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Ethics and Awareness

A Social Psychological Study of Impediments to Dynamic Moral Awareness

by

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Faculty of Religious Studies

McGill, Montreal

February, 1995

A thesis submitted

to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

This study examines impediments to dynamic moral awareness. Following the understanding of knowledge developed by Michael Polanyi and Bernard Lonergan, ethics is presented not as a science of abstract norms and principles, but as a transformative science of reflection on moral activity. Drawing from the social sciences, negative structural patterns which corrupt transformative awareness are examined under the rubrics of self-deception, social ignorance, ideology, dependency and social conformity. These investigations identify and analyze sociological and psychological features of dynamic relationships preventing or corrupting processes of personal transformation and the building up of moral human community. At each stage of the study, the central role of economic and political structures and conditions influencing modern consciousness, and defining society, are taken into account. This research provides insights and analytical tools to increase our capacity to become awareness of the subtle social psychological dynamics which stifle human creativity and block moral and social development within contemporary society.

Résumé

Cette thèse examine les obstacles au développement et au maintien de la conscience morale dynamique. Suivant le concept de la connaissance élaboré par Michael Polanyi et Bernard Lonergan, l'éthique est ici présentée non pas comme une science abstraite de principes et de normes mais comme une science transformationnelle de réflexion sur l'activité morale. S'appuyant sur des études appartenant à diverses sciences sociales, cette thèse examine les structures négatives qui corrompent la conscience morale dynamique ou empêche son développement, sous les rubriques suivantes: l'auto-déception, l'ignorance sociale, l'idéologie, la dépendance et la conformité sociale. Ces investigations identifient et analysent les caractéristiques sociologiques et psychologiques des structures interindividuelles qui nuisent à la transformation personnelle et qui, d'autre part, renforcent la communauté morale. A chaque étape de la thèse, l'auteur se rend compte du rôle central des conditions économiques et politiques dans la formation de la conscience moderne. Ces investigations offrent des perceptions et des instruments analytiques capables de promouvoir des réponses personnelles et collectives aux processus déshumanisants qui dans la société contemporaine étouffent la créativité humaine et le développement moral.

Preface

The Questions

As a social organizer, often I have witnessed individual and group resistance to ideas and actions for positive change. I have also observed - and experienced - the power of psychological, interpersonal and social performances which encourage us to avoid an honest awareness of the central facts, patterns and operation of addictions and damaging relationships.

Why do we resist becoming aware of the very things which are the source of our suffering and despair? What are the impediments blocking the kind of awareness that would improve self-esteem? How do we increase our motivation to act morally to build a happier, finer and fairer world? What makes us turn our attention away from those things that would generate awareness and lead to positive, self-empowered action? What are the societal factors which impede the effective functioning of moral consciousness within contemporary society?

Moral and spiritual transformation requires a dynamic interplay of two different types of knowing in human consciousness: one type apprehends and assimilates knowledge from experience; the other type constructs an understanding of self and society from that experiential knowledge. The goal of this process of information gathering, integration and knowledge construction is transformation. To move toward greater fidelity to - and a greater realization of - one's inherent moral and social vision in one's day-to-day life, it is imperative that the psychosocial requirements for moral and spiritual transformation are not frustrated at the level of human consciousness, lived experience, and social interaction.

Why is it that social inequality, injustice, poverty and the breakdown of moral human communities are increasing throughout the world at such alarming rates? Why do masses of people participate and give support to destructive personal and social processes? A systematic examination of the captivating capacity of various elements and patterns of thinking and acting can generate important information. When isolated fragments of information are viewed together in an interconnected way, people can gain awareness of the particular social and psychological factors which constitute impediments to moral action and transformation. Such information can assist in the quest for greater human freedom and social justice.

Questions concerning moral improvement at the individual level are seldom situated within the social context which either forms or deforms people. This study of moral consciousness, on the contrary, proceeds with both eyes on the social context. It develops a theoretical understanding of possible factors that can explain impediments to dynamic moral awareness. Such an understanding can then assist in the detection of the actual dynamics of oppression and injustice operating in our daily lives.

Objective

This work explores the mechanics of moral consciousness to understand better how human *attention* can be de-focussed from moral concerns, and how this de-focussing corrupts consciousness, stifling positive personal and social change. The aim is not to generate information simply for the sake of making a *contribution to knowledge*. The intent is to generate understanding and power for more effective strategies for personal and social transformation. To achieve this objective, a theoretical framework is developed to explore *conceptually* the factors and circumstances which diminish awareness, deflect attention away from caring for ourselves and others, and decrease our motivation to initiate, or to pursue, moral and spiritual transformation.

This study identifies and clarifies the social psychological factors which constitute barriers to moral awareness and personal and social liberation. It lays the groundwork for a practical ethic of awareness able to spell out the main features of personal and social reality in concrete terms. It aims to increase our capacity to detect and overcome impediments to moral awareness and transformation in our personal and social lives.

Elements of an Ethic of Awareness

An ethic of awareness seeks to explain the powers that drive human consciousness and push us to act in certain ways. Many ethicists do not consider what keeps people from realizing their full potential; they more often attempt to map out a vision of what that potential is, or to prescribe moral norms and principles which they deem appropriate for the person's particular situation or dilemma. Some simply engage other professional ethicists in debate over various intellectual issues and ethical subtleties. Few ethicists consider the captivating negative patterns of thinking and acting that block moral awareness and transformation operating within the social institutions in which they live and work. An ethic of awareness combines the insights from psychological and social analysis to build an understanding capable of discerning impediments to dynamic moral awareness in the individual, and in the whole human family. This approach builds on various other well-known theological and popular movements and teachings.

Liberation and political theologians, for example, speak of *consciousness raising* as the appropriate aim of the church's pastoral ministry. They define the process as one of *leading*, or *calling* people to an awareness of the obstacles that prevent them from *being responsible subjects* of their lives. Christians find in the Gospel message the call to a life of *seeking* moral perfection based on the social vision of the *Reign of God* of which Jesus spoke in his parables. Those who wish to follow in the footsteps of Jesus find that to do so they must engage their consciousness and daily lives in the actual social dynamic of their society. They experience in the Gospel message a moral and spiritual call to imitate Jesus in his selfless identification with the poor and downtrodden. They believe that they

must *do justice* to demonstrate the authenticity of their faith in God. In trying to achieve the Reign - which Christians acknowledge is not fully attainable within the limitations of earthly life - their consciousness and daily lives are transformed by the power of their faith and their actions.

This radical transformation in thinking and acting is not an experience limited to Christians, or for that matter, followers of other religions. When a person decides - or is challenged - *to realize* (awareness) the true source of human suffering, and then further decides *to try to do something* (moral action) to neutralize that source, the truth about the world (and one's life in the world) can take a potent form, revealing the carefully-camouflaged contradictions within society, as well as in personal consciousness: poverty and inequality are made manifest in their rawest forms. From the awareness of the sources of our own and other people's unnecessary suffering comes the spiritual call to moral action and social solidarity to act to overcome oppression and exploitation.

Achieving moral awareness presupposes moral action. At the same time, moral action presupposes moral awareness. Moral power (the power to effect and participate in positive change) comes when insight reveals the moral significance of personal and social change in anticipation of a better future. Setting the right course for moral action in contemporary society requires an understanding of the circumstances and interpersonal patterns and structures which are impeding people from living economically-stable and morally-rewarding lives. An ethic of awareness calls us to *want to know* so that we can choose the moral actions which produce personal growth and societal human fulfilment based on equality and justice.

Awareness of injustice can evoke feelings of compassion for those afflicted and victimized by domination and social inequality. When attention turns to those individuals or structures perpetrating injustices, *compassion* for those enslaved or victimized naturally leans toward actions to overcome whatever is enslaving or victimizing them. Awareness of injustice gives rise to moral motivation and a social imagination upon which to plan actions aimed at alleviating suffering and correcting social injustices. Once a person becomes aware of how he or she is stuck in negative patterns, or how he or she is

contributing unwittingly to social evil by participating in unjust structures, the new awareness can give rise to increased energy to act for positive change. And it can inspire creative ideas and plans to move from negative patterns characterized by *caughtness and compulsion* toward a liberating and rewarding experience of *mutual love and respect* in relationships, which are sheltered by the security of just and sustainable social structures which truly protect and support moral human community.

Assumptions

Like all inquiry into human thinking and acting, this study proceeds from a few basic assumptions, and was guided by a definite value perspective. The selection and integration of social psychological information was determined by the author's ethical vision of human liberation, social justice and Christian redemption. The method of this approach is non-religious in character, but relies on a foundational anthropology which regards the human person as a moral and spiritual being capable of transformation.

A package of *assumptions* can be found in every value perspective. One such assumption for this study - which I believe is especially crucial given the circumstances of the contemporary social context - is that immorality more often results not from people *knowingly doing wrong*, but rather, from people *knowingly, or unknowingly, not doing what is right*. The greatest human sufferings and tragedies in the world today are not being suffered by people who made bad moral choices. More often than not, our failure to grow spiritually through moral action is not the result of choice, but comes as a complex consequence of our participation in society.

