the ugliness of the rest. He closes his eyes, and recoils from the environment. He turns his attention to a sick feeling and a heaviness to his body. He is overcome by the sense that doing anything will be difficult, if not impossible. As his thoughts begin to form, so too does an overriding sense of disgust in himself.*

*It is the same feeling as yesterday, as last year even, indeed it is always the same, there is no change from one moment to the next.*

*He experiences his body as paralyzed, but he opens his eyes again. He sees the objects in the room, in fact he stares at them for extended moments, but like staring at a fuzzy television set, he seems only to*

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124 This example is drawn from several sources, including interviews with depressed persons by David Karp and Dorothy Rowe, and personal memoirs by William Styron and others. See especially, Karp's *Speaking of Sadness* (1996), Rowe's *The Experience of Depression* (1978), Styron's *Darkness Visible* (1990) and Nell Casey's *Unholy Ghost: Writers on Depression* (2001). My example is an extension of several statements and thoughts by those suffering from depression. The example will be followed throughout this chapter.

125 These descriptions echo William Styron's writings on the experience of being immobile and observing his surroundings and his internal state. See *Darkness Visible.*

126 The relationship of this suffering to time is described by Julia Kristeva. She writes: "I live a living death, my flesh is wounded, bleeding, cadaverized, my rhythm slowed down or interrupted, time has been erased or bloated, absorbed into sorrow." (*Black Sun*, 4). Several of Karp's interviewees also often refer to a slowing down of time. See *Speaking of Sadness.*
see a reflection of himself, as though the objects served the function of showing himself to himself, and of highlighting himself as alienated from them. He sees his alienation. He sees the book he should be reading on the floor, along with other objects which serve as evidence that it is the same situation as yesterday. These objects, far from compelling him toward them, call him back only to himself, to the situation of his inert body, and his suffering. Those objects are for other people, he is not worthy of them. He loathes his situation, the room, the suffering, but mostly he loathes himself. He remembers the feeling of shame and hurt when he was out with friends a few days past. He believes others would find him pathetic, and lacking in will. He believes this. He considers what it would be like if he could just do the things he wants to do, have the perfect day, as he remembers some time in his life when he felt good. The sick feeling gets worse; he feels perhaps as though he is suffocating, or drowning, and he feels desperate for escape. He perceives only himself; he is everything, and yet, this everything that he is, is empty and repugnant; he is nothing. It is himself that he wants to escape from. How can he possibly carry on? He thinks about the letter he needs to mail, the same letter that has needed mailing for days. He does not move.

As stated at the outset, a phenomenological investigation of depression cannot hope to uncover every nuance of this experience, but it can highlight some of its fields, those realms of human experience most commonly visited and explored by those with depression. In the example above, we might note that the feeling of depression is global — all parts of the man's experience and

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127 Lesley Dorman describes the experience of seeing oneself reflected as alienated from things. She also emphasizes the hyper-awareness one has of her own depression, and the way all situations and days seem the same. See "Planet No" in Unholy Ghost: Writers on Depression.

128 Karp emphasizes the connection between self-loathing and an anxiety in being with others in his descriptions and many interviews in which interviewees describe their sense of a lack of worth, and their concern that others hold this same view.
perception are saturated with it. We could start with any one of the sentences from that brief account, and develop it, and likely it would lead us back to the rest. For example, were we to begin with the self-loathing the man experiences, we would soon come to his experience of powerlessness to act, and were we to begin with the latter, a relationship to his tendency to self-isolation would be found. Indeed, the four features that I identified in Chapter Four as essentially belonging to the phenomenon of depression— that is, the inability to act, self-loathing, the tendency to self-isolation, and suffering— are intimately connected with each other, and it is the movement within experience between these particulars that ultimately serves as the basis for our phenomenological study.

This chapter, then, will be divided into sections headed by these four features. Again, as said above, we could begin with any of these four features — they will each lead us back to the rest, and display the phenomenon of depression. However, I do contend that field of inaction is the place to begin our phenomenological investigation. Starting here will be fruitful for a few reasons. Chapter one of this thesis emphasized perception is an action, and one that, at least in an ideal situation, leads to a transformation whereby both the subject and the object of perception are made more determinate. While the depressed person is unable to act, and his lack of transformation — ultimately his lack of movement out of the depressed state — is notable and a key feature of depression, he does still perceive through a depressed lens. We must investigate what form this perception takes, investigate, in other words, the action that is being done in depression. Beginning our study with inaction will also be useful because the inability to act is, I contend, the catalyst of depression — that aspect of it which begins (by not beginning) the depressed state of being. The inability to act is not necessarily the catalyst developmentally, though perhaps even there, but it precipitates the loop of depression, that very closed circuit of
experience that includes the other three mentioned features. Finally, we begin there because action is accomplished by a body in relation to the world. Investigating the relationship of the depressed body to its world is a tangible and potentially illuminating place to begin because it situates the depressed experience in that very world. Once we have a clearer picture of depressed perception, which I will argue is the perception of oneself as both everything in the world, and nothing in the world, we can move on to other fields belonging to the depressed experience.

I will make several claims in this chapter, based in three layers of argumentation. First, I draw from the conclusions I have made in Chapter Four; again, that the experience of depression belongs in four realms of human experience — the inability to act, self-loathing, the tendency to self-isolation, and suffering. In this chapter, I identify each as having a particular role to play in depression's make-up. As I have said above, (first) the inability to act catalyzes the problem. It begins the problem, not developmentally, or in some clean temporal order, but as a beginning that sets in motion the very habit of not beginning which becomes the "place" of depressed experience, and which draws to this place those other dimensions of the experience. Second, self-loathing acts like an adhesive, sticking so closely to the other aspects of the experience as to make each of those indiscernible without recourse to self-loathing. These four aspects of the experience are not separated from each other, but are rather one experience, saturated and connected by self-loathing. Third, the tendency to self-isolation is depression's drive deeper. Isolation propels and forces the experience of depression into deeper and deeper states. These states are the diminished relationship to the world; they mark the degree to which the depressed person experiences, but also is, in reality, the degree to which he is alienated from others and the world. These states also represent, then, the depressed person's problematic and troubled psyche in relation to these. Fourth, the suffering of depression; a particular suffering that is both nothing
other than the suffering of inaction, self-loathing and isolation, and also the suffering of more than these— that is, of what these give way to in experience— becomes depression's prison. This prison, I will argue, is essentially belonging to a now-solidified and seemingly inescapable lack of expression.

I have identified the role that each realm of the depressed experience plays. This first "layer" of argumentation, though, does little more than provide us with a template from which to investigate the experience as a whole, and so discover more important and fundamental truths about it. The second "layer" of argumentation is based on my contention that in depression one becomes everything there is, and yet nothing at all. The depressed person becomes only a presence to himself, and not a presence for others or for a world, and this presence to himself makes him all that is visible for him. In being a presence only to himself, he remains on this side of the visible, and his alienation from others and the world is his reality, not a "sensation" or feeling. However, because this presence cannot act, because it does nothing, it is an empty presence — and he experiences himself as nothing. The loathing of himself that makes connection with others impossible erodes the capacity for expression (and here we refer to the expression of speech but also to a more primordial expression, that expression which is one's flight into the world), and creates suffering.

A third layer of argument regards temporality. The temporality of depression — which includes: a present which is not, in reality, a present, the lack of flow and movement of time, an effortful enduring, a halting of original action, the perseverance of a past, and the lack of a future — is deeply imbedded in the experience. Ultimately, I argue that we are not able to take up a general and objective time without the expression and creation of intersubjective time that makes
the former possible. A fourth layer of argumentation involves desire; the desire to be immersed in the world of others, and the lack of desire that makes the leap out of ourselves impossible.

This chapter will have four sections. These four sections fall under the headings of the four features of depression that I have identified as essentially belonging to the experience of depression in Chapter Four. These are, respectively: (I) the inability to act; Section (II), Self-Loathing; Section (III), The tendency to isolation; and finally, section (IV), which will emphasize the particular nature of the suffering belonging to depression. We will, in each section, explore the argumentation I have briefly outlined above, as we attempt to uncover the underlying experience of depression.

Section 1: The Inability to Act: Depression's Catalyst

"I am a body that rises up toward the world" (Merleau-Ponty, p. 78).

The paralysis, immobility, and overwhelming sense of inability that comes over those in depression reflects a problem with bodily action, and indeed any and all bodily action appears impossible. What we find in our phenomenological account of depression is a dwindling away of action until even those actions seemingly most belonging to the habits of second nature are difficult. Inaction steadily weakens one's powers to do, to rise toward the world, since with each good habit cultivated, more sophisticated objects of perception are available. This dwindling away of action is, in each diminishment a reflection of an overall comportment of the body in its relationship to the world. The inability to act catalyzes the loop of depression, it is not so much the cause of it as it is observable expression — as lack of expression — of the depressed body in the world. With every diminished action comes also the amplification of self-loathing, the
tendency of self-isolation and suffering. Inaction catalyzes more essentially, I will emphasize, a movement which keeps the depressed body on this side of the world (or the visible). The depressed person becomes for herself, I argue, everything in her perception.

We will investigate, then, action as it pertains to depression, and we can make some general and preliminary remarks, drawing from earlier chapters of this thesis and from Merleau-Ponty. It is significant to note that the inactivity of depression is a remarkable demonstration of a phenomenological understanding of perception as an action. In Chapter One, we discussed the bodily nature of perception and found that perceiving is not a discrete subject's passive seeing of a represented but distinctively other world. Perception is rather the accomplishment of the body's action in the world, indeed the beginning of action; it is the "flight outside the self" and into the world. It is in the world that perception occurs, and both perceiver and perceived are transformed in the process. Further, when there is resolution of the object — when that object becomes determined or better understood by the subject — a new world is opened up. The subject has crossed the threshold that particular object's determination has given itself as a doorway to something new, and the subject, in coming out the other side of this resolution, sees a new world, has a new perspective, and has deepened her powers of response. The inactivity of depression demonstrates this idea in its negation of it, for the depressed person does not take flight out of himself, and moreover, the object becomes fixed. The object, for the depressed person, lacks a beyond, and instead of then perceiving and situating the object within its world, that object instead becomes a mirror that reflects back to the subject her inabilities and her lack of powers, rather than her autonomy. The world becomes for her a distinctly other world, and importantly, no transformation occurs. More importantly still, there is no freedom in inaction and
no expression, for freedom and expression are born from the immersion that unites the subject to her world.

This section will have three parts. In part (i), we will look at what is entailed in beginning action. We will note that, at least at first glance, it is this beginning that poses the problem for depressed persons, and we might conclude that the inaction of depression is especially tied to the inability to begin action. In part this is true, however, as we will go on to see, sustaining action is also impossible, and the sustaining of action (which we have defined as one attribute of good habits) is a vital component in the ability to move freely in the world. We will emphasize in section (i), that the moment of beginning, the moment, in other words, of the present, is something that the depressed person is not able to take up (to plunge into). The depressed person has not developed the leaping habits that reveal to her the autonomy she needs to begin; the past does not serve as platform for the present.