People are naturally inclined to aspire toward moral improvements for themselves and society. They tend to deteriorate if they fail to improve, or if they fail to contribute to the improvement of other people in their lives. The failure to bring about meaningful change often stems from an inability or unwillingness to take the steps necessary to develop moral consciousness and habits of moral action - not from a lack of knowledge about what is morally-preferable and desired. The important questions to address are:

what are the reasons that explain the interruption of moral and spiritual development?
What are the primary causes for the factors and circumstances which describe and explain human deformation and immorality?

This study assumes that much human suffering and destructive behaviour evident in the contemporary situation is caused by unjust and fragmented social systems which distort social information, deform moral consciousness, and manipulate and exploit people, entrapping them in daily routines which are neither healthy nor conducive to moral human development. The situations within our society in which individuals, families and communities seek a just and peaceful coexistence are being supported less and less by authorities still perceived to be legitimate. Government laws, international trade deals, and a dominant global culture together work on people to entrench an *ethic of competition* into their consciousness and daily lives. Competition, and having competitive advantage over others, has become the dominant mode of operation and form of organization within social life. This situation makes the call to live a moral and rewarding life, in arrangements based on principles of cooperation and caring with others, a challenge. Ironically, and sadly, the physical, psychological, and spiritual scars suffered by people who resist adaption to unjust social institutions, coercive and dehumanizing rules, and damaging cultural stereotypes are too often explained in ways that obscure the social source of human deformation and destroy dynamic moral awareness.

Another assumption in this study is that there can be no escape from moral stagnation and captivity, and no experience of healing or liberation from servitude or oppression, without attaining insight into what is preventing such an experience from occurring. Becoming aware of the complex social factors and subtle psychological forces which shape human consciousness, and establish the boundaries for human activity, is a must for morally-authentic and effective action in our fragmented world.

Method and Sources

Conventional ethics normally attempts to establish rational grounds to evaluate and judge the moral worth of human thinking and acting. Positions are postulated and defended with argumentation. Theses are either proven or disproved with a focussed attention on predetermined claims which are evaluated. The claims which are tested define the scope of the project. This is not the method followed in this study.

This study uses an approach designed to integrate information and insights that uncover the dynamic workings of human and social life that subvert moral awareness and constrain human freedom. The aim is to understand better the forces and structures influencing human consciousness. I rely first on my own experience of oppression and injustice in Canadian individuals, families, and groups. I bring together insights from personal experiences and the relevant findings of social scientists to provide possible answers to the questions articulated in the beginning of this preface. The primary sources of information are psychology, sociology, social psychology and ethics. There are many valuable avenues of inquiry for an investigation of moral awareness and dynamic personal and social change - such as the *cooperative movement* and *feminism* - which have not been included in this study, which is a limitation. The study makes several references to concrete situations, but is intended to be a theoretical study to equip people from a broad spectrum of social groups, traditions and religions, (who share a common concern for fellow human beings who suffer unnecessarily for want of positive changes to the organization of society) with practical insights and ideas to facilitate processes of moral transformation and social change.

To research the interface between the human and social sciences from the perspective of an ethic of awareness, I rely on models and concepts from liberation theology and emancipatory social science based on critical research methods. Many of these same approaches have been adopted (and adapted) to the Canadian social reality by social theorists and the Canadian churches.

Scope

The scope of this study is determined by the objective and method, not a predetermined claim or conventional thesis statement. As earlier stated, the purpose of the inquiry is to examine systematically the factors, forces and conditions of personal and social life to discover what impedes people from achieving authentic personal growth and positive social transformation. To achieve these aims, the approach adopted is akin to going on a fishing trip. As with a fishing trip, there are reasonable expectations of catching certain types of fish by looking in certain places and anticipating the most appropriate tools for the task. To achieve deeper insight into the impediments blocking the transformation of consciousness, the scope of ideas that can be gathered in the net is vast, and the net is cast wide to gather as many illuminating ideas and insights as possible.

Relying on a specialized vocabulary of terms from one professional discipline (such as philosophy) restricts the scope of inquiry, and discourages the development of dynamic moral awareness; i.e., gaining insight into the interconnected meaning of things through the integration of two modes of knowing (concrete and abstract) in one dynamic life process. This research seeks to overcome the restricted bias within much contemporary ethical reflection and theory by integrating information and insights from a range of social sciences.

The language and terms used in this dissertation ensure that a proper amount of attention is given to the essential unity of the human person as both *personal* and *social* being. Awareness of this fact is central to the dynamic method which is followed: indeed, reflecting on the interaction of personal and social is the very essence of dynamic moral awareness and strategic ethical planning. It is only at the important juncture of *personal and social* within consciousness that a person is energized and prompted to embark (or continue) on a journey of moral transformation and constructive social engagement.

Unless we are continually summoned by the beauty and power of the truth, we will not be able to maintain a commitment to pursue personal liberation and social justice (and thereby remain faithful to our highest moral or religious ideal). Many people will never

decide to make any significant changes in their lives without first experiencing either a *gradual* or *sudden* moral or religious conversion - a transformation of consciousness - which inspires and motivates them to become more spiritual. An ethic of awareness proceeds on the presumption that the reader is open to transformation; (i.e., to read a book titled *ethics and awareness* already indicates a predisposition or *openness* to transformation). Such an attitude of the heart is conducive to moral transformation.

The most difficult challenge for ethics is to respond to the injustices of the day at the level of the lived experience of individuals, families and communities, and to respond with practical theories and strategic information to foster transformation and to overcome debilitating *personal* situations and oppressive *social* conditions. This ethical investigation into the workings of human consciousness and personal and social change provides some assistance.

The originality in this work lies in the manner in which a range of insights and ideas have been organized and presented to clarify the social psychological requirements for dynamic moral awareness in contemporary society. This objective is achieved by revealing the structural dynamics of social psychological impediments to awareness. The hope is that this study will encourage an ethical reflection process in the reader that will culminate in greater awareness of the possibilities for moral transformation, social action, and spiritual growth.

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Chapter One

Moral Action and the Dynamics of Human Knowing

Evaluating human action is a central and ongoing task of ethical reflection. This is especially true for an ethic investigating the social psychological dynamics of human action and social change from the perspective of *awareness*. We can view all human and social change as a historical dynamic that we continually experience, interpret, evaluate and act upon. This study begins with such a dynamic view of the human person: individuals can interpret information and evaluate change by transcending temporal and physical boundaries in moral and spiritual reflection that explore new options. We can also choose to embark on creative action paths in strategic pursuit of envisioned goals.

The capacity to envision future possibilities and make plans, and the capacity for effective moral transformation and meaningful social change, depends on the degree to which we guide our lives based on a dynamic awareness and ethical vision. Christians strive to be *followers of Christ*, as they struggle to imitate his identification with, and love for, the poor and downtrodden. Others pursue a vision of life inherent in a certain philosophy. Although not the focus of this study, the links between moral awareness and caring, caring and the motivation to act, and transformation through action, are related integrally.

Viewing moral awareness and moral action as interdependent aspects of a person's life helps us to understand better how the degree of awareness an individual has of the ability to chart a life course can range from continuous awareness, to periods of awareness interrupted by occasions of ignorance or self-deception, to a perpetual state of false consciousness and distorted identity. Different conscious states of awareness have corresponding consequences for the quality and character of moral action. Before studying the actual limits and potentialities of human knowing, it is useful to begin an inquiry into moral action and the dynamics of awareness by identifying a fundamental anthropology which serves as a starting point for this study.

1. Self-reflection: The Psychological Foundation for Moral Human Action

Different people view the nature of human action quite differently, offering distinct explanations of what it means to be a human being. Underlying these different views of humanity is a more foundational anthropology that affirms the dynamic structure of human nature and the capacity for self-awareness and self-determination. In his book, *Praxis and Action: Contemporary Philosophies of Human Activity*, Richard J. Bernstein considers four contemporary philosophical approaches from this perspective: *Marxism*, *Existentialism*, *Pragmatism* and *Analytic Philosophy*. According to Bernstein, these divergent approaches all share the same belief that human beings are *intentional* creatures, capable of both critical awareness and self-directed human action that, together, can transform self and society: "It is not only Marx who thinks that the point of understanding is no longer just to 'interpret' but to 'change'; this basic orientation is shared by both existentialists and pragmatists. This, of course, does not diminish their differences concerning what is to be changed, how it is to be changed, and why change is so vital."¹

The task of constructing an ethical theory upon this common anthropological foundation begins with our grasping the essential connection between moral *awareness* (*thinking*) and moral *transformation* (*action*). It is helpful to recall the classic distinction made by Aristotle between *theoria* and *praxis* to clarify what this distinction means for moral consciousness.

1.1 Theoria and Praxis: The Dialectic of Moral Awareness

In Aristotle's distinction between *theoria* and *praxis*, *theoria* signifies those sciences and activities concerned with *knowing for its own sake*, while *praxis* designates a particular mode of knowing which aims at personal and social *transformation*. Bernstein believes Aristotle also used the term *praxis* in a more restricted sense, to signify the disciplines and activities predominant in ethical and political life:

¹ Bernstein, *Praxis and Action: Contemporary Philosophies of Human Activity*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971, p. 316.