But (ii), we find that any beginning is really a change in an action already begun, and is not an absolute beginning. Action is always underway for the free moving subject; even the primitive action of rising up to the world, of just living, is a sustained action, in that the particular thing one is directed toward may shift, or change direction as more and more objects are revealed, but the subject, as a time, carries on. Indeed, sustaining action (which, as we will see, requires less effort than beginning it) allows one to see her freedom in front of her, making further action possible. The depressed person lacks the ability to sustain action, and ultimately to carry with him that primitive impulse to sustain the action of his own life. We will emphasize here the temporality of sustaining a flow of action, which is, in other words, the flow engaged when I make myself a time by living in the world.
And yet again, (iii), we find that there is in fact a project of sustaining a certain kind of action -- a depressed action. This action is in fact already underway. It is the action of halting action that the depressed person is engaged in. This halting of action is an action itself, though a sick one. It is an action that does not take flight into the world, but rather which tears itself away from the world, and so establishes the self as everything there is in perception. It is also the halting of time — certainly of subjective time, but also with implications for general (or objective) time and of intersubjective time. Beginning action, sustaining action, and halting action will be studied in turn.

a) Beginning Action

Let us begin by taking from our earlier example of the depressed man those parts which emphasized his inability to act. We recall, that he:

sees the book he should be reading on the floor, along with other objects which serve as evidence that it is the same situation as before. These objects, far from compelling him toward them, call him back only to himself, to the situation of his inert body, and his suffering.

And he:

He thinks about the letter he needs to mail, the same letter that has needed mailing for days. He does not move.

The depressed man cannot begin the action of mailing the letter. This action, to be sure, would require many steps. He would need to rise from the bed, get changed, pick up the letter, and leave the house, along with several other more minor actions. But his eyes pass over the letter,  

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129 The idea of a "sick" action will become more clear in section (ii) when we explore the action of self-loathing, and specifically when we identify desire as ill.
perhaps not with the quickness in which they looked over the books, never really seeing those at all: the letter is noted- it calls to him somehow, it is visible to him, yet his eyes stop there at the letter, and so the depressed person stops short of seeing what is beyond the letter. What is beyond are those objects around it (and so he fails to situate it in a room that he dwells in), but also the possibilities the action of seeing it may give rise to. His body does not reach out toward the letter in any capacity, and so the letter hovers in his periphery. It has the form of a call without the power that enables him to answer to it. Writes Merleau-Ponty, "Without the exploration of my gaze or my hand, and prior to my body synchronizing with it, the sensible is nothing but a vague solicitation" (PP, 222). The letter remains outside of the depressed man's reach.

But we must say more about action and its beginning before we can understand what is happening when an object remains outside of one's reach. When we say an action is begun, what is meant? In fact, beginning action, whether it is beginning to write, beginning to mail a letter, or beginning to put new strings on a guitar, I am beginning precisely the action of joining my body with the keyboard, with the clothes I must put on to mail the letter, and with the guitar and the strings. We cannot understand action without understanding my body's involvement with the objects and world it acts for, or toward. Merleau-Ponty writes: "I cannot understand the function of the living body except by enacting it myself, and except in so far as I am a body which rises towards the world" (PP, 87). When we speak of action, then, we do not speak of some abstract thing or movement "out there," we speak instead of the action of my body, and the action of my body is precisely the action of joining with the sensible, with those particular objects that open themselves up (and therefore open me up) to other objects, and to the world more generally.
The letter remains outside of the man's reach, and his body does not join with it. It is the task of engaging his body that remains outside of his understanding; he cannot mail the letter because he does not, or cannot (as we will see) rise toward the world. We may speculate that the task of mailing the letter seems monumental and is requiring of an effort he feels unable to meet. We might suggest that for him, this action seems futile, for surely even if he mails the letter, he will feel the same way when he returns. Or, if he does feel somewhat better having accomplished his task, he believes he will return to the state he is in at some point after. He is probably correct. The depressed man's sense of futility has played a role in developing a habitual inability to begin. He has, to put it in different terms, lost the habit of doing. And his habit of not doing, itself a poor habit, deprives him (not surprisingly!) of the freedom "good habits" of perception give, for in good habits, we are able to see beyond the letter in a way that makes its perception not futile, but rich in accomplishment, leading to further action. To begin the action, the letter must call to him in a way that reveals its own beyond, it must call to him as something to be resolved.\footnote{If meanings are not resolved in situations, the beginnings of actions are not able to be self motivated. Merleau-Ponty gives the example of Schneider, who cannot initiate sexual activity itself but is able to sustain it once begun. He writes, "For Schneider… the feminine body has no particular essence. Above all, he says, it is the personality that makes a woman attractive, for, when it comes to their bodies, they are all the same. Close bodily contact only produces a "vague feeling" or the "knowledge of something indeterminate," which is never enough "to launch" sexual behavior or to create a situation calling for a definite mode of resolution". (PP, 158). The idea that meaning comes out of the resolution is important here, and Merleau-Ponty goes on to write, "lacking an intention, a sexual initiative that calls forth a cycle of movements and states, that 'articulates' them and that finds in them its realization - the very word 'satisfaction' no longer means anything to him" (PP, 159). It is the successful resolution of an object that leads to initiative being made, the beginning of action, because it is in the resolution that meaning is found and this meaning is one that gives to a further situation, its intention, its motivation "to launch". Perhaps he is not inclined to begin action due to the inability to make sense of a certain situation having been caught in a double-bind, where there is no way to act that will have a successful resolution. He cannot make sense of it, and so loses the ability to perceive calls of this nature.}

There is an effort in beginning, however we must be careful not to confuse the effort of engaging one's body with an effort that alone belongs to the body. The beginning of action (say
the action of perceiving the blue of the sky, to use Merleau-Ponty's example) is a response to a solicitation. It is the effort of finding an attitude "that will provide it [the body] with the means to become determinate and to become [the] blue [that I see]" (PP 222). And moreover, this effort is rather an abandoning, a plunging into the blue, such that "it thinks itself in me" (PP, 222). Or, again recall our discussion of dancing (from Chapter One) where we noted, with Russon, that "the music itself is the guide...when the body dances, its limbs are moved by a power not its own."[131] Effort, then, is not merely my own exertion toward a thing, but my ability to allow myself to be guided in the first place. When we described leaping habits in Part One of this thesis, we noted them to be in part the ability to perceive a call in the first place: it is not only the ability to respond to a call, but an ability cultivated out of good habits that allow us to perceive new calls we might not otherwise have perceived. Effort, or beginning, is found there. In effort, I abandon myself to calls from objects and things that solicit my powers. What the depressed man sees in our example is not the letter, its surroundings, its opportunities for further action, and nor does he see in this, his ability. Rather he "sees" his disability. He is unable to reach for the letter because he lacks the ability to effortfully perceive the letter as a call for his action and ability. The depressed person lacks the power to begin.

The depressed man lacks the power to begin the engagement of his body, and beginning is that power of implicating oneself in the visible by responding to its solicitations, it is the power to take up one's situation in the world. Merleau-Ponty defines what he calls the "intentional arc." He write about freedom in relation to a particular patient (Schneider, though we will not discuss this case, but rather take similarities to be found there for depressed persons): "he 'lacks freedom', he lacks the concrete freedom that consists in the general power of placing

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[131] Russon, BWE, 11.
oneself in a situation." (PP, 137) This placement of oneself in a situation, is in part, as we said above, the power to be in a situation such that we may be called to orient ourselves with regard to an object: to perceive, in other words, its solicitation. Merleau-Ponty goes on to describe the core function (of the intentional arc), which is *prior* to making us see or know objects, this core function:

first more secretly brings them [the objects] into existence for us….the life of consciousness — epistemic life, the life of desire, or perceptual life…is underpinned by an 'intentional arc' that projects around us our past, our future, our human milieu, our physical situation, our ideological situation, and our moral situation, or rather, that ensures we are situated within all of these relationships. (PP, 137).

When we are situated in these relationships, we have a certain orientation, or behavior, toward them. The depressed person lacks freedom first because he is not oriented to his situation. However, it remains that the depressed person, is still somehow tied to his situation. He is still somehow connected to the *idea* of beginning, he *wants* to mail the letter, and this is evidenced by the reprimands he makes on himself for not having done so yet, reprimands that are punitive, as we will see in the next section of this chapter. He tries to "do" the task through some sort of volition, by some force of will, hoping that his impetus will somehow come over him, but herein lies a problem: to try to act from a deliberate intention fails him.

Genuine intentionality, Merleau-Ponty contends, does not *posit* its object, but is *toward* its object (PP, 472). The depressed person posits the letter, he deliberates about it, but in trying to make the decision to go over there and pick up the letter, and thus positing the idea to consciousness, he will fail (not necessarily, but most likely). He will fail because this positing does not reflect a *genuine intentionality*, and since it therefore is not a true beginning. The man
is, in fact, not in the possession of an intentionality toward this particular action, and so does not have the power to begin it. He lacks the power to implicate himself in the visible, to situate himself in the world, in *his* world, and these are necessary if he is to perform the series of actions required to mail the letter. Were he in fact in possession of a genuine intentionality, he would *already* be going over there, *already* picking up the letter. He would be *toward* it. It is intention then, or lack of intention, where we see another problem related to beginning action.132

Let us elucidate this idea further by contrasting our current example with another. We will find by making this contrast, that intentionality has a direct relationship to one's perception of either the "I can," or the "I cannot." Elaborating on the example of the depressed man, let us presume that the letter which needs mailing is his income report in order to get his disability cheque for that month.133 In this case, he deliberates about doing the task, but does not move. He considers that it must be mailed, or he will not get the money he needs for rent. He tries to move but cannot. He loathes the idea of the effort it would take to do the task, and senses himself to be lazy and useless because he cannot do it. The man is *not* toward the task of mailing the letter, but remains in the state of deliberation.134 In a second scenario, imagine a young university student

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132 *Merleau-Ponty* also describes an "original intentionality" (pp. 139). This means that consciousness is not originally an "I think," but an "I can." We emphasize this original intentionality shortly, but a genuine intentionality and an original one, do already express the same idea — I am toward the object and the world since "I can"; and the original intention is one that makes me already toward the object.

133 Admittedly, this is a somewhat "loaded" example. Virtually every action becomes difficult or impossible for depressed persons, and so I may have used the example of his seeing dirty laundry on the floor and thinking he needed to do laundry, or many other things he may be "inclined" to do. I use this example because it demonstrates the need to do an urgent action (he will not be able to pay rent without that cheque), and this is important because it is in situations of need (of eating, bathing, paying rent) that he is confronted head on with his inability to act. This example also represents an extended action — rather than a shorter action of picking up a glass, which also may be difficult but which does not involve a clear passage of time, and this, as we will see, is important. The fact that the letter is for a disability cheque of course has psychological implications, emphasizing his problem, but this reminder is equally felt in the terms of its urgency — *he can't even do that which needs doing.*

134 The particular nature of the deliberation underway in depression will not be examined more here, though the self-loathing component of it (what I argue, then, is in a sense the deliberation itself) will be the subject of part two of this section.
who needs to mail her application for graduate school. It is the last day she can mail it if it is to arrive by the due date. As this occurs to her, she leaps up, quickly gets dressed, grabs the letter and walks purposefully to the post office. Her actions are deliberate, she has her attention on the post office. While we note that she is toward the post office, we can also emphasize how once begun, each part of her task connects itself to the previous task and at the same time commits itself to the next one. Every stride of her walk propels her toward her goal, each last stride commits to the next one. Each stride is a new beginning, but also a new commitment to the action itself, sustaining the action. In this example, her actions toward becoming a graduate student are presumably already underway: the action of mailing the application is built upon previous actions: getting good grades in her undergraduate degree, researching schools, learning her own skills and abilities. And this action commits her to future actions — she will, if she is accepted, begin to take courses, meet professors and students and begin the process of study entailed. In the example of the depressed man, however, his action of mailing the letter does not sustain a previous action, and neither does it commit him to a future (beyond the paying of his rent). Nothing was already underway, and in fact this is evidenced by the fact that he is "disabled" enough to be given a cheque. Nothing is underway already, and there is no future action to be performed by performing the current one.

We are discussing the effort of beginning action and the intention involved in it. These discussions lead us to a further question. If depression involves the inability to effortfully rise toward the world, and if the intentions toward objects are not to be found in the body, what experience is being had? Why are the presence of objects, for the depressed person, only objects to be posited and not taken up? We find that objects for him are useless, and effort is futile. The experience of futility goes hand in hand with the habit of not doing because this habit is a habit
of not merely not acting, but seeing the action as futile, as failing to provide possibilities for transformation, as involving a constant restarting, rather than providing a continuous and easeful flow of action and being. The futility of effort can be put in the following terms: "I will still be here (in this state) tomorrow, as I am here now, and was yesterday." Importantly missing in the depressed state is the visibility of one's own freedom, and this because one action does not benefit from the last, nor does it contribute to a further action, as we have said above. Merleau-Ponty writes:

the very notion of freedom demands that our decision should plunge into the future, that something should have been done by it, that the subsequent instant should benefit from its predecessor and, though not necessitated, should be at least required by it. If freedom is doing, it is necessary that what it does should not be immediately undone by a new freedom. Each instant therefore must not be a closed world, one instant must be able to commit to its successors and, a decision once taken and action once begun, I must have something acquired at my disposal, I must benefit from my impetus, I must be inclined to carry on- (my emphasis, 471).

Without commitment, that is, something acquired, without some benefit, there is no use in carrying on, and the effort of abandoning myself to the object is futile. But we are led through this to the temporality of action. That the depressed person does not plunge into the present, thus engaging a commitment and a flow of action that carries him on, demonstrates an important part of the depressed experience of inaction: the inability to begin action in the present is just the inability to get out of himself and into the world. Plunging into the present as the presence of the world is the joining of the himself to that world. It is in time that I join with the world, and if I do not take the present up, I remain "on this side of the world," or "on this side of the visible."
The present is that vital time where I join up with the cohesion of a world. Its omission from my experience makes me, I argue, *all that I can perceive*, I become a presence only for myself. We shall look into this further. The present instant, we have seen in Chapter Two, is one that marks the flight out of the self and into the visible. Importantly the present "actualizes the mediation between the For-Itself and the For-Others, between individuality and generality" (PP, 478). Merleau-Ponty is pointing here to how the body in action is a mediation between the self and the world, in that it becomes in so acting not only a presence to itself, but also a presence to others and a presence to the world. When I act, I am not only who I am to myself, but am a presence for others and the world. Again, perception is not taken by a discrete individual about a distinctly other world. As a presence to myself and to the world, I actualize myself as a time, but I also take up the general time of the world. Merleau-Ponty writes of general time:

> We have seen that there is no such thing as a natural time if we understand this to mean a time of objects without subjectivity. There is, however, at least a generalized time, and this is even the time intended by a common notion. This time is the perpetual starting over of the series: past, present, future it is the continuous time, it offers us the outline and the abstract form of a commitment (PP, 479).

What is absent then for the depressed man in his inaction is the actualizing of this mediation, and the synchronization of this body with objective time. He remains then, on *this* side of the mediation, and *this* side of time, on *this* side of the visible, present only to himself. But what is

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135 When Merleau-Ponty notes that even a generalized time is understood by a common notion, he refers to intersubjective time, not as it is in its living out, but its giving away to a general time that is only experienced through our connectedness to it. One of the conclusions I make in this thesis is that it is through a living out of intersubjective time that I am able to join up with natural time and so become for myself a time. This is important for therapeutic reasons, and it also demonstrates my argument in section three of this chapter: the tendency to isolation drives depression deeper since it moves the depressed person away from the possibility to action in the present, *with them*, and so for himself.
the nature of the present in depression if he does not accomplish this mediation, and yet time passes? Levinas' discussion of fatigue is helpful here. With this discussion we also return to the notion of effort.

Levinas says that effort is already involved in the present. "It is caught up with the instant as the inevitable present in which it is irrevocably committed, and is not free as the wind. Fatigue marks a delay with respect to the present." \(^{136}\) It manifests as an inability to commit to the present through effort. The depressed person also lacks the ability to exert the effort necessary and commit to the present. Yet he is well aware that time passes, he mourns the passing of time, it is as though he watches it pass, in other words, he observes change in all but himself. The present, is for him, a perpetual non-passing, a repetition of the same. However, it is laboursome. Indeed, he must endure the present.

Each instant, being a closed world in depression, does not commit to its successors, and nor has it acquired something from the previous instant. The body does not have a genuine intentionality toward the object because the effort of beginning is futile. As a result, the flow of action is not sustained, and so importantly, neither are his powers of doing, that is, his freedom to act and be, made visible to him. Let us turn to a discussion regarding what is at stake in sustaining action.

**Part b): Sustaining Action**

"Our commitments sustain our power" (Merleau-Ponty, pp 481).

When we speak of sustaining action, we mean, again, the prolonged actions of carrying a particular action on. This means we carry forward our projects: of applying to graduate school, of talking with a friend about a difficult issue, or of walking to the post office. But there is a

broader action than the particular actions we commit to: life itself is an action, and it is the particular action of living that is sustained that we commit to our own life. We do this, not in isolation, as we have seen in Chapter Three, for others contribute to the sustaining of our own lives in significant ways, namely as we have said, by revealing to us that our actions matter. And further we sustain our own lives in part by supporting the projects of others. Action, once begun, is sustained by our commitment to a larger project. Ultimately, we commit to the project of our life: we are committed, in other words, to our intimate others, our political goals, of being a good person, and to living our life the best way we can. In short, we sustain through commitment the freedom we have to be.

Evidenced by the inability to begin action, the depressed person does not sustain action. Since it is in sustaining action, that one's powers of doing are made visible to him, this omission from his experience has a catastrophic affect, for he becomes embroiled in a perpetual present in which what becomes visible is freedom's opposite — his lack of powers are all that appear to him. And, he remains closed to the change that sustained action might afford him. Importantly, however, I argue, that the depressed person ultimately does not sustain the action of carrying himself forward; he is not inclined to carry on. The inclination to carry on marks the orientation he has toward his own temporal flow. However, this inclination is also the taking up of a generalized time, and so synchronizing with that that time, and through it, the world. Sustaining action, then, is akin to sustaining a mediation with the world. As we go on in part (iii) of this section, I will argue that a certain kind of action is sustained in depression, although it decisively does not take the form of action we have discussed previously.

Let us take any random present in the student's action of mailing her graduate school application, and contrast it with the inaction of the depressed man. The young woman has made
the initial effort of beginning to mail the application. This effort was the beginning of something new, but also the continuation of a project already underway, specifically the project of becoming a graduate student. Now she walks to the post office, and this action taken as a whole is underway; each present along the way is open to the next present. Each present belongs to her project, but in taking each one up, she becomes open also to the possibility for other experiences. In a sense, she has already finished mailing the letter, she can enjoy walking the streets on a quiet day, running into a friend, or thinking about the lunch she will have later. The young woman "carries on." The depressed man, on the other hand, in never beginning the action of mailing the letter, lags behind the present; the action of mailing still needs doing, and the impossible present looms in front of him as the very present that needs taking up, that calls to be taken up, but which cannot be. He lingers, then, in a habit-body that is a consciousness, not of "I can," but of "I cannot."

Let us take a closer look at the temporality of the "flow." We have noted above that the plunge into the present begins the flow. For Merleau-Ponty, time is not a multiplicity of connected phenomena, past, present and then future, but rather a single phenomenon of flowing (PP, 442), a harmonizing and overlapping of the past and the future through the present (PP, 443). The past, present and future are not distinct successions, but are differentiated within the flow as both a being and a passing. One thrust of the jogger's foot down is the future becoming the present, as his previous footing moves to the past. The present action is the catalyst for the harmony, and he himself is implicated in time's flow, indeed he is the flow.

We have said that the depressed man is stuck in a past, and he lags behind the present that still in a certain sense calls him. At the same time as he is stuck in a past, he recoils from his present situation. But what marks the difference between the effort of beginning action and the
effort of recoiling from it? Beginning action, I contend, is the effort of autonomy, of implicating oneself in the visible, something called of him to do. Recoiling from action in the present is the effort of already somehow being implicated, and forcibly denying this implication by not taking up one's powers of action. Stopping the project of one's life is the breaking of away of consciousness with the visible it is already in reciprocal dialogue with. Autonomy at its foundation just is the response already occurring in life, an effort experienced only as the call to be within the visible.

Part c: Halting Action

We have so far discussed the ways that the depressed person finds action difficult; he neither begins action, nor sustains it in the ways that show his freedom to him. Yet, he does act in halting action. This halting of his direct and primitive contact with the world makes himself the only object in his experience, and so we find action there, in the halting, and in the consciousness of "I can't," outside of the world. He also halts the temporal flow that himself, that flow that allows for change and transformation, and so solidifies the habit of depression, catalyzing its loop. We can now look at this inner action in more depth.

Let us use the example of jogging. The jogger may hesitate or postpone the effortful activity, but once begun he participates in the visible. He takes up his present situation by plunging in. Once begun, the action of jogging takes hold, the jogger continues the particular movement with his feet and body. In fact, once begun, that initial effort, at least for the body, becomes second nature, and is even forgettable. Now he is focused perhaps on other things, a pain in his chest, a particular thought, but that initial movement is no longer at the fore of his consciousness. Indeed, unless he is forced to stop because of the pain, or perhaps because he
becomes winded, the effort will actually be in *stopping* the movement. He will need to slow down his gait until it is slow enough to become a walk, or else he would probably fall!