*Those disciplines, which require knowledge and practical wisdom, can be contrasted with 'theoria' because their end is not knowing or wisdom for its own sake, but doing well - living well. When we add that for Aristotle, individual ethical activity is properly a part of the study of political activity - activity in the 'polis,' we can say that 'praxis' signifies the free activity (and the disciplines concerned with this activity) in the 'polis.'*²

Aristotle did not consider *theoria* a particular form of life (contemplative) as opposed to *praxis* (active). This is unfortunately the meaning often attributed to these terms in popular culture and institutions (e.g., in the traditional classification of religious vocations, *contemplative* and *active*). *Theoria*, for Aristotle, does not represent a passive, contemplative state of mind; *theoria* involves disciplined activity, both mental and physical. As Bernstein notes, "It is not entirely accurate to call 'theoria' and 'praxis' ways or forms of life, for according to Aristotle they emerge as two dimensions of the truly human and free life."³

Transformative knowledge comes only from the continuous interplay of these two modes of knowing (*abstract* and *concrete*) in a single life process where human reflection and agency struggle to bring about - at one and the same time, through a single course of action - the transformation of self and society. This research into the social psychological dynamics of moral transformation and social change is in fact an investigation of the various dynamics that *stunt* or *repress* moral awareness as a result of either an inability, or unwillingness, to balance and integrate two essential modes of perceiving reality, and engaging oneself in society.

² Bernstein, *Praxis and Action*, p. 10. Aristotle's belief that *knowing for its own sake* can constitute a legitimate *telos* for inquiry, fails to appreciate how all knowledge - including (and perhaps especially) the findings of the natural sciences - have ethical significance. The value significance of different types and methods of inquiry will be explored in chapter four.

³ Bernstein, *Praxis and Action*, p. x.

1.2 Social Knowledge Plus Moral Responsibility: The Fuel of Praxis

The *desire* to comprehend and improve one's life is the fuel of transformative action. This desire is the basis of our "need to know." Improving one's life requires a continuous stream of decisions, work and self-directed initiative. To know in a transformative way requires what Paulo Freire called *thematic investigation*:

Thematic investigation thus becomes a common striving towards awareness of reality and towards self-awareness, which makes this investigation a starting point for the educational process or for cultural action of a liberating character.⁴

Without such activity, there can be no dynamic moral awareness. Knowledge begins and ends with the activity of the knower. The more active an approach we take regarding the exploration of the world, the more we deepen our critical awareness of reality. Gaining the capacity to *spell out* the meaning of occurrences in the social world enables us to relate to the world and others in an open and confident way, freed from debilitating negative emotions that accompany states of self-deception and ignorance. Being unable to comprehend the origin of negative emotions can foster a dynamic of *reacting to* - or perhaps *following, without questioning* - *another* initiative or influence, rather than encourage us to act of our *own* initiative by taking responsibility for our decisions and actions, thereby achieving a greater degree of freedom.

What we know cannot be separated from *how* we know. Knowledge is the product of an intellectual activity initiated by our active engagement in society:

"Knowledge is not innate, ready-made in the mind, at least not the knowledge we have and know. Nor is it acquired by passively allowing an influx of sensations. Knowledge is constructed."⁵

Thematic investigation is not simply a mechanical act of information acquisition. It involves a searching process by which the investigator solves (often by first "dissolving")

⁴ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Seabury, 1970) p. 98.

⁵ D. W. Gotshalk, *The Structure of Awareness: Introduction to a Situational Theory of Truth and Knowledge* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1969) p. 13.

complex problems by discovering important information and linking ideas and events using meaningful models and themes. To gain a clearer understanding of the various components of this process, we need to reflect on the *structural limitations* and psychological *dynamics* of human knowing.

2. Moral Awareness and the Psychology of Human Knowing

The open-ended character of human life, and the frustrating social and natural limitations experienced by the human mind and body, leave human beings with a greatly-restricted capacity to experience the *fullness* of reality. These limitations can produce many negative social and psychological consequences, chief among which is a fixation in consciousness that causes the person to relate to, and mentally dialogue with, *objectifications* and *speculations*, rather than *objects* and *actualities* (i.e., the *real* world).

Dualism, as a permanent mental construct or world view, is a reflection of the mind's inability to do two things simultaneously: *distance* itself from concrete reality in an attempt to construct a mental replication of concrete reality, or an ideal imagination of what could be; and *experience* the integral unity of concrete reality or, in terms less technical, *that which is*. The dualistic split can happen easily because of the limitations of the mind's eye or *attention*, which must invariably move back and forth between real particulars, and some abstract theoretical construct. The mind does this naturally in a quest to piece together a meaningful and more comprehensive explanation of things. The following sections explore the moral phenomenon of human knowing (thinking) and becoming (acting) in the dynamic psychology of Michael Polanyi and Bernard Lonergan.

2.1 Human Attention and the Psychic Limits of Knowing

In his book *Attention*, Paul Bakan notes that despite the central importance given to human attention in early experimental psychology, most proponents of various schools of modern psychology such as behaviourism, gestalt psychology, psychoanalysis, and

stimulus-response learning theory have tended either to ignore the function of attention, or to relegate it to a position of little concern.⁶ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, in his article *Attention and the Holistic Approach to Behaviour*, believes that it was Freud's revolutionary theory of the unconscious that was responsible for the subsequent lack of study on human attention. He believes that because Freud devoted his life to showing that mental processes happen below the threshold of consciousness, and attention is not always fully in control, " . . . further study of attention as the basic form of psychical energy, which Freud clearly stated, was soon and permanently overshadowed by fascination with unconscious processes. 'Psychical energy' became associated with the 'libido'."⁷

Retrieving a sense of the central importance of *attention* for moral consciousness is the point of departure for the development of both a foundational psychology and a practical theory of knowing and acting: a dynamic ethics of awareness requires both.

How are we to define attention? Quite simply, human attention is the *focal capacity of the mind*. When someone tells us to *pay attention*, they are telling us to focus on what they want us to see, hear, or understand. Attention is the process that regulates states of consciousness by admitting or excluding various experiences into consciousness. The capacity to focus attention on one thing leaves us momentarily unaware of virtually everything else.⁸ This selective and restrictive structure of attention is the most basic and important psychological fact of human experience. It provides the foundation for critical psychology.

⁶ Paul Bakan ed., *Attention: An Enduring Problem for Psychology*, (Toronto, Ontario: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1966), p. iii.

⁷ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, "Attention and the Holistic Approach to Behaviour," found in *The Stream of Consciousness: Scientific Investigations into the Flow of Human Experience*, Kenneth S. Pope and Jerome L. Singer eds., (New York: Plenum Press, 1978), p. 338.

⁸ There is some debate among psychologists regarding the number of items the human mind can attend to at one time. Reflection on my own experience leads me to agree with William James, the founder of modern psychology, that the answer is " . . . not easily more than one, unless the processes are very habitual; but then two, or even three, without very much oscillation of the attention." William James, "Attention," found in *Attention: An Enduring Problem in Psychology*, Paul Bakan, ed., (Toronto, Ontario: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1966), p. 9.

It is easy to see the wide-ranging implications of William James's penetrating insight concerning attention: "My experience is what I agree to attend to. Only those items which I notice shape my mind - without selective interest, experience is utter chaos."⁹ This observation appears so much like commonsense knowledge as to appear trivial. It is, however, a key insight. To grasp the power and importance of attention, one has only to give the term another name: *psychic energy*. This is what Csikszentmihalyi does. He regards attention as a form of psychic energy that enables us to control the *stream of consciousness*. The image of consciousness as a *stream* stands in stark contrast to the metaphor of the mind found in Freud.¹⁰ The finite resources of attention - and the physical restrictions of existence from the limits dictated by place and time - clearly narrow the scope of what human beings can know and do.

It is necessary that we are both *able* and *willing* to focus voluntarily and invest our attention to achieve valued personal and social goals. This is not always possible, with detrimental negative psychological consequences for the mental and spiritual health of human beings. An increase in awareness of the human capacity for intentional moral action brings with it additional responsibilities and obligations to oneself and to others. But how free are human beings? What are the natural and social constraints on human action? Considering the dynamic of knowing and acting in terms of who, or what, *controls* the successive focusing of human attention is enlightening. Csikszentmihalyi believes that: "The inability to focus attention voluntarily leads to psychic disruption, and eventually to psychopathology."¹¹ With such an economic view of attention it is possible, as Csikszentmihalyi explains, to reinterpret the notion of *alienation* developed by Marx in his

⁹ William James, *Principles of Psychology*. Vol. 1. (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1890) p. 402.

¹⁰ Portraying human consciousness as a *stream* differs significantly from the compartmentalized and relatively-fixed image of the mind as a three-level house (id, ego, superego) found in Freudian Psychoanalysis. How we talk about the human mind has consequences for ethics: the metaphor of stream points to the dynamic nature and structures of human consciousness and encourages us to think in terms of successive stages of change; the metaphor of a compartmentalized house can easily contribute to an excessive concern with achieving a static reality and can encourage us to defend a status quo situation that should be changed.

¹¹ Csikszentmihalyi, *Attention and the Holistic Approach to Behaviour*, p. 348.

early manuscripts, as referring, quite literally, to the workers selling out control over their attention to the employer.