Let us note a few things about this example. First, each and every time he puts his next foot down on the ground, he commits to the successive time and that next time benefits from the previous. Indeed, it is *required* by the previous one. With each footing, he acquires something at his disposal, he is *propelled* forward. He is propelled, that is, inclined, *to carry on*. Second, *what* he carries on, to be precise, is the flow of the action, but also, the flow of his consciousness — his own temporal movement, his presence to himself, to others and to world. If he does halt the action prematurely, or even if he just finishes his jog in the time he intended, he then presumably begins some other action; stretching or showering. But the power to break off and complete the first task occurs at the same instant as he begins the second: his gaze shifts from one goal to another, and it happens in an instant. Merleau-Ponty writes there would be no tearing apart, no breaking off from first task "if freedom were nowhere committed and was not preparing to establish itself elsewhere" (pp. 462).

We begin to see that stopping action is just an interruption in a particular activity, and not a halting of all action; consciousness directs itself elsewhere. The depressed person, we have said, does not begin action, and nor then does he sustain action. I am arguing however that he does halt action, and this he does at each new present. This halting itself *is an action* but it is one that involves the severing of connection with a world, and moreover, this action is sustained, as the action belonging to depression.

In refuting the idea of some actions being free while others are not, Merleau-Ponty writes:
If we assume that my freedom is abolished when it does not act, then how will it be reborn? If, by some miracle, I were able to turn myself into a thing, then how would I later recreate my consciousness? If I am free, even once, then I do not figure among the totality of things, and I must be free continuously. If my actions even once cease to be my own, they will never again become my own; if I lose my hold upon the world, I will never regain it" (PP, 459).

The depressed person is significantly limited in terms of his abilities to act, and his hold upon the world. However, as we stated in the introduction, the depressed life is one way of living a life, and depressed persons are still free to act. In this truth lays both the always open possibility that a depressed person will act — our man may just get up and mail the letter — but also the possibility that he will sediment a continual action of turning away from the world. The paradox we are hinting at is simply that the depressed person is free to make his action one that is not free. But let us say more about the implications of halting action. In particular, we identify the halting of action to be an action found within consciousness and an action which is the loathing of the ego by conscience.

The inability to act is at the base of the experience a temporal problem: the problem with beginning is a problem related to the effort and intention involved with the present, the difficulty sustaining action relates to an inability to perceive a future (that is freedom) through action, and the halting of action is the perpetual taking up of a past that becomes the atmosphere of a present (and so a loop has occurred — we are back to the inability to plunge into a present since it is no real present at all). The halting of action is the heart of depression's habit, and has its roots in a past that has led to the consciousness of "I can't." We explore this further now.
"The complex of melancholia behaves like an open wound, drawing to itself cathectic energy from all sides ... and draining the ego until it is utterly depleted" (Freud, MM, pp. 290).

Depression is a lot about not having energy. [But] one place in my life where there was loads of energy was in the self-hatred. There was endless energy for that and it was a powerful energy....I would just wake up doing it... and I would spend ten hours a day at it" (Interviewee for David Karp, male therapist, age 45).

We might say that the depressed person loathes first and foremost her own inaction. It is with and from self-loathing that she does not act. She has become everything in experience, but she is nothing; she does nothing. But while inaction is bound to self-loathing, the latter is a feature of depression in its own right. Moreover, we will find it to be the adhesive of the experience — that part of depression that binds together all of its features. We can also note that self-loathing is an effort; if the depressed person is active, it is here. As we learned in chapter four, Freud was highly influential in drawing attention to the self-loathing that is part of depression, identifying this as the main factor which distinguishes melancholy from mourning. We will find in our phenomenology then, drawing on Freud's terms that the action of self-loathing is played out by a conscience that belongs to a past world, and indeed past others. I will emphasize that the depressed person experiences herself as nothing, and this in spite of a conclusion made in the last section that the depressed person is everything in her experience. We will draw once again from Laing's terms to support my claim that this depletion of ego, or sense
of self, can be seen as the experience of living in a state of perpetual engulfment, implosion and petrifaction.

We will draw several conclusions in this section. First, a self-loathing conscience is a conscience that derives pleasure from its torment, and this in a particular way. While we may concede that there is a familiarity to the self-loathing, its pleasure is not to be found in this, but rather in a punitive pleasure. The depressed person, simply, feels he deserves to feel bad. Second, desire itself is sick, it cannot redirect itself from a place of loathing. In this way, self-loathing is intimately tied to inaction. Second, in the dread of meeting others from the state of such unworthiness, the depressed person cannot be with others, and in this way self-loathing is tied to isolation. Finally the particular suffering that comes from self-loathing, is an understanding of oneself as not belonging to the world (let alone being at home in it), gives rise to fear. Also, because self-loathing is a kind of action that repeats and reinforces itself continuously, and no new perceptions are formed, the depressed person brings to the world, at times a delusional perception. She reads things that are not there. This reinforces the fear. Self-loathing is the glue of the depressive movement — it binds the experience together by always returning there. While the conscience criticizes the ego, the desire for life remains and so there is an inner conflict for the depressed person between the desire not to act, an inner desire to act, and the defeated, loathed ego.¹³⁷ We will then study more closely some of Freud's theories.

Freud's theory of loss is consistent with elements of thought taken from Merleau-Ponty in earlier chapters, both in terms of what we have said about trauma, and what we have said about the relationship of the past to a present. Self-loathing is in the body, but in a past body. It is

¹³⁷ Note the beginning of an emphasis on desire. Here desire refers to the desire not act given by conscience, and the "secret desire" or "wish" for action. In section (iii), we will expound on desire to include more fundamentally, the desire for others.
in a past wherein (for Freud) some object was lost; the body thus still holds onto the sadness and disappointment of this loss, but also it has developed a hatred for the lost object and turned it into a hatred on the self.\textsuperscript{138} Also, (for Merleau-Ponty) the depressed body's orientation and attitude to objects belong to this past; his very perception is a past still alive in the present. This past is often tied to trauma, or more generally, to poorly formed habits which do not lend themselves to ones' autonomy. To say that self-loathing is in the body is also to say, I contend, that it is a bodily attitude toward the world, and toward the self. It is, in other words, an action.

Let us have a brief reminder of the experience of self-loathing as taken from our example of the depressed man:

\textit{As his thoughts begin to form, so too does an overriding sense of disgust in himself. It is the same feeling as yesterday, as last year even, indeed it is always the same, there is no change from one moment to the next.}

And,

\textit{He loathes his situation, the room, the suffering, but mostly he loathes himself. He is pathetic, unworthy, etc…}

These examples begin to portray how the self-loathing of depression is global — it is not separate from his loathing of the surroundings and in a way, extenuates his loathing of himself. We note then a spatial component to his self-hatred, his self-hatred extends to the objects in the

\textsuperscript{138} Note also here the first reference to the emotion "sadness." Freud\textapos;s distinguishes between mourning and melancholy the feature of self-loathing, but they retain the commonality of a lost object — a person, a relationship, a time — and so mourning is the sadness of this loss, as is melancholy the sadness of losing another object not as readily seen from the outside. Sadness, recall was named a key feature in melancholy as far back as …along with fear. While I will not expound on these emotions in this thesis, I do note their significance. Sadness belongs to the feature of depression that is self-loathing, and as we will see in the next section, fear that emotion underlying the experience of isolation.
room, and they back at him.\textsuperscript{139} And as we have said, there is also a temporal component to his self-hatred, he hates himself in this instant, but since he experiences himself as the same as previous moments, this self-hatred is old, past, and deep. Before we emphasize further the spatial and temporal components of the self-hatred, let us return to the account of Freud from Chapter Four, in order to try to understand better \textit{what} it is that he loathes.

Recall that for Freud, the lost object of melancholics is not one readily seen by the outside, whereas in mourning, the lost object is obvious, as in the case of a death of a loved one. Mourning involves the ego’s letting go of desire for the loved one by testing all of the experiences and comportments that involve the person, discovering that the person is really gone, and finally coming to a place of acceptance. Then, in Freud’s words, "the testing of reality, having shown that the loved object no longer exists, requires forthwith that all the libido shall be withdrawn from its attachments to the object."\textsuperscript{140} In some cases of melancholy, the loss is of a more ideal kind (he gives the example of the deserted bride). It may be tied to a past disappointment, rejection or injustice. Freud remarks that "one feels justified in concluding that a loss of the kind has been experienced, but one cannot see clearly what has been lost, and may the more readily suppose that the patient too cannot consciously perceive what he has lost."\textsuperscript{141}

\textsuperscript{139} In Chapter One, we noted that we perceive a thing \textit{in} its world. While we focus on the call from a particular object, we do so while still putting that thing in its world. In depression on the other hand, we fix on an object, which is to say (in part) that it lacks a world. "Down here, under the flickering, basement light of depression, my field of vision narrowed. I encountered yellowed labels inside shirts, limp one-dollar bills, and people with flat opinions about movies, spoken in the voice of a dial tone" (Unholy Ghost, pp. 12). The "dingyness" of the things, in other words, were dingy because they lacked a world around it — they were just labels, bills and voices taken out of the conversations actually happening. This perception, I am arguing, is closely tied to self-loathing. It is from a loathing of the self that she sees the isolated, dingy objects, she herself is the very same, and these objects reflect back on her.

\textsuperscript{140} Freud, MM, 253.

\textsuperscript{141} Freud, MM, 253.
Importantly, the testing of reality becomes much more problematic, and with this, the libido is not able to, having gone through a process of testing, withdraw from it. Ultimately, this means the libido cannot redirect itself. We will return to the topic of libido (or desire) shortly. First, let us look at another loss that occurs for the melancholic; that is, the loss of ego:

In grief the world becomes poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself. The patient represents his ego to us as worthless, incapable of any effort and morally despicable; he reproaches himself, vilifies himself and expects to be cast out and chastised.\textsuperscript{142}

Freud contends that in melancholia one part of the ego sets itself over against the other, judges it critically, and looks upon it as an object.\textsuperscript{143} This institution is distinguished from the rest of the ego, and is the one commonly called "conscience." Conscience, Freud contends can become diseased independently.

Freud advances this theory by showing the self-reproaches to be in reality reproaches against a loved object which has been shifted onto the patient's own ego. This loved object was first the patient's object-choice — the libido had attached itself to a certain person — "then, owing to a real injury or disappointment concerned with the loved person, this object-relationship was undermined."\textsuperscript{144} The result was not the normal one, involving withdrawal of the libido from this object and transference to a new one. Instead the freed libido was withdrawn into the ego. There it served to establish an identification of the ego with the abandoned object:

Thus the shadow of the object fell upon the ego, so that the latter could henceforth be criticized by a special mental faculty like an object, like the forsaken object. In this way the loss of the object became transformed into a loss in the ego, and the conflict between

\textsuperscript{142} Freud, MM, 253.
\textsuperscript{143} Freud, MM 255.
\textsuperscript{144} Freud, MM, 254.
the ego and the loved person transformed into a cleavage between the criticizing faculty of the ego and the ego as altered by the identification.\textsuperscript{145}

We leave Freud's theory for the time being, taking from it the aspect of self-loathing in terms of the ego, conscience and the libido. I am arguing in this section that the self who loathes, loathes the very existence of itself, we might say that conscience seeks to destroy the libido — the very life force. In the process of identifying with the object of loss, and loathing it, the libido is suppressed, becoming weaker and weaker until it has no force. Conscience is able to press onto the libido, or let us now modify to the term to desire, because it has instantiated itself as \textit{all that there is} to it. Conscience alone has become the sayer and the decider in fate of existence.\textsuperscript{146}

Furthering this argument, we return to our example of the depressed man. His ego and conscience are at war. One part of the "dialogue" says "get up and do this," the other responds "I can't." We might speculate that it is the ego that says "get up and do this", and conscience, hating itself replies "I can't." But it is the reverse. Only an embodied ego can "say" "get up and do this," and even then, of course, it does not "say" at all, it does not deliberate, but is already a body toward its object. It is conscience that says "get up and do this," it taunts and mocks the ego. It taunts and hates a \textit{disembodied} consciousness, one that cannot comply.

Conscience drives desire down because desire, or the libido, is \textit{created} through action in the world and with others, it is born out of relationships, and is not prior to these. In halting action, the depressed man engages a monologue which is equally the destruction of that very

\textsuperscript{145} Freud, MM, 256.
\textsuperscript{146} The use of the term "sayer" in this case points us a discussion we will take up later. I emphasize depression as essentially involving the self's lack of expression in the world. Conscience and the Ego are not in dialogue, conscience dictates its terms, and since there is nothing new given from the world, no possibility for transformation through dialogue with it, this dynamic is really a monologue.
force of desire that could enable him to act. There is another aspect of Freud's theory which bears some weight here:

If the object-love, which cannot be given up, takes refuge in narcissistic identification, while the object itself is abandoned, then hate is expended upon this new substitute-object, railing against it, depreciating it, making it suffer and deriving sadistic gratification from its suffering (my emphasis).\(^{147}\)

The self tormenting which is "no doubt pleasurable," has yet another way of rendering depression into a habit. Not only is the habit sedimented by its lack of any other which can move the ego out of itself, but also by the pleasure, the familiarity, if you will, of the self-loathing. Just as in any habit, the habit of depression becomes second nature as it becomes increasingly familiar. While I wonder about the fruitfulness of describing the depressed person's situation as pleasurable, for surely it is not felt as such, I do think conscience itself derives sadistic pleasure from eroding the hated ego; the degree of loathing is great enough as to elicit punitive and cruel measures on the ego.

We see then from our above argumentation and analysis, that desire itself is sick, and this sickness is seen from two angles. On the one hand, desire is sick in its absence. As suppressed by a conscience which makes impossible one's flight into the world through action, desire fades until there is no force from which to rise. On the other hand, desire is sick since it does find, within a monologue, and on this side of the visible, a way to express itself as critical, punitive and unforgiving.

Establishing thus far described a kind of action that occurs in depression where such action is accomplished by the conscience upon the ego, such that the libido, or desire, itself is

\(^{147}\) Freud, MM 255.
sick, we can address how it is that a person can come to be in such a state. This involves the theme of temporality once again, this time with a focus on the past. In the action we have described, some work is being done, and effort is being made.

Effort, we saw, in section one was the effort of beginning the flight outside of the self — of implicating oneself in the visible, but now, we will see, effort takes a different form. Instead of an effort that joins the subject with the world in mediation, instead it is the effort of turning away from the world, and from the mediation, and is on effort on this side of the visible, as Merleau-Ponty would put it. That is, the effort is on my side of the visible, the effort is one of conscience on its ego, and conscience is punitive. Conscience I argue, has created through habit an endless well of reasons to hate to draw from. This is because not only does it hate through its initial identification with the lost object, but it with each halting of action that results from this hatred, comes a new reason to hate — the ego is worthless, it cannot do anything. We note then, that the action taken in depression has a beginning, and it is sustained, it resembles "true" action in form, but is astoundingly different in execution and result. But let us look at the beginning of the action of self-loathing.

Self-loathing's beginning as we have so far described it, is the result of a lost object where the resulting sadness and disappointment is not transformed as the libido finds a new object. This beginning has both a historical and temporal root, and often involves some sort of trauma, a topic we addressed in chapter three. Recall, for example, our example of the bullied child. Applying what we have learned thus far, we note that the child was unable to defend herself. Defending himself would have entailed taking flight out of himself and demanding that
his claim that he is someone be taken into account; that he has a say in who he is. The children taunt that he is weak and pathetic, he comes to identify himself with their perspective, adopting the attitude that he is in fact so, and taking over their work for them.

The beginning of self-loathing, more often than not, is found in a past, and even if it finds itself in a new present, will quickly become a past if the libido does not withdraw and find a new love-object. The import of identifying self-loathing's beginning in a past is two-fold. Most significantly, it sheds light onto the present as it is for depressed persons. In section one, and indeed for the majority of chapter two, we emphasized that a present that is not taken up through action is not a true present at all, and our study so far in this chapter gives more evidence to this effect. For the present is after all, the place where the world presents itself, and it is only in action that I can respond to it as it is at present. If I recoil from it, if I do not rise toward it, it remains a place where I am not. I must be, then, if I am not there, in a different place and a different time. The present that I occupy must be saturated with a past I have never left. Merleau-Ponty captures this nicely, when he says:

"It's unlikely that I would in this moment destroy and inferiority complex in which I have been complacent now for twenty years. This means that I am committed to inferiority, that I have decided to dwell within it, that his past, if not a destiny, has at least a particular weight, and that it is not a sum of events over there, far away from me, but rather the atmosphere of my present" (PP, 467).

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148 Says Russon, "...just by being a living center of meaning he cannot deny the sense that he is someone" (Human Experience, 131). We see here also the erosion of the ego to the extent that he mistakenly denies this truth to himself, and so certainly fails at expressing this to others.
If anything belongs to the true present for the depressed person, then, it is his self-loathing. Self-loathing is the atmosphere of his present, and the shape of this is such that the depressed person remains on this side of the visible, in a state of self-loathing, and the world is "over there," its general time quite apart from him.

We will see now in a more complete way, my contention that the depressed person becomes for himself everything in his experience and yet this everything is nothing at all. The depressed person's present, occludes the presence of the world and of others, it is a present occupied by the past. As such we note that the present as it is, is one that remains alien to him. Here we come to an important point — self-loathing is extended to everything in the depressed person's perception. Since the depressed person is everything in his perception, this perception is extended to the world around him. He loathes then, not only himself but the very world he is alienated from. The world then becomes something hateful and uninviting as we have seen in our example. Importantly, though, when it comes to other people, something is different again. He does not so much loathe other people as fear them, and this because he loathes himself, and experiences the hateful world as a world that is for them, and not him. He is unworthy of sharing the world with them.

In conclusion, the activity of self-loathing has rendered the depressed person, at least so far as he is concerned, unworthy of human connection. Moreover, desire is sick, and so as already alienated from other people, does not have occasion to rise. This, in combination with a fear that has resulted from the historical beginnings of self-loathing, makes the depressed person seek his own isolation. We turn now, to a discussion on the tendency to isolation.

Section 3: The Tendency to Self-Isolation; Depression's Drive Deeper
"Depressed people greatly desire connection while they are simultaneously deprived of the ability to realize it" (Karp, pp. 28).

"I believe depression is a disease of isolation that tells you to withdraw, stay away, don't be a social person. Stay away from the people who are going to make you better. Yeah, the need to be alone, to withdraw… but I was like, just so alone" (interviewee of Karp's, male salesman, aged 30, pp. 37).

If we imagine a series of concentric circles, each arc making its center smaller and smaller, we might visualize something in the happening of isolation drawing depression into deeper and deeper states. While the inability to act happens in stages something like this, such that larger projects became eventually abandoned and actions once easy become difficult, these stages do not draw the state of depression deeper. Depression's "stage" is not understood by how much or how little a person does, solely. This may be its outward manifestation, however even those in deep depression can at times rise to any occasion, and this does not necessarily translate into less depression. Similarly, even non depressed persons can have days when action is difficult, but this does not mean they would be thought of as "a depressed person." It is the movement away from action within the intersubjective realm, movement away from involvement with other people, that marks the degree to which a person is depressed, I contend. The degree to which one is alienated from other people marks not only the depth of a depressive "episode" but also the "stage" of depression in a person's history. This is to say that isolation will make any particular period of depression deeper, but also there is a temporal movement as well, such that the deepening of depression on a grander scale — the degree to which a person is depressed, and
the capacity for its deepening is marked by the extent and duration to which a person is
isolated.\textsuperscript{149}

But notice above a contradiction — on the one hand, I have said that the inability to act
does not drive depression deeper, but then go on to say that a movement away from action within
the intersubjective realm does. In fact, the movement away from the intersubjective realm is a
demonstration of inaction on the part of the depressed person. Depressed persons engage not
only in inaction with others, but importantly in a very \textit{active} isolation from them. Depressed
persons experience a need to isolate themselves because they cannot be with others, they are
called toward the action of isolation.

Let us expand again on our example of the depressed man:

\textit{The phone rings. He thinks it might be a particular friend of his who has been trying to
reach him, but it does not matter who it is, he does not want to answer. He thinks about
the effort it would take to speak. He cannot speak, much less convey what is happening. He
wants to be left alone. Later he looks out the window and sees people walking down the
street. They seem alien to him, and a part of something he is not a part of. He thinks
about the social engagement he has agreed to, happening later that night. It will be the
same as the last time, he thinks. He will be overcome by a self-consciousness so deeply

\textsuperscript{149} I purposely use terms like "episode" and "stage" here, language different from the language used in earlier
sections, and I do so because their belonging to a more "clinical" understanding of depression is appropriate here.
While I do not propose to offer clean definitions of various stages of depression, or categories that represent the
degree to which a person is depressed, I do agree with a cultural causation approach to depression in this category (this
approach was studied in chapter four of this thesis). There does seem to be stages to depression. Recall from Chapter Four
Karp's contention that there comes a moment in what is after the depressed person's life, when one recognizes what is
happening to them is indeed depression. Karp calls this the "illness Identity." This identity is the joining together of the
depressed person's perception of herself with a societal one. This moment is the agreement
between self and society that the person is depressed (it is often marked by the feeling one is having a "nervous
breakdown" combined with the actual seeking of help from clinicians, getting diagnoses, etc.). The tendency to
isolate oneself reflects not only one's inner turmoil, but also the degree to which a person, in recognizing
themselves as depressed in contrast to other people, and in the eyes of other people, experiences themselves as unfit for
social contact.
uncomfortable that he is literally unable to call up any part of himself that feels familiar. In the face of them—all those others— he alone is visible to himself, each person there confirming his certainty that he is worthless, their gaze penetrating. He is engulfed by them, and terrified.