A wage labourer, in effect, consents to focus attention on goals determined by the owner of capital. He or she thereby becomes alienated by relinquishing control over psychic energy (attention) and the direction of his or her life experience. Alienation is never total, however; workers seldom need to give *undivided* attention to the job. Those who are forced to alienate the focus of their psychic energy can still daydream, remember, or engage in voluntary thinking and theoretical planning. Still, the material social reality sets the boundaries for personal choices: "The major social institutions - economy, law, government, media - are all formalized structures of attention; they define who should pay attention to what."¹²

When we decide to turn our attention to a particular thing we are exercising our capacity for human choice. We are often also revealing by our choice, a particular interest or preference that has moral significance for the establishment of a self-understanding and identity. Although a multitude of imposing stimuli may bombard us *demanding* our attention without any explicit decision on our part to *focus our attention*, human attention is, nonetheless, that unique capacity whereby human subjectivity (freedom) and human consciousness (moral awareness) intersect. This capacity to exercise agency through the purposeful control of our attention suggests some of the requirements needed to unify personal and social in *consciousness* and in *life praxis*. With the multitude of demands being placed on people in contemporary society, it is easy to understand the difficulty for people to gain, or to reclaim, control over their attention, consciousness, and actions.

It is important that ethics recognize that social systems draw - often coercively - from the same limited human pool of attention as do individuals:

*It follows that the creation and maintenance of social systems is dependent on the same source on which individual experience depends. What one does with one's attention not only determines the content of one's life, but also shapes one's relationship with social systems, thereby affecting the existence of such systems.*¹³

¹² Csikszentmihalyi, *Attention and the Holistic Approach to Behaviour*, p. 354.

¹³ Csikszentmihalyi, *Attention and the Holistic Approach to Behaviour*, p. 353.

That personal development and the maintenance of socio-cultural systems depend on limited supplies of psychic energy raises key ethical questions concerning how much attention is paid to what, and under what conditions. It also points to the need for unity between the personal and social dimensions of life, to avoid duplicity in our use of psychic energy. It is important that ethics examine all the influencing factors affecting human attention. We also need to understand the psychological structure of attention. Is attention given voluntarily or under constraint? Can we attend to the same thing in more than one way? These questions on human consciousness have been key concerns of a number of prominent *Philosophers of Mind*.

2.2 Michael Polanyi: Knowing as Alternating Psychological-Social Dynamic

Michael Polanyi sheds considerable light on both the psychological *structure* and *operations* of human knowing. In a collection of philosophical essays titled *Knowing and Being*, Polanyi describes how the mind functions within a physical environment. The basic insight upon which William James based his entire psychology is also central to Polanyi's philosophy of knowing and being - the human mind is restricted in its ability to focus attention. Polanyi investigates the impact of this psychological restriction on consciousness.

Polanyi explains how we attempt to compensate for our limited capacity to attend to objects, and grasp the interrelated meaning of things, by continuously shifting our attention between the *particular* and *general* aspects of things:

In the first case we focus our attention on the isolated particulars; in the second, our attention is directed beyond them to the entity to which they contribute. In the first case therefore we may say that we are aware of the particulars 'focally'; in the second, that we notice them 'subsidiarily in terms of their participation in a whole'.¹⁴

This key observation that *particulars* can be noticed in two different ways is central to Polanyi's epistemology and psychology of human knowing. He explains how we

¹⁴ Michael Polanyi, *Knowing and Being: Essays by Michael Polanyi*, Marjorie Grene ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), p. 128.

can be aware of particulars uncomprehendingly (*focally*), i.e., in themselves, or understandingly (*subsidiarily*), in terms of the contribution particulars make to a more general understanding of a comprehensive entity. The same process by which the mind connects particulars, in the unified activity of the person pursuing a particular insight, occurs as well while pursuing concrete goals. Again, the movement is from particular actions to some integrated result to bring forth the fulfilment of a comprehensive unified project: "In a skill we have a set of elementary motions, integrated in fulfilment of a joint performance. These elements are the subsidiaries of this focal act. They possess a joint meaning in being co-ordinated to this common purpose. We are attending 'from' them 'to' their integrated result."¹⁵

Polanyi explains how *focal* and *subsidiary* awareness are not two *degrees* of attention, but two *kinds* of attention given to the same particulars. He illustrates the distinction between focal and subsidiary awareness with concrete examples: "There is a fundamental difference between the way we attend to the pointing finger and its object. We attend to the finger by 'following its direction' in order to look at the object. The object 'is then at the focus of our attention,' whereas the finger 'is not seen' focally, 'but as a pointer' to the object."¹⁶

This example helps to clarify the two levels of human awareness: the lower one for the clues or other subsidiary elements, and the higher one for the focally-apprehended comprehensive entity to which these elements point. A true act of consciousness has both an identifiable object as its focal point, and a set of subsidiary roots that function as *clues*. It is *subsidiary* awareness of a thing that endows it with meaning: a meaning that bears somehow on an object of which we are *focally* aware. The continuous process in which the mind fuses clues to the emerging mental image to which they point suggests how gaining insight is not primarily the result of *deduction*, but follows a process of integration or *construction*. The process by which we *come to understand* is driven by what G. W.

¹⁵ Polanyi, *Knowing and Being*, p. 182.

¹⁶ Polanyi, *Knowing and Being*, p. 161.

Gotshalk calls the *epistemological purpose* guiding an investigation of reality: "But above all there is the epistemological purpose that informs the inductive act. This is the effort to use what we know to understand what we do not yet know, and by a process of synthesis to enlarge the frontiers of awareness of the world that is there to be known."¹⁷

We increase our awareness of self and world through a process of knowledge construction. The process is akin to that of a painter moving the brush from palette to canvas, choosing separate colours, mixing colours, creating unique shades and hues, all the while set on taking action to recreate on a canvass the image he or she has in mind. The purpose is to construct one integrated scene from many strokes of the brush. Physical and mental activity work cooperatively in the project. This analogy offers a symbolic description of how the mind strives for full understanding by continuously alternating between the perception and analysis of particulars (paints), to the integration of that knowledge (mixing paints), then making meaningful and insightful connections through mental activity (painting), to create a unified understanding (a painting). In shifting between a focus on generalities and particulars, something is always temporarily lost, again, due to the limits of human attention. Polanyi explains:

*... every time we concentrate our attention on the particulars of a comprehensive entity, our sense of its coherent existence is temporarily weakened; and every time we move in the opposite direction towards a fuller awareness of the whole, the particulars tend to become submerged in the whole.*¹⁸

This innate human capacity to focus our attention either on the comprehensive entity itself, or the various particulars of which the comprehensive entity is comprised, determines the basic mode of engagement with reality, and the moral character and quality of personal life praxis; it also maps out the principal characteristics of our operating world view. A fixation with one mode of knowing generates a state of consciousness akin to what Paulo Freire calls *submerged* consciousness, a state of mind marked by the absence of critical awareness. Freire believes that when human beings,

¹⁷ Gotshalk, *The Structure of Awareness*, p. 35.

¹⁸ Polanyi, *Knowing and Being*, p. 125.

" . . . lack a critical understanding of their reality, apprehending it in fragments that they do not perceive as interacting constituent elements of the whole, they cannot truly know that reality."¹⁹

Polanyi points out that the ongoing alteration of the mind between particulars and generalities is a natural cognitive process. A fixation in consciousness on one mode of knowing is neither natural nor healthy. What Polanyi calls a *temporary* loss (which happens normally as the mind turns from particulars to generals) can take a permanent and debilitating form. Whenever an alternating search between particulars and the emerging *comprehensive* entity (of which particulars make up integral parts) does not occur, comprehension through insight becomes impossible. Becoming fixated on the analysis of particulars leads to *logical disintegration* which slowly, but steadily, reduces a comprehensive entity to its " . . . relatively meaningless fragments."²⁰ The natural tendency to shift from particulars to generals, back to particulars, and so on, can be interrupted or impeded in any number of ways, leaving an individual *fixated* on one way of relating to reality, resulting in a one-sided and distorted relationship with others and the world.

How is it that human beings become fixated in a one-dimensional relationship with reality, characterized either by an uncritical gazing at the *general*, or a continuous process of relating to *particulars*? Why does the movement back and forth between the particulars and the emerging understanding cease? What happens with the move from subsidiary to focal awareness? Bernard Lonergan suggests that the key to answering these questions lies in gaining conscious control over the process of knowing, by *understanding* its psychological dynamics. Although Polanyi and Lonergan share a very similar understanding of human consciousness and the process of knowing, Lonergan has more clearly articulated the *cognitive operations* by which the mind shifts between subsidiary and focal attention. Eugene Webb notes this in his study *Philosophers of Consciousness*,

¹⁹ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 95.

²⁰ Polanyi, *Knowing and Being*, p. 213.

It is characteristic of the difference between the perspectives of Lonergan and Polanyi that Polanyi concentrates his attention on the distinction between focal and subsidiary, or distal and proximal, while Lonergan directs his attention toward discovering the operations by which one can move from the one to the other.²¹

The psychological problem identified by Lonergan is that too few people are aware of the operations of these two kinds of knowing, with negative consequences for moral awareness.