In this example, note, the remark "It [the social engagement] will be the same as the last time." Also, note the remark "He thinks about the effort it would take [to speak]." These remarks point to two themes we have discussed at length in section (I) of this chapter: namely, the themes of effort and futility. The action of being with others, is an action, after all, as is the action of mailing a letter, and it is an action of great significance. It is the actions with others that have probably contributed to the habit of inaction in the first place, it is actions with others that offers the most potential to give a depressed person a renewed sense of the future, and it is actions with others that ultimately draws one into a present. All of this will be examined further, but I point to these now in order to demonstrate that when we speak of the tendency to isolation, we are speaking again of a tendency toward inaction of a particular nature, and so we might remain attentive to our earlier themes as we proceed.

In this section, I will distinguish between the need to isolate oneself, and the experience of isolation itself (in other words, the question of why depression leads to a need for active isolation when the pain of this isolation is so great). I will argue that depression's stage is marked by the degree to which the depressed person is isolated from others. These stages are marked by the degree to which, more specifically, the depressed person is alienated from others such that the world he perceives belongs to "them," and not to him, and so in turn perceives himself as not-belonging to the world of others and as unfit for human contact: Contact with others becomes an action that does not serve to replace him in the world of others, but only to bring him
further away; any action toward others in so far as it serves any rehabituation toward others, is futile. But I will also argue that while he experiences the effort of acting with others futile, it is in fact this active isolation that is futile. The depressed person, I will contend, is never without the other. The self-loathing consciousness that has divided itself into a punitive conscience and an unmoving ego (drawing on our previous discussion on Freud), is still tied up with the other, though a fictitious other. Much as he tries, the depressed person cannot escape the other. What is lacking for depressed persons, I ultimately argue, is a *practical* intersubjectivity. Indeed, I will argue, drawing from Merleau-Ponty, that consciousness for depressed persons is decidedly and really *not* intersubjective (and this despite the remnants of the other that "haunt" depressed persons).

Before we proceed, let us return again to our preceding sections on "the inability to act" and "self-loathing." Recall that the depressed person is not able to rise toward the world, not able to abandon himself to objects or to the world—and ultimately not able to get out of himself. Recall also that it is his self-loathing that has become a labour he cannot escape from. Conscience oppresses the ego, and obliterates desire. It does so by making desire sick — desire is absent because it only comes out of action itself, and it is sick because conscience, in its hatred of the ego, gets some kind of pleasure out of punishing the ego. Part of what makes the effort to be with others futile is the mechanisms by which inaction and self-loathing lend themselves to a

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150 What is meant by a "practical intersubjectivity" will be expanded upon. For now, we can stress that it is the *practice* of being with others, of working toward, and being committed to goals drawn in and through our relationships with them, of acting with them and so acting *out of* the demands of these relationships that will move the depressed person from a place of alienation to one of integration, not only with those others, but with the world more generally.
perception that includes only the self; the depressed person is everything for-himself, and yet in
not acting and without worth, nothing at all.

The experience of the need to isolate oneself, and the experience of the isolation itself has
to be distinguished. The depressed person does not want to be others, rather he can't be with
others, but being without them is a certain kind of madness- an experience that leads to his
inability. 151 We have discussed the self-loathing of depression as a monologue on this side of the
visible — self-loathing is an active dialogue that does not include the other, and is indeed not
bodily — it is an "invisible" dialogue. For a person to engage in such a dialogue is to make the
possibility of others' participation in it impossible because, as we have said, conscience
suppresses any impetus by the ego to take flight into the world. This isolation and alienation
from the other, however, gives conscience more fuel for the suppression of the ego. Isolation
fuels the alienation that makes the need greater, because it has no opportunity to alter its
direction, and so perpetuates a perpetual repetition of the same "conversation" between ego and
conscience.

The conversation is the same as many previous times, but is also an accumulation and
building on of these previous times. The deeper the habits of depression become, and the longer
they persist, again, mark the degree to which his alienation from others is real. Real alienation, I
contend is based and manifested as the inability to enter into a present where that other "really"
is, where any real and practical intersubjectivity is to be found and lived out. There is a
movement to depression which is to say there is a movement—down—into a fear of the other
that is so great that he exists only there, frightened and perpetually so.

151 "Madness, and in particular, delusions are described as a certain kind of suffering will be expounded on in
section (iv) of this chapter."
What can we say about the movement of isolation and alienation? It is a movement from the cohesion of the depressed body with the other. Merleau-Ponty writes of cohesion:

the moments of the sonata, the fragments of the luminous field, adhere to one another with a cohesion without concept, which is of the same type as the cohesion of the parts of my body, or the cohesion of my body with the world (VI, 153).

The depressed person, when he says that he is isolated, that he in fact craves this isolation, is involved in a movement away from this cohesion, with then, a severing of the parts of his body, or with the cohesion of his body with the world.

Part a): The movement

Isolation is depression's drive deeper, and represents the degree to which one is isolated and alienated from others. We will find that the secret desire for others not being met, contains an erotic element, and by this I only mean (at least for now), a dynamic one — it is my living an intersubjective time that I join with the objective time of the world, and so become for myself a time. To speak of desire then is to speak of the eroticism of the living time with others, and to see its contrast in a conscience who actively wants to avoid this shared lived time is shown to be an "ill conscience," and, as first argued in section two, I contend, desire itself is sick.

Let us return again to our example and see where other people fit into his experience.

These objects, far from compelling him toward them, call him back only to himself, to the situation of his inert body, and his suffering. Those objects are for other people, he is not worthy of them.

He remembers the feeling of shame and hurt when he was out with friends a few days past. He believes others would find him pathetic, and lacking in will. He believes this.
The first of these passages reflects the experienced alienation from others, and to the extent that the objects — the world — are for them and not for him. The world is not then merely a presence that he does not have access to, but is decidedly a world that others do have access to. His exclusion from others is paramount when he sees the books on the floor. The second passage reflects his experience that others have the same perception of him as he does — that he is worthless. Indeed this perception of himself is based on the belief that others think this. Note that self-loathing sticks to every aspect of this experience.

Let us elaborate on the example of the depressed man.

*The phone rings. He thinks it might be a particular friend of his who has been trying to reach him, but he does not want to answer. He thinks about the effort it would take speak.*

*He cannot speak, much less convey what is happening. He wants to be left alone. He looks out the window and sees people walking down the street. They seem alien to him,*

*and a part of something he is not a part of. He thinks about the social engagement he has agreed to, happening later that night. It will be the same as the last time. He will be overcome by a self-consciousness so deeply uncomfortable that he is unable to call up any part of himself that he recognizes. In the face of them he alone is visible to himself,*

*each person there confirming his certainty that he is worthless their gaze penetrating and destroyed. He is engulfed by them, and terrified.*

Two important hints into this experience are given here. First, the depressed man does not want to answer the phone and he wants to be left alone. But yet he feels himself to be alienated from the other people he sees walking down the street — they are part of something he is not a part. This is something he suffers and this hints at a desire in conflict with desire to be left alone. He longs for other people. Second, he is afraid of other people; this fear given to him by his
alienation from them. As alien they threaten him, and this deepens his desire for isolation. Desire is in conflict.

We will begin with the second of these points, addressing the fear of others underlying the tendency to self-isolation. "The nature of human contact is always intersubjective," says Russon - "This means that we are always in search of confirmation of our sense of ourselves and of our world." The depressed person avoids this searching by staying away. Of course, he cannot completely deny his need for confirmation, and by staying away, there is more at stake in every interpersonal encounter. The stakes are higher, and if confirmation is not given, his felt need to retreat becomes stronger.

In chapter three, we studied how other people contribute to our sense of being continuous and how they might inhibit it. The development of depression rests in many ways on interpersonal relationships, beginning in childhood and onward. Once depressed, an other person may bring me back to a former perspective — one that shuts me down, halts my ability to act, and which is painful. Even if I do not come face to face with an other, the depressed person is still haunted by them, as we have seen, by adopting, however falsely the perspective of a punitive other. For a depressed person to come face to face is often unbearably hard. But why is this? The depressed person, in some way, is trying to hold onto consciousness, to maintain a sense of himself as whole and continuous. His hold on consciousness is tenuous, and other people threaten it. R. D. Laing, recall, called this engulfment. Other people can be for the depressed person the mechanism by which his consciousness comes to a halt.

But we can say more. The structures of the for-others must already be the dimensions of the self, says Merleau-Ponty (PP, 412). Others are different from the objects in the world in that
facing them, the depressed person sees himself in his situation as though under a headlight. He is not in fact like them; the day he has had is empty — "they" are the subjects, "they" are the ones with powers, "they" are the ones who gaze at him and reduce him to the status of object. Says, Merleau-Ponty, "The other is never strictly an object in my vision" (PP, 412). And indeed this is so for the depressed person. Yet the other is in the world, is master of his world, so it seems, and this, the very world that he is alien from, the world which he recoils from.

This characteristic of depression reveals most fully however what I will call "the secret desire" of depressed persons, which is to be in the flow of others, to be in the world with others. I have argued that desire is sick for depressed persons. The desire to recoil from the world, to escape the self in the only way he thinks he can, is a desire, and a true desire of his. It is not that we can think this is some strange counter of desire, but rather that this desire is tainted by self-loathing, he is both being punished by himself for not being good enough to be with others, but he cannot bear the thought of being with others, and so he complies with the punishment. The longer he isolates from other people, the more he deserving he is, the less worthy he is, he does nothing, he has nothing to say, he offers nothing. The desire to isolate, and the isolation itself drive self-loathing deeper, the habits of inaction, in short, these are depression's force -its "digger" into deeper and thicker dark holes of suffering.

The depressed person knows this last point. He knows isolation will make it worse — his desire is not so sick as to be able to deny this very fact to himself. He is aware that part of his suffering is a longing for expression with others. This longing and desire is attached to his essential belonging to a shared world, and to the intersubjective time that gives him to himself. It is others that give us the desire for our own life. We quote a passage by Merleau-Ponty in full:
The thinking subject or consciousness catches sight of itself as a man, an embodied subject, or a historical subject. The absolute flow appears perspectively to its own gaze as "a consciousness" (or as a man…) because it is a field of presence — presence to itself, to others, and to the world, and because this presence throws it into the natural and cultural world from which it can be understood. We…must represent this flow to ourselves as…a being who continues itself into the outside. [But we are not] individual flow followed by another, but rather each subjectivity taking itself up, and subjectivities taking each other up in the generality of nature, or the cohesion of an intersubjective life of a world. The present actualizes the mediation between the For-Itself and the For-Others, between individuality and generality. True reflection presents me to myself, not as an idle and inaccessible subjectivity, but as identical to my presence in the world and to others, such as I currently bring it into being: I am everything that I see and I am an intersubjective field, not in spite of my body and my historical situation, but rather by being this body and this situation and by being, through them, everything else" (PP, 477-478).

Depression prevents consciousness from catching sight of itself as a man, embodied subject, or historical subject, and this because the field of presence has been halted for consciousness. The depressed person has halted, in others words, action, time, but also the very being of his body and of his situation. He has difficulty achieving the true reflection that presents him to himself as "identical to [his] presence in the world and with others," prevented himself as being an "intersubjective field." 153 We can better understand Merleau-Ponty's points here, and the

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153 I contend that the depressed person "has difficulty" achieving this kind of true reflection, but I stress in section (iv) that this is not impossible, and is often found and achieved again in moments of beauty; of art, music and the
implications of this lack of an intersubjective field, and of isolation more generally, by contrasting isolation with what we might call a "healthy solitude."

In Part A of this thesis, we described healthy habits of perception as habits that open themselves onto a situation that itself affords such an opening. We noted that others play a crucial role in the healthy development of these habits, as they also may hinder such a development and render an individual to a lack of any sense of a consistent identity. Others may support our habits with mutual recognition, or they may put us in a double-bind such that we cannot respond at all. In the case of unhealthy habits, in which one cannot develop the sense being real or continuous, one might be said to be already isolated—withdrawn into himself and away from others and the world. We might investigate now the nature of such an isolation and contrast it with might be called a healthy solitude. In the experience of solitude one continues his sense of identity in explicit situations of otherness, and does so in their absence. Autonomy, then is not accomplished in isolation, but a healthy solitude is still a condition of it.

Given that other people play a crucial role in the development of autonomy, we might ask, in what ways solitude might be said to be healthy or unhealthy? Briefly, a healthy solitude must contain an initiative to act which is not based in a response to the other. Further, a healthy solitude will be a situation which itself calls for, and in fact demands such a position. For example, the student and the artist must often times seek solitude to do their work. An unhealthy solitude is one wherein a retreat away from the external world and into the internal processes may occur. We saw this in our example of the girl with the alcoholic mother (and in the schizophrenic). While the girl's initial response was the forming of a healthy habit of retreat from her situation, it becomes unhealthy in adult life when she retreats from her partner's desire

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memory they invoke of the depressed person as historical and intersubjective. Beauty is a theme we will expound on as part, however small or rare, depressed experience.
for intimacy. We can see more clearly the distinctions between a healthy and an unhealthy solitude by looking at Drew Leder's study of the "lived body."

Leder writes about the importance of the "lived body" and describes it as a body that is not enclosed within itself. The Cartesian body (and similarly the body of the Stoic), is such a bounded body, and this body cannot achieve the kind of healthy solitude we are trying to describe. He writes:

For there-in the body is seen as a force of deception and limitation and ontologically identified with sheer presence. It is an object with clearly defined location and boundaries, here, not there, enclosed within itself…Through the lived body I open to the world. This body is not then simply a mass of matter or an obstructive force. It is a way in which we, as part of the universe, mirror the universe.\(^{154}\)

The lived body is open to the world even in solitude, and indeed, Leder says, ritualized solitude such as mediation is a way of removing the bounds of the Cartesian or Stoic body. He writes that "in meditation one begins to suspend, examine, and overcome [the] separative body/mind."\(^{155}\) Mediation --as a form of solitude-- relativizes distinctions between inside and outside, self and Other, and he goes on to say: "the boundaries of these are transgressed and life is sustained by the interconnection of these."\(^{156}\) The absence of the lived body in pain and suffering, and in the unhealthy habits that seem to force us away from the world, is contrasted with this suspension of the separateness between mind and body, self and other, inside and outside. The bounded body of Cartesianism, or the Stoic's insistence of separateness, each precludes such a transgression of these dualities and also of the experience of solitude Leder is

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\(^{154}\) Drew Leder, *The Absent Body*, 173. Further references to this text will be cited as AB, followed by the page number.

\(^{155}\) Leder, AB, 170.

\(^{156}\) Leder, AB, 171.
describing. The body that is bounded in itself and external to the world, is a body without the autonomy we have been describing and such a body is unable to have the kind of healthy solitude we are referring to.

Leder writes again of what how such a solitude might be experienced:

When I am in solitude I can hear a "song" coming forth from everything. Each and everything has its own song; even moods, thoughts, and feelings have their finer songs. Yet beneath this variety they intermingle in one inexpressibly vast unity.\(^{157}\)

While others play a crucial role in our healthy developments, they also prepare us to be with ourselves and with the experience of being alive, whole, real and continuous, \textit{even} in their absence.

The isolation of depression, that "inability to be an intersubjective field" is experienced as a particular kind of suffering, in stark contrast to the above description of solitude. In part, we might speculate that the suffering is of that lack of unity, at the same time as it is the suffering of being bounded within oneself. The suffering of depression is indeed deeply connected to isolation. We spoke in our introduction to this section about the stages and episodes of depression, as well as the degree or extent to which a person may be said to be depressed. We noted that the tendency to isolate is depression's driver deeper, and that desire itself is sick in its avoidance of what it secretly wishes for. What ultimately defines the degree of depression \textit{for the depressed person} (as opposed to for others who witness her inactivity, self-loathing or isolation) is the degree of suffering undergone, and the degree to which a person is imprisoned within this suffering.

\(^{157}\) Leder, AB, 172.
Section 4. Suffering: Depression's Prison

The depressed person suffers, but what does he suffer? To be sure, he suffers his inability to act, his self-loathing and his isolation. But the suffering of depression is something more than, or different from, a number of various experiences piled upon one another as though each of these come in turn, adding pain as it progresses. The suffering one undergoes is the inescapability of the prison that depression has become.

We have established in sections 1 and 2 that in depression one becomes for himself everything and nothing; that inaction catalyzes the loop which makes depression a habit, that self-loathing binds itself to inaction and also to the need to isolate oneself. In section three, we saw how drives depression deeper, such that with each recoiling from the world and from others comes a more concrete and absolute isolation. While, then, in the first three sections, we focused on the "doing" of depression — the depressed person *does* the action of inaction, if you will, he *is* the action of self-loathing, and he accomplishes his isolation and alienation, in this section we focus on his experience as it is closest to him. The lived experience of depression is, I contend, the experience of being imprisoned in the everything and nothing he has become and in his alienation from the world. Importantly, depression is a prison because it has become a home. The depressed person suffers a deep familiarity with her prison.

Notice the use of the metaphor "prison." When someone utters "I feel like I am in a prison I cannot escape from," he describes using metaphor, a situation that has eluded the commonly understood language. He transfers the meaning from one idea to another to express what cannot be expressed.

*Part (i): Metaphor*
The depressed person, lives in certain sense, searching for expression that becomes possible only with the use of metaphor. For example, the depressed man in our example does not merely think "I must mail the letter," or "I can't mail the letter," he senses the effort (remembers it) in rising to action, and senses himself sinking into inaction. When he opens his eyes to the sickly grey of his surroundings, where objects lack colour and presence, he describes himself in darkness. "The grey drizzle of horror induced by depression," writes William Styron "takes on the quality of physical pain."158 Sinking into the grey drizzle of horror is sometimes described as suffocation or drowning. "The deepest depression," they say, "may be a frozen misery which is beyond tears" (Rowe, pp. 18, my emphasis). Plenty more metaphors are created by depressed persons in their attempt to describe the suffering they experience. She is sinking into darkness, there is a cloud between herself and the world, she has a sunken feeling, she is weeping on the inside, she is in a nightmare. The use of metaphor is significant not only for the way it provides expression of the experience, but also because the metaphor demonstrates the relationship the depressed person has to her past.

According to Dorothy Rowe, "the process of creating a metaphor need not be, in fact rarely is, a fully conscious one, mainly because the process can operate so quickly, but sometimes because the metaphor is drawn from a past experience which the person prefers to forget."159 I will pursue the metaphor of darkness in some detail. I do so not only because it is one of the most common used by depressed persons, but also because I agree with Rowe, that metaphor is at times drawn from past experience, indeed I contend, this is always the case. The depressed person returns in her depression to the moody character of a former "scene" in her life, one that is associated with pain of and loss. This scene is clouded in darkness — it is never

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158 Styron, Darkness Visible, 50.
159 Rowe, The Experience of Depression, 18
approached (or perceived) directly and remains a fuzzy representation of her current state of being. The horror and darkness that permeated every aspect of her previous experience, in other words the horror and darkness that made understanding and transformation impossible is now, again, her lived experience. It is described with reference to the past because that is all there is from which to draw from. We have established that she is alone, that her experience—that inner monologue—is utterly devoid of the other. She has no other resource to draw on to help her understand the reality that presents itself to her except her own history, and this history is itself shrouded in darkness. Let us now observe this phenomenon using our example of the depressed man.

The darkness of the present scene — the scene the depressed man wakes up to — is the darkness associated with a world he is alienated from, and which thus highlights himself as the only world he occupies, but importantly the same world he occupied in his own history. Recall implications of darkness:

*He opens his eyes to his environment and finds it hateful and dark. The things in his room are repugnant to him. They hover in the midst of a foggy and dim light, even the light itself seems dark, for it too is an object in his vision; and one that only accentuates the darkness of the rest.*

*He sees the objects in the room, in fact he stares at them for extended moments, but like staring at a fuzzy television set, he seems only to see a reflection of himself, as though the objects served a function of showing himself to himself, and of highlighting himself alienated from them.*

But this is because his past experience (or experiences) included moments in which he could not respond, he literally could not act. Recall for example the example used in chapter two of this
thesis — a child is bullied, told that she is worthless by her peers. She was incapable of responding then to these claims, she had not learned yet her own autonomous ability to acknowledge that she someone. She is not equipped yet to respond to this, and so begins a movement of "dialogue" with herself—is it true what they are saying? The defeated and disappointed conscience has to agree that it is in fact true. She is in darkness now, with only herself to act as the sayer in who she is. She now wakes up in the morning to a scene that is nothing but exactly what it was yesterday, and like our depressed man,

*The sick feeling gets worse; she feels perhaps as thought he is suffocating, or drowning, and he feels desperate for escape.*

Part (ii): The Need to Escape: a short note on Suicide

The depressed person has escaped from the world that he fears, yet he wants to escape from himself, from the prison he finds himself in. Styron contrasts the pain of depression with physical pain, and remarks on why the pain of depression fills one with the need for escape:

We learn to live with pain in varying degrees daily, or over longer periods of time, and we are more often than not mercifully free of it. When we endure severe discomfort of a physical nature our conditioning has taught us since childhood to make accommodations to the pain's demands—to accept it, whether pluckily or whimpering and complaining, according to our personal degree of stoicism, but in any case to accept it. Except in intractable terminal pain, there is almost always some form of relief; we look forward to that alleviation, whether it be through sleep or Tylenol or self-hypnosis or a change of posture or, most often, through the body's capacity for healing itself, and we embrace this eventual respite as the natural reward we receive for having been, temporarily, such good sports and doughty sufferers... In depression this faith in deliverance, in ultimate
restoration, is absent. The pain is unrelenting, and what makes the condition intolerable is the foreknowledge that no remedy will come—not in a day, and hour, a month, or a minute.\textsuperscript{160}

This "darkness" then, the metaphor for her complex experience offers no light, no ledge to cling to that offers to lift her back out. Suicide becomes a response to this. Suicide would be not merely a relief, but the response to that which resists, it is a \textit{surrendering}. It is the final action, the final response to that which resists every attempt I make to overthrow it, the resolution of the conflict between conscience and ego, taken by the finally depleted, but still desiring, ego trapped in a dark past.