2.3 Bernard Lonergan: Human Insight and the Two Modes of Knowing

At the outset of his mammoth study *Insight*, Bernard Lonergan informs the reader that his primary concern is not with the *known*, but with the *human process of knowing* which presents itself as, ". . . a recurrent structure that can be investigated."²² Like Polanyi, Lonergan begins his investigation by establishing how the limited capacity of the mind to focus attention leads to two kinds of knowing: "But the hard fact is that the psychological problem exists, that there exist in man two divers kinds of knowing, that they exist without differentiation and in an ambivalent confusion until they are distinguished explicitly and the implications of the distinction are drawn explicitly."²³

Understanding the mechanics of the essential psychological structure of human knowing is necessary to control the movement of the mind and achieve awareness. This is the same essential view as Polanyi. We see a striking similarity between Polanyi's and Lonergan's philosophy of consciousness in the following passage from *Insight*:

*It is not difficult to set forth the differences between the two types of knowing. The elementary type is constituted completely on the level of experience . . . On the other hand, in fully human knowing experience supplies no more than materials for questions; questions are essential to its genesis; through questions for intelligence it moves to accumulations of related insights which are expressed or formulated in concepts, suppositions, definitions, postulates, hypotheses, theories . . .*²⁴

²¹ Eugene Webb, *Philosophers of Consciousness* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988), p. 65.

²² Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1957), p. 18.

²³ Lonergan, *Insight*, p. xxii.

²⁴ Lonergan, *Insight*, p. 252.

Lonergan establishes a hierarchy of value between these two modes of knowing by suggesting that the first is an *elementary* type, whereas the second is *fully human knowing*. In fully human knowing, the mind works on the materials gained from human senses to create integrated meaning and awareness. Without critical self-reflection culminating in reasoned judgment, such awareness does not happen. That we should naturally shift from one type of knowing to the other is a given: the challenge is, as Lonergan notes, to gain conscious control over the process by exercising one's critical awareness and developing a self-reflexive understanding of the process and oneself: "The problem set by the two types of knowing is, then, not a problem of elimination but a problem of critical distinction. For the difficulty lies, not in either type of knowing by itself, but in the confusion that arises when one shifts unconsciously from one type to the other."²⁵

Lonergan situates his reflections on the two modes of knowing within his general theory of knowledge comprised of three distinct and successively-ordered cognitive actions which operate in every truly human act of knowing: *attending*, *understanding*, and *judgment*. The judgment of truth or falsehood is founded upon an *interpretation*, an interpretation is founded on an *experience*, and an experience is largely determined by the operation of directing our *attention*. We all need to discern right and wrong in our daily lives, but moral judgment is not legitimate without the dialectical interplay between the two modes of knowing, for it is only in attending to, interpreting, and making judgments, that knowledge (information) becomes understanding and practical insight. The end of understanding is always some form of action and transformation; this requires moral judgment, and a decision to act. This also means that two kinds of knowing are required. The two modes of knowing only work together as a mental dynamic when individuals engage themselves in some form of praxis set on personal and social improvement:

²⁵ Lonergan, *Insight*, p. 253.

*For concrete situations give rise to insights which issue into policies and courses of action. Action transforms the existing situation to give rise to further insights, better policies, more effective courses of action. It follows that if insight occurs, it keeps recurring; and at each recurrence knowledge develops, action increases its scope, and situations improve.*²⁶

Here we see a understanding of the human person as both *knower* and *agent*. To be a *subject* requires the performance of intentional operations; to perform intentional operations requires consciousness; to have consciousness presupposes a dialectical relationship with reality, whereby the individual focuses attention, interprets what is at the focus of attention, and renders a judgment, or otherwise comes to some conclusion. The degree of awareness one has of this process of knowing and acting will largely determine one's metaphysical world view and subsequent ethical and political approach to life. Metaphysics and ethics are simply two ways of speaking about one and the same human process of knowing and acting: "There follows a conclusion of fundamental importance, namely, the parallel and interpenetration of metaphysics and ethics. For just as the dynamic structure of our knowing grounds a metaphysics, so the prolongation of that structure into human doing grounds an ethics."²⁷

Although Lonergan speaks of abstract knowing as superior to elementary knowing in terms of attaining insight, he is careful not to confuse *ideas* with *things in themselves*, or to denigrate the material world. Lonergan was no Idealist. Indeed, he refers to the abstract as an *impoverished replica of the concrete*.²⁸ Concrete knowing is experiential in that the particular object of knowing is always an actual object in the world: this obvious fact is especially significant for theorists, for no matter how brilliant our theories may be, we must not lose sight of the fact that what really matters in the end is their *effectiveness* in bringing positive changes which alleviate unnecessary human suffering. Only the *world* is real. When individuals seek meaning in their experience - comprehending the empirical fragments as elements of a coherent, structured whole - they gain understanding. When

²⁶ Lonergan, *Insight*, p. xiv.

²⁷ Lonergan, *Insight*, p. 603.

²⁸ Lonergan, *Insight*, p. 87.

individuals continually go one step further to test in actions and plans, the adequacy of the understanding they have, they attain a dynamic moral and engaged awareness.

2.4 From Experience, to Theory, to Transformation, to Experience

As Anton Zijderveld suggests, the power to generalize and to engage in abstract reflection is the source of our power to comprehend and transform the world:

The capacity to generalize is the source of all of our communication: if I use the word "tree" in one of my sentences, everyone will perform the act of generalization with me and, apart from specific situations, remain on the level of this generalization, without asking me such questions as "which tree?"²⁹

Despite the obvious advantages in being able to generalize, it is crucial to recognize that neither the *origin* nor *end* of knowledge lies in the imaginary world of mental abstraction. Knowledge begins not with reason, but with structured experience. It is here that the first intimations of *the way things are* dawn upon us. As knowledge grows, so too does the capacity for rational theory. New experiences from active engagement in the world can open up new avenues with important new information not previously available, or intelligible on the basis of previous information, experiences and theories. Abstract knowledge cut off from the world of experience becomes meaningless:

...human communication occurs in an ongoing movement between generalizations and particularizations, between abstraction and specification. But what is more important, if the experience of an abstract phenomenon (e.g. 'father') cannot be brought down to an experience of a particular phenomenon (e.g. "my father"), meaning and reality will vanish.³⁰

Understanding the human condition in this way helps to clarify why the foundation of both metaphysics and ethics lies neither in sentences, nor in propositions, nor in judgments, but in the dynamic structure of rational self-consciousness and purposeful action. It is the inevitable recurrence of human experience in place and time which explains why

²⁹ Anton C. Zijderveld, *The Abstract Society: A Cultural Analysis of our Time* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1970), p. 50.

³⁰ Zijderveld, *The Abstract Society*, p. 50.

metaphysics and ethics must be grounded in an historical dynamic. The structure of our participation naturally tends toward the integration of the abstract and concrete modes of knowing into a unified consciousness supporting a single process of human praxis geared towards the *transformation of self and society*.

Focusing the mind requires human action. This fact of human agency points - at the level of human consciousness - to the intrinsic freedom of being human. With the freedom of human agency at the core of human *attending* and *knowing*, the process whereby we shift our attention from one thing to another denotes, in the most fundamental sense, both the *way* and the *extent to which* we become engaged in the social reality within which we are physically immersed.

How is ethics to take account of the psychological restrictions regarding human attention? How are we to reconcile the two modes of knowing within a foundational theory of knowledge (epistemology) upon which to base dynamic ethical reflection? An answer comes with a more focused study of the function and role of knowledge in ethical theory.

3. The Key Role of Knowledge (as Moral Awareness) in Ethics

There has been an age-old debate between *emotivist* ethical theories based on a *non-cognitive* pattern of rationality, and *absolutist* ethical theories which assume a rational method and the existence of *universal ethical norms*. Both arguments, or intellectual belief systems, have *validity* and *weaknesses*. The danger with emotivist ethical approaches is that they can tend towards *moral relativism*; the danger with absolutist ethical approaches is that they tend to encourage *moral idealism*, and abstract consciousness. Both speak of essential elements needed in the dynamic of moral reflection and life. The debate is not winnable by either point of view. These intellectual systems serve as theoretical models, or ideal types, and must not be confused with factual accounts or interpretations of reality. A resolution comes with the insight that a dynamic

understanding of moral consciousness and moral life praxis requires both *concrete* and *abstract* knowledge, as well as *emotions, experiential impressions and feelings*. Such a reformulation draws attention to how concrete and abstract modes of knowing, together form the dynamic structure of human consciousness and life experience.

Without an appeal to *abstract* moral principles, we are left with no moral guide for our lives. On the other hand, without *concrete* biographical and historical information of individuals and social situations, we are unable to make those moral judgments and decisions which properly embody (personal) and contextualize (social) abstract ethical principles and moral norms within daily life. Ethical theories which proceed from abstract principles, while making no provision for the particulars of concrete human experience, can deaden or prevent moral awareness by obscuring the dynamic nature of the process of moral knowing. There can be no resolution of the tension between knowing and feeling within ethics without a fundamental understanding of the moral life as transformative praxis, and how both knowing and feeling figure in that process.

3.1 Abstract Ethics

Ethical theories developed over the centuries have tended to follow one of two dominant approaches. On the one hand, there are theories which urge us to formulate and follow principles or moral rules which are regarded as being universally applicable. Rather than basing ethical theory on a dynamic epistemology, which incorporates both concrete and abstract modes of knowing, such theories seek to identify appropriate general principles by which to direct and evaluate human action. Appeals to moral ideals and principles are essential for a master life story; however, an excess focus on this perspective which excludes the equally important *experiential knowing* from the ethical task can be an impediment to moral awareness.

The principle of abstraction operating excessively in some ethical theories encourages us to disregard the special features of a situation. The particular identities and relationships of individuals are viewed as having little importance. We are directed to

concentrate on the essence of either the act in question, or its likely consequences. Such ethical theories can be collectively categorized as - to use Paul Lehman's expression -

Absolutist Ethics:

Absolutist ethics declares that the proper answer to the question "What am I to do?" is supplied by an absolute. And what is an "absolute?" Ethically speaking an absolute is a standard of conduct which can be and must be applied to all people in all situations in exactly the same way. The standard may be an ideal, a value, or a law. Its ethical reality and significance, however, lie in its "absolute" character.³¹

Absolutist ethical theories regard the exclusion of concrete knowledge as necessary to obtain untainted knowledge of moral *right* and *wrong*. Stanley Hauerwas and David Burrell, two critics of absolutist ethics, believe absolutist ethical theories distort moral truth by disregarding the particular features of situations, and that such theories are dominant in contemporary ethics:

The hallmark of contemporary ethical theory, whether in a Kantian or Utilitarian mode, has been to free moral behaviour from the arbitrary and contingent nature of the agent's beliefs, dispositions, and character.³²

Absolutist ethics can fall prey to the fallacy that assumes that authentic knowledge is discovered only by using objective methods which ignore the *arbitrary and contingent* aspects of human life. Such an approach regards human emotions as suspect, the memory as faulty and untrustworthy, and holds that the imagination can make no clear distinction between fact and fancy; in short, that the human body has little or nothing to offer the person seeking accurate knowledge upon which to base moral decisions. The methods able to offer moral guidance within absolutist ethical theories are those that claim to provide an objective apprehension of the truth: rigorous empirical methods of investigation, the logical conclusions of deductive reasoning, and the derivations of mathematical calculations: moral truth is obtainable - it is claimed - only through the

³¹ Paul Lehman, "The Contextual Character of Christian Ethics," found in James M. Gustafson and James T. Laney, eds., *On Being Responsible: Issues in Personal Ethics* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 137.

³² David Burrell and Stanley Hauerwas, "From System to Story: An Alternative Pattern for Rationality in Ethics," in *Knowledge, Value and Belief: The Foundations of Ethics and its Relationship to Science*, H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr. and Daniel Callahan, eds., (Hastings-on-Hudson, New York: Institute of Society, Ethics and Life Sciences), p. 113.

dispassionate and diligent use of discursive reasoning.

Is such an acquisition of objective moral truth possible? René Descartes, Immanuel Kant and the Logical Positivists have answered "yes." They believed that to achieve objective knowledge it is necessary to sever all presumed links between *facts* and *values*. Despite marked differences in their belief systems, the founders of these philosophical traditions made it their project to demonstrate that the world of *facts* is the world of *truth and falsity*, and the world of *values* is the world of *subjective emotions*. To assume that the subjective experiences of human beings - the moral agents - tend to cloud and distort truth, making an honest apprehension of reality impossible, is completely untenable. Is ethics a science? This issue will be explored in depth in chapter four, but to respond to the Logical Positivists in brief, the conclusion of a year-long project sponsored by the Institute of Society, Ethics and the Life Sciences at the Hastings Centre in New York, which explored the relationship between science and ethics articulates the view adopted in this study:

*Valuing the world presupposes certain descriptive and explanatory accounts of the world. Further, descriptive and explanatory accounts cannot be pursued while eschewing all evaluations of the world or appeals to values generally, nor are such accounts value-free in either their perspective or their purpose.*³³

Ethics is as much an objective inquiry as are any of the methods and approaches used to investigate and interpret life. It is both impossible and foolish to try to separate values and facts in an inquiry into human and social life. With ethics viewed too narrowly as a rational activity of the mind alone, Absolutist ethical theories tend to construe the ethical *task* in a restricted and excessively technical way. Ethical reflection within such an approach becomes an intellectual effort to *solve problems*, rather than to map out and pursue the *good* and moral life. Without a dynamic method, the person does not work at exposing and overcoming the impediments to moral life he or she may ideally desire.

³³ H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr. and Daniel Callahan., *Knowledge, Value and Belief*, p. 6.

Critics of the dominant ethical approach call this the "Standard Account."³⁴

3.2 From Moral *Problem-Solving* to Human Transformation

Stanley Hauerwas and David Burrell suggest that the Standard Account of moral reasoning assumes that no one faces an ethical issue until they find themselves in a quandary.³⁵ Is it right to steal to feed one's family? Should a sick and suffering grandparent be allowed to die? Whatever the particular circumstances, some moral dilemma or problem arises leaving individuals morally perplexed. The standard account considers it the task of moral theology and philosophical ethics to analyze such situations and to supply an ethical *solution* to moral quandaries. Such a narrow conception of ethics is incredibly problematic.

The assumption that moral concerns are always *problems* suggests that "... ethics can be construed as a rational science that evaluates alternative 'solutions'."³⁶ This approach pictures the world as a static *given* about which we need to make largely predetermined moral decisions. With the ethical task so defined, the primary moral problem is to attain a verifiable account of what constitutes *moral right* in a given problematic. Such a theory regards the primary task of ethicists to be the clarification and demonstration of right and wrong vis-a-vis any number of areas where it is perhaps less

³⁴ What exactly is the *Standard Account*? In a response to Burrell and Hauerwas, Pellegrino has this to say: "The standard account, against which Hauerwas and Burrell argue, is not easily identifiable. I take it to consist largely of some combination of Kantian ethical absolutism and the scientific and logical forms of ethical objectivism. They share an 'objective' quality in that they seek for the validity of ethical judgments independently of who utters them, and under what circumstances." "Rationality, the Normative and the Narrative in the Philosophy of Morals," found in *Knowledge, Value and Belief*, edited by H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr. and Daniel Callahan (Hastings-on-Hudson, New York: Institute of Society Ethics and the Life Sciences), p. 155.

³⁵ Burrell and Hauerwas rely on the research of Edmund Pincoffs, whose article "Quandary Ethics" [*Mind*, 80 (1971):552-71] discusses the restricted understanding of the ethical task evident in so much of contemporary ethics. Pincoffs' statement that neither Plato, Aristotle, the Epicureans, the Stoics, Augustine, Aquinas, Shaftesbury, Hume nor Hegel conceived of ethics as *the business of giving 'grounds' or 'justifications' for particular difficult moral choices*, should be kept in mind. These moral theorists were primarily concerned with moral enlightenment and education, and discovering what constitutes a vision of the *good* life.

³⁶ Burrell and Hauerwas, "From System to Story: An Alternative Pattern for Rationality in Ethics," p. 115.

than obvious what *acting morally* entails. Determining moral right and wrong requires continuous conformity to the absolute moral rules upon which the ethical theory is based.

This approach construes the search for knowledge as a *dispassionate* and *rational* quest for knowledge. Once knowledge of what is *true* is determined, the onus is then on the individual to act in a morally-responsible fashion, in accordance with the degree of knowledge of right and wrong he or she has.³⁷ When people with such knowledge do not act in accordance with their view of moral truth, they suffer the guilt of wrongdoing - along with whatever consequences result from wrongdoing. Within the standard account, impediments blocking the necessary *power* required to act morally are not examined.

Moral problems are seldom - if ever - simply issues of principle or fact. Determining right and wrong requires that we understand particular situations within the entire lived context of the person. Moral judgment requires that we refer to absolute moral principles, it also depends on the prior experiential knowledge derived from the actual context in which particular events occur and constructed by the individual. Moral judgment is never simply a matter of finding the solution to moral problems; moral judgment presupposes a complicated process of alternating shifts in mental perception, governed by a self-reflexive process of narrative interpretation and moral accounting.

Critics claim that the Standard Account makes the moral life take on the characteristics of a system. To attempt to systematize life reflects a failure to appreciate the social psychological complexity and dynamism of human existence, screening out from consciousness whatever can not be systematized, or completely grasped by the mind; namely, human spirituality and the transcendent mystery of existence.

³⁷ The deficiencies of an ethical approach which regards the primary ethical task to be one of "moral problem-solving" are by no means limited to internal method and epistemology. Deficiencies become especially evident with an increasing inability for such an approach to *solve moral problems*. In his book *After Virtue*, Alasdair MacIntyre bases his entire project on the observation that, *There seems to be no rational way of securing moral agreement in our culture*. In the final section of this chapter we will see how MacIntyre also makes a case for a narrative pattern of rationality for ethics, as a partial answer to the impasse caused by the plurality of moral norms and ethical systems in contemporary culture.

3.3 The Importance of Human Emotion for an Ethic of Awareness

Because morality necessarily involves the whole person, a foundational ethical theory upon which moral reflection and action stem must be able to accommodate the full-range of human experience. Human feelings or *sentiments* must not be excluded from ethical theory or moral reflection.

Human feeling must supplement reason so that the perceived moral *good* can exert a force on our will; in other words, rational morality, which is meant to have command over the emotions, itself relies on an emotion to move a person to act. As Hans Jonas aptly explains: "Without our being, at least by disposition, responsive to the call of duty in terms of feeling, the most cogent demonstration of its right, even when compelling theoretical assent, would be powerless to make it a motivating force."³⁸

Bringing to mind those times when we fail to accomplish (in concrete action) what we believed to be a morally -preferable course of action (in abstract theory) reveals the central role of strong motivating feelings in the process of moral transformation. It seems a fact of human experience that - because of depression, or sadness, or lethargy, or some other negative feeling - we all at times refuse to act in a way that our own beliefs and values tell us to act: we make a moral trade-off; we shrug our shoulders saying *we just don't care*.

How do we generate feelings of compassion and care for ourselves and others? Choosing to become aware of the needs of others can elicit feelings of compassion and concern which generate motivation and energy to engage in moral and political action. Becoming aware of the needs of others may challenge us to make changes in our social location and social identification; such changes can themselves create motivating emotional energy and intentional moral activity.

Existentialist philosophers characterize the human dilemma as one of *wanting to be without limits*, along with *being aware that we can not completely overcome or transcend our limits*. This view regards the primary drive of the human person as a desire for

³⁸ Hans Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 170.

unrestricted personal power, knowledge, autonomy and self-sufficiency. Paul Ricoeur focuses on the other pole in the human equation, the need to belong to others and build community on shared social goals and moral principles; here the dilemma is the self-condemning awareness of not actually thinking and doing in one's daily life what one believes should be thought and done. Ricoeur believed that people are driven more from a sense that they are not being as *good* or *moral* as they are able to be, leading to a sense of failure and negative feelings of shame and guilt. As Eugene Webb notes: "Ricoeur conceives the issue primarily in moral terms: the deficiency from which man inescapably suffers is not just lack of satisfaction, but a 'failure to love sufficiently'."³⁹

This view regards the primary drive of the individual as a moral and spiritual desire for communion with others. Human beings are not simply *unsatisfied*, they also feel morally accountable to themselves and to others to live in accordance with fundamental philosophical or religious beliefs and moral principles. Authentic self-awareness demands integrity between one's beliefs and actions, and such authenticity takes form within loving and trustworthy relationships.

Knowledge of moral right is insufficient by itself to sustain moral awareness and transformative praxis. Strong desires and positive human feelings are also necessary for moral living. Any pattern of ethical thinking which excludes human experience from the process and pursuit of moral action and transformation is inadequate. An acceptable ethical theory will need to utilize some heuristic model or conceptual framework which respects, and makes intelligible, the ongoing dynamic of *knowing and feeling*, since they are always intrinsically intertwined in real life. This model will invariably be constructed using the literary structure of *narrative*, which is the only literary genre and communication mode which offers a broad enough scope to express the incorporation and integration of knowing and feeling which happens in the historical reality of life. An ethics of awareness is always about investigating and telling stories to understand the complex integration of real circumstances in the lives of individuals and societies - the goal, and driving push for such a pursuit is an idealized ethical vision which contrasts with the imperfect present. The reason why an ethics of awareness is

³⁹ Webb, *Philosophers of Consciousness*, p. 143.

called a *dynamic* ethic of awareness is because it requires engagement; narrative is the communicative medium which makes that engagement possible and explainable: "Narrative is essential if moral problems are really to engage our selves, rather than simply standing before us as objects of study."⁴⁰

Narrative must form the *backdrop* for all ethical theories, simply because there is no other way we can grasp, even partially, the mystery of the *other* and grow in human love without the benefits of communication that narrative alone can provide - even when communicating with oneself in reflection, narrative still forms the matrix of our consciousness. Opening oneself to another person can only occur in a meaningful and revealing way when we allow ourselves to hear that person's story. Human relationships are only *realized* concretely through the mutual disclosure of personal stories in loving relationships. If we are to have a meaningful relationship with another human being, we must engage in mutual dialogue which makes possible both self-affirmation and mutual recognition. This is the ultimate objective of ethics. As Burrell and Hauerwas declare, it is "...in this entry into the mystery of being - another's and our own - that narrative transcends problem solving."⁴¹

4. Narrative: Language that Unifies Thinking and Acting

Narrative easily integrates both the *concrete* and *abstract* modes of knowing and the interpretation of experience within consciousness - this approach is based on a fundamental philosophy of human nature and consciousness. As Jerome Bruner suggests, combining diverse aspects of cognitive and physical experience into a unified system indicates a particular philosophical orientation: "Philosophically speaking, the approach I shall take to narrative is a constructivist one - a view that takes as its central premise that

⁴⁰ Burrell and Hauerwas, "From System to Story...", p. 166.

⁴¹ Burrell and Hauerwas, "From System to Story...", p. 166.

'world making' is the principal function of mind, whether in the sciences or the arts."⁴²

The exclusion of concrete knowledge creates a distorted understanding of human development, and results in a reductionist view of moral experience. Such an approach erroneously denies the value and importance of human emotions for ethics, and the variety of human experiences which emerge from a multitude of unique conditions and circumstances. Perhaps more importantly, the exclusion of concrete *knowledge-of-acquaintance* severs ethical reflection from the historical process of identity formation, central to the development of moral awareness. A narrative framework for ethics is indispensable to grasp how the *development of moral awareness*, and the *formation of identity*, are two ways of speaking about one and the same process. Each represents a perspective and language with valuable insights; both are needed to gain a deeper insight into the negative dynamics of self-deception, ignorance, ideology, and the negative dynamics of dependency and social conformity.

4.1 Narrative and the Dynamic Structure of Human Experience

To regard knowledge as separate and distinct from values, and to exclude deliberately, and systematically, subjective aspects of human experience from the quest for knowledge, prevents the mind from considering those aspects of life which - although subjective and diverse - contribute to the constitution of identity and self-reflexive thinking. With no subjectivity, there are no human feelings, no compassion, no moral motivation, no sense of one's limits and particular areas of blindness; the guide becomes, rather, some universal moral norm or law which applies in all cases equally. . . as an act of moral consciousness and decision-making. Moral *action* equals moral *compliance*.

We need to jettison both a *static* world view and all forms of *anthropological idealism*, to portray life experience accurately as the dynamic process it is. Viewing a person's life as a *story* reveals an underlying *dynamic metaphysics*, and *philosophy of history*, operating within human consciousness, guiding moral action. As Donald E.

⁴² Jerome Bruner, "Life as Narrative," *Social Research*, Vol. 54, No. 1, (Spring, 1987), p. 11.

Polkinghorne states in his study *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences*:

The approach to the self as a story is developed from a metaphysics of potentiality and actuality focused on the changes that occur in organic life, rather than from a metaphysics of substance. From this perspective the focus of one's identity is not centered on the sameness of an underlying substance but on one's process of actualizing what is potentially possible in one's life. The emphasis changes from "What am I?" to "Who am I?"⁴³

Human experience confirms that such a dynamic metaphysics is fully justified. Our understanding of self is never static. We grow, we learn, we forget, we deceive ourselves, we are always changing...and so too is our self-understanding. It is misleading to suggest that our self-understanding is the same as a *self-concept*, for our knowledge of self is not simply a *concept*, but an evolving understanding of who we remember ourselves to have been in the past, who we believe we are in the present, and who we hope we can become in the future.

Nor is awareness of self ever complete. It oscillates back and forth from a *shallow* to a *deep* understanding, from a *trivial* to a *meaningful* understanding; or, depending on the extent to which we are able to avow the full range of our experience in consciousness, an *honest* or *dishonest* understanding. Without both a *commitment* to avow all of our experiences - and the *wisdom* to integrate all the particulars of our experience into a more comprehensive, consistent, intelligible, and meaningful understanding of who we are - then self-understanding is bound to be *superficial*, or worse still, *deluded*. To learn the skills necessary to avoid self-deception, overcome social ignorance, and sustain an honest knowledge of self, we need to develop a theoretical model, as part of a process or overall method of self-interpretation, which is capable of dealing with the full range of human experience we seek to acknowledge and integrate into our self-understanding. An understanding of *self as narrative configuration*, or *story*, offers such an approach. Narrative configuration is a unifying interpretative and communicative approach with a framework and scope broad enough to accommodate the requirements for authentic

⁴³ Donald E. Polkinghorne, *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1988), p. 151.

discovery and development of self-understanding.

Paul Ricoeur makes reference to the pre-determining context of identity in a discussion of what he refers to as the *pre-narrative structure of human experience*. Ricoeur believes that what we normally understand by *individual life*, is essentially a linguistic construct which moulds numerous readings and interpretations into the shape of a story: "To this end I would insist on the pre-narrative capacity of that which we call a life. A life is no more than a biological phenomenon as long as it is not interpreted."⁴⁴

It is the capacity for self-transcendent reflection which makes human beings capable of art, planning the future, religious aspirations and eternal longings. Ricoeur believes our natural inclination to find meaning in experience, and make sense of particular events, leads us to search for the *full story* we naturally suspect underlies fragmented bits and pieces of information. Ricoeur follows an epistemological theory compatible with Polanyi and Lonergan.

What we do not yet understand about ourselves and the world, we seek to discover by constructing meaningful stories. We are not content to know *what* happened, or what will or might happen; we seek to comprehend the *meaning* of what happened, or what will or might happen. Because a basic human drive to attain comprehensive understanding is part of the human condition, Ricoeur suggests that we have a right to speak of life as an *incipient* story, as an *activity and desire in search of an narrative*. As he explains: "It is not by accident or by error that we are accustomed to speak of stories that happen to us or stories we are caught up in - or simply of the story of a life."⁴⁵

Story provides the essential framework for the development and articulation of identity. What mechanisms or forces serve to unify experience into a single narrative framework? Glynis M. Breakwell points to three constituent elements which, he believes, are essential for this integrative task:

⁴⁴ Paul Ricoeur, "Life; A Story in Search of a Narrator," found in *Facts and Values: Philosophical Reflections from Western and Non-Western Perspectives*, M. C. Doezler & J. N. Kraay, eds., (New York: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1986), p. 127.

⁴⁵ Ricoeur, "Life in Search of a Narrative," p. 129.

Although the concept of "identity" - like the related concepts of "self" and "ego" - is one which has been formulated in a variety of different ways by different writers, it should be obvious that a complete account of the sense of identity would have to refer to at least three component characteristics. These characteristics are a sense of personal "distinctiveness", a sense of personal "continuity", and a sense of personal "autonomy".⁴⁶

Both personal *distinctiveness* and a sense of personal *continuity* are determined and defined by the movement of the autonomous self-reflecting person through *time* and *place*. These two dimensions of all life stories comprise the *abstract* (time) and *concrete* (place) components of a single autobiography, and together form the framework for understanding the continuity, identity and meaning of an individual's life. Before considering these dimensions of identity further, it is insightful to consider how the concept of identity itself signifies a dynamic understanding.

Arthur Brittan offers a critical reading of how identity can be wrongly viewed as a static *property* belonging to an individual. He believes that identity is a product of symbolic integration, facilitated by a process of self-reflection; in other words, identity is not a *thing*, it is an evolving *understanding*:

Identity is, thus, a symbolic interpretation of the individual as he [she] believes himself [herself] to be, and as he [she] hopes to be. The fact that there may be a discrepancy between these two aspects of identity has exercised a great deal of comment in the literature, particularly in accounts of the reported discrepancy between self and ideal self....⁴⁷

Which is the *true* self? That which we believe we can become? Or that which we actually are? But is it even possible to know who we are? Perhaps we think we are worthless and without talent, when in fact, we are quite valuable to others and possess a great deal of talent. What is true identity in such a case? What we think of ourselves? Or what others think of us? How much trust should we place in our narrative life account? How much should we trust the accounts of others? What criteria are we to rely on to discern the moral integrity of narratives? Should they be allowed to exert a moral force on our will, obliging us to act? Narratives are central aspects of an ethic of awareness, but something more is required.

⁴⁶ Glynis M. Breakwell, ed., *Threatened Identities* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1983), p. 75.

⁴⁷ Brittan, *The Privatized World* (London, England: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), p. 102.

4.2 Do Narrative Life Accounts Have Moral Force?

David Burrell and Stanley Hauerwas have argued that internal coherence, faithfulness, truth and meaning constitute implicit criteria for the construction of a life narrative. Does this mean that narratives can simply take the place of moral absolutes? Do narratives have moral force in the same way that moral norms do? E.D. Pellegrino clarifies how the use of a narrative configuration in ethics cannot, of itself, provide the criteria for choosing ". . . the final good to order all other goods." Narrative pertains to method; it offers a linguistic means for unifying the complexity of life experience; it also provides a structure for ethical reflection analysis and judgment. It does not, however, provide the normative content needed to determine the plot and direction of one's life story:

The moment we face the question of what "ought to be" - that is to say, when we begin ethical discourse proper - we must choose between narratives. Internal criteria are of little use in trying to decide which story should shape our lives....We must step outside the narratives we are comparing and resort to more explicit reason and more general principles to justify the assumption about what is "good" and "bad".⁴⁸

Pellegrino makes an important observation regarding the degree of authority which ethicists such as Hauerwas and Burrell should invest in what they call a *narrative pattern of rationality*. He correctly points out that the criteria listed by these men to justify narratives (coherence, faithfulness, truth, or meaning) are all *internal* to the narrative, and can discuss only what *is*, or what *was*, or what *might be*. They say nothing of what *ought* to be, besides helping to present theoretical moral options in the form of imagined social visions. How then are *moral norms* to be verified?

To understand human actions, we need the fullness of detail the narrative affords; to judge these actions and choose among them, we need to prescind from these particularities. We are compelled, therefore, to cultivate both accounts - the standard and the narrative - at least in part, for each grasps some part of the unbelievably complex fabric of moral reality. Each falls short of ever encompassing all of human moral life.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ E. D. Pellegrino, "Rationality, the Normative and the Narrative in the Philosophy of Morals", p. 62.

⁴⁹ Pellegrino, "Rationality, the Normative and the Narrative in the philosophy of Morals," p. 167.

Pelligrino believes that "... narrative stands somewhere between the Kantian ethics of pure reason and the overzealous attention to personal experience of ethical subjectivism."⁵⁰ Such a statement is enlightening, but needs to be fleshed out. Basically what Pelligrino is saying is that both systems have something important to contribute. The *somewhere between* he alludes to, is actually a dynamic process which combines concrete and abstract modes of knowing in a single life process. Narrative *configurations* underpinning moral consciousness allow us to unify the particulars of our life experience into a comprehensive framework of meaning - the materials of concrete experience are sewn together with the unifying threads of time and place. Narrative *structure* is powerless to determine what final end or moral goals should be pursued. The narrative *content* of particular stories can, however, shape both identity and social life, as the world's great religions clearly show.

Brittan points to a tendency in the literature on narrative for theorists to rely excessively on abstract concepts of *identity* and *self* to demonstrate autobiographical continuity. Continuity is an ambiguous concept when applied to human beings. A person's self-understanding does change over time, sometimes dramatically. Although transformation creates a new person, something essential and spiritual remains that allows us to recognize the unity of personal identity, despite successive transformations, or even radical change.

The extent that personal identity is rooted in both time and place is significant for ethics. As Brittan notes, "...identity is context-bound - it can never transcend the parameters of time and place. There is no primary self or identity - only a multiplicity of situations in which 'identity' language is used."⁵¹ *Time* and *place* are central and permanent aspects of identity. Each person is born on a certain day, in a certain place, in a particular family. The initial social and historical matrix of life stories is a given. From these *givens*, issues a historical chronology of connected events. This is of central

⁵⁰ Pelligrino, "Rationality, the Normative and the Narrative in the Philosophy of Morals," p. 165.

⁵¹ Brittan, *The Privatized World*, p. 15.

significance for an ethics of awareness exploring impediments to dynamic moral awareness, for *time* and *place* are two essential factors determining the mechanics which explain much about the limitations blocking awareness and frustrating attempts at meaningful and effective moral praxis.

4.3 The Significance of Time in the Construction of a Life Story

Self-understanding emerges as a complex configuration, embodying information on countless experiences and events which are unified by the mind into a single autobiographical and historical framework of meaning. The presentation of the self to the self, or self-reflexive thinking, has a spiritual dimension: self-understandings transcend the boundaries and limitations of time. Self-understandings include who we believe we *have been*, how we see ourselves *in the present*, as well as what we imagine we can or will become *in the future*. Both the past and future have considerable impact on one's present self-understanding. As Breakwell suggests, they form a *life trajectory* framework for evaluating the present reality:

*These constituents...organize our experiences in such a way as to provide us with a moment by moment sense of identity. In order for that sense to unify our experiences in time, there must be an autobiographical system of beliefs to which one refers in identifying the present moment of one's life as part of a life trajectory.*⁵²

The time dimension of narrative offers a means whereby both *intentions* and *actions* can be situated and connected within a single framework which plots the movement from desire, to idea, to action in such a way that the continuity of life experience becomes intelligible. As Ricouer explains: "We seem to have no other way of describing *lived time* save in the form of a narrative. Which is not to say that there are not other temporal forms that can be imposed on the experience of time, but none of them succeeds in capturing the sense of 'lived' time."⁵³

⁵² Breakwell, *Threatened Identities*, p. 42.

⁵³ Paul Ricouer, *Time and Narrative* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 12.

Comprehending the meaning of life requires that we search out, and construct, the underlying *plot* which unifies both abstract and concrete aspects of human existence. The narrated story is always more than the mere enumeration of incidents in a simple linear succession of events. Narration organizes past experience (memories), experiences in the present (dynamic social reality) and intimations of the future (social imaginations) into an interconnected whole.

A narrative structure is especially important for ethics. Single actions never happen apart from a concrete process involving continuous movement from one thing to something else. It is, therefore, impossible to characterize or judge people, interpreting actions abstracted from the situational context of their lives. To do so is - to use Lonergan's cognitional language - to render judgments before interpreting and synthesizing the particulars into a coherent whole. The significance of this elementary fact of human experience - that narrative is a precondition of moral evaluation - has too often been overlooked in by ethicists and social theorists. Alisdair MacIntyre is among those who regard narrative as an indispensable tool for interpreting both human experience and social history.⁵⁴

Time is only one component of a narrative life account: an equally important component is *place*. The continuous succession of time is a structural dimension of consciousness which is universal in nature, and *abstract*, and is easily found in both dominant ethical theories and cultural ideological