\textit{Delusion}

We have discussed at some length the new understandings and insights that perception offers when a person has developed good habits. These understandings are not, with good habits, simply additions to a formerly developed but fixed perception of the world. They are perceptions that as we have said, give me new perspectives, or at least set me in a direction which is toward this. When we said in Chapter 2 that to be open to a world is to be open to change, and to be stuck in a world is to be stuck in a past, we stated something about the form that the experience of delusion takes. Of course, even describing delusion as an experience is suspect, since we think of delusion as a misunderstanding of reality, and so as not a "real" experience. To some extent this is true. If all I can take up in the present is past conceptions that do not hold the perspective of a living person I am engaged with, to what extent is that experience "real"?

The depressed person, to some extent or other, is stuck in a world and stuck in a past. This world becomes ever more incongruent with reality as time goes on. To the extent that I hold

\textsuperscript{160}Styron, DV, 61-62.
onto past worlds, interpretations and perspectives and I am less free to understand current worlds and perspectives, the more my perception may become out of touch with the perspectives of other people. This experience is "delusional" since it lacks a mutually recognized correspondence with others and the world.

Part (iii): Beauty and Eros

Is there any good, any beauty, to be found in depression? I think, yes. But it is not be found in the manic's false association with the world in which there is a sudden and profound relief from the darkness, but one which posits a false self, in a false world. Nor is it in his sense that he has a privileged position from which to see the world. However happy the manic may feel, he is still not in touch with beauty, for he is still detached from others and the world, still locked within his own monologue. Beauty is found in those moments when the depressed person catches a glimpse of his himself as alive, in the moments he remembers past moments of mutual expression with others, or when a piece of music pierces his core drawing out his desire for others and for life. William Styron, writes for example:

Late one bitterly cold night, when I knew that I could not possibly get myself through the following day, I sat in the living room of the house...I forced myself to watch a tape of a movie...at one point in the film, which was set in late-nineteenth-century Boston, the characters moved down the hallway of a music conservatory, beyond the walls of which from unseen musicians, came a contralto voice, a sudden soaring passage from the Brahms Alto Rhapsody. This sound, which like all music — indeed like all pleasure—I had been numbly unresponsive to for months, pierced my heart like a dagger, and in a flood of swift recollection I thought of all the joys the house had known: the children who had rushed through its rooms, the festivals, the love and work, the honestly earned
slumber, the voices and the nimble commotion...All this I realized was more than I could ever abandon, even as what I had set out so deliberately to do was more than I could inflict on those memories, and upon those, so close to me, with whom the memories were bound. And just as powerfully I realized I could not commit this desecration on myself.\textsuperscript{161}

We might say that his transformational experience of beauty revealed to Styron the truth of his intersubjective nature, and this was the realization, the epiphany that allowed him to change his mind. He found a way back to intersubjectivity. But notice the particulars of this experience: he watched the movie because he knew an actress in it, it was set in late-nineteenth century Boston, a historical place and time created by people, a beautiful voice sang Brahms \textit{Alto Rhapsody}; the experience was saturated with the other — and this across time and place. The beautiful voice was the voice of humanity, and his connection to it. But because he knows this voice is not his alone to hear, that it belongs to all, he is moved out of, if only for a moment, his isolated position. This idea can be expressed differently in the following way:

[writes Merleau-Ponty] The concrete red stands out against a background of generality, and this is why, even without passing over to the other's point of view, I grasp myself in perception as a perceiving subject and not as an unmatched consciousness" (PP, 477).

Such is the case of the music Styron heard, and in so hearing it (perceiving it) knew it to have its own background accessible to the perspectives of others (and indeed with others performing it). In other words, he was able to grasp himself as a subject again, not as unmatched, not, then, alone.

\textsuperscript{161} Styron, DV, 66-67.
But there is another way still that the depressed person may experience beauty, and it too involves "catching sight of the other." This beauty is found in the very darkness, though, but in darkness which the depressed person, for some reason or another, recognizes his turmoil as a human one—that the capacity for depression in all of its realms—the fear, the sadness, and the suffering more generally are capacities or possibilities for all, and always has been. He catches sight of the human realm and its struggles in his own. But this is not simply a morbid feeling of connection through the suffering, but can draw forth empathy for himself and for others, and this connection through empathy places him back in his situation, it brings him back to the intentional arc.

I have accomplished what I have set out to do in this dissertation which was to give a phenomenological description of depression. We now turn to the conclusion. I will make some suggestions for how these ideas might for relevant for thinking about treatment.

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162 Merleau-Ponty, VI, 155.
Conclusion

But precisely because it can shut itself off from the world, my body is also what opens me up to the world and puts me into a situation there. The movement of existence toward others, toward the future, and toward the world can begin again, as a river thaws.

(Merleau-Ponty, pp. 168)

Recall again the series of concentric circles described in our section on isolation. These were imagined to be a movement downward into deeper states of "depression." They represented the degree to which one's movement is not toward the world but away from it, in other words, the degree to which one is alienated from the world. We have used the word "alienated" often in this dissertation, but we have not described the phenomenon in explicit detail. However, in a certain ways we have already concluded the many ways that depression is a kind of alienation. It is the position of being an alien in a world otherwise open to receiving us as one with it. It is the sense of not belonging in a world that has its own time that carries on, with or without us. Depression is alienation from own bodies, and our own powers. It is remaining alien to what life could be.

My goal in this dissertation was not to propose a therapeutic model, but to identify and understand what the reality is that corresponds to the word depression. The successful fulfillment of this goal is the ability to say "this is what depression is." We have seen that there are many

\footnote{Again, see Susan Bredlau's "Respectful World," for the description of a world that invites, supports and respects us.}
avenues we can take in saying this, where one description ends, another is taken up. Depression is a global experience. It permeates every aspect of a depressed life; it is a way of perceiving, a way of living. It is the alienation from the world, as described above. It is the inability to immerse with the world in such a way that a person can forget herself and freely move. It is lack of autonomy and the lack of an ability to leap into new presents and new worlds. It is the melancholia of ancient Greece. It is the deafening silence of isolation and the lack of beauty perceived. It is being stuck in a past and in a perspective that precludes transformation, and it is a lack of expression. It is all these things, and more. It is difficult to pin down the "what" of depression in neat and tidy terms.

However difficult it may be though, we can return to the phenomenology we have performed, and note its overall movement of key features. Depression, I have argued is the interdependence of four features of the lived experience described, and under which all of the above descriptions and the many others we could add, will fall. It is a movement whereby one's inability to act (and this based in several ways that the habit-body has habits that lend to this inability) catalyzes an interplay occurring in the psyche and lived body of the depressed person. This distortion of the ideal form that perception takes turns depressed contact with the world into a monologue rather than a dialogue. This monologue is one of self-loathing because it is such a monologue, because it cannot rise to the world, plunge into a present, or even see its call. And this loathing sticks to the inaction, and the depressed individual declares to herself that it she is not worthy of contact with other people, that her actions do not in fact matter. Contact with other people confirms this because the monologue is already underway, and so others begin to do precisely what the depressed person dreads: they annihilate any coherent sense of self left, and they can do this because the depressed person has reached the point of not being able to really be
with others at all, present or not, she is closed to their perspective and world. The suffering of this realization — that she is again worthless — and the suffering of the pain of the isolation become a prison wherein movement out is impossible, and so it goes in ever deepening concentric circles, with time passing as it happens, and with time, her life. This movement of features is a web or reinforcing habits that are work in keeping depression as the dominating feature of experience, as the dominating way of seeing and being.

Depression is not one bad habit, but many. When we say that it permeates every aspect of experience, this means that every aspect of it, every situation calls upon the depressed person to remain where she is. We have said that the depressed person experiences herself as everything in her perception. How, then, can any experience really be new, how can any given moment offer the possibility for change? When as if by magic the depressed man hears Brahms Alto Rhapsody he may be jolted into the present, into the visible. But then how can this experience be sustained, how can he commit to the action? We might ask, then, what would be required to spiral back up out of the concentric circles of isolation, out of those movements down toward a deepening of one's powerlessness to act, that give with each spin more cause for self-loathing, and which take a person into the kind of suffering that becomes further and further away from expression? Is there a way to move back out and what it would entail? I do not propose a therapy, but I offer some suggestions for thinking about the experience of depression as allows or disallows a change in direction.

Since we have been studying the nature of the "I can" and autonomy more generally, and since depression is tied in part to an inability to be autonomous — an ability to realize, to perceive the worth of one's actions, and ultimately, to begin, to live—we might say that the way out is learning to perceive oneself as able, as belonging, as not alien. But this perception is not
done without the support of and immersion in the other. The depressed person must realize himself as the doer of his action, but the action itself cannot be done without the other. It may take several people to help a person complete a difficult project, but the person must complete it herself. This paradox may only be resolved at the deepest of concentric circles, at the point where survival is in question.

The depressed person has looked down into the lowermost point of his suffering, and found again, only himself, at the crossroad of the struggle between ego and conscience. He has realized himself as worthless, perhaps so worthless and hateful as to warrant the making of his own death, but in this moment, he also realizes the imperative to change, he must change—what he is doing is only causing more harm. And so perhaps he turns to the other, the only place he can turn. This turn is a leap. What is required to make that leap will, and, must, be something he alone finds at the bottom of the concentric circles he is trapped in. He plunges into the world of others, alone.

While perhaps the imagery of ever spiraling down resembles a simplistic model based in a cliché "you need to sink to rock bottom before you can climb your way up," and while perhaps there is some truth to that cliche, our model will have more layers than that. (And surely the depressed person "sinks to rock bottom" over and over again and repeats the same patterns upon coming out. Sinking, or thinking he's 'sunk' may move him temporarily but without the rehabilitation required for lasting change). What he finds alone at the "bottom of the concentric circles," is not only a certain depth of suffering that is intolerable, but an experience related to the necessity that he survives; and in that necessity finds himself to be something already -- his existence as one that is already in the world is revealed, as is, perhaps the beauty of its

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164 The notion of "hitting rock bottom" is central to the 12-step program of Alcoholics Anonymous. See Gregory Bateson's "The Cybernetics of "Self": A Theory of Alcoholism" for reference to this notion.
connection to others. This insight, this new perspective is the catalyst for movement. This given perception is for the depressed body the call of its own survival, of its already existing immersion that is a reality; he exists and he is not alone in this existence but shares it. The necessity of survival is not a biological "survival instinct," but the instinct of being already at home in a shared world. Within this particular depth, he meets the other and this meeting is the beginning of action. He then may mail the letter and the momentum of realizing his own action there as mattering may move him further still toward, perhaps therapy, and the lengthy practice of rehabilituation with the other. While this description is perhaps quite optimistic and idealistic, I suggest that as movement it is a plausible description, and we could go on to describe a momentum that may take effect. Further, the suffering we describe may be grave and unbearable, and perhaps he need not 'sink that low' — but -- he must recognize the call to plunge into the present, as his present, and he must upon doing so begin working his way back out, with practice and with the help of others.
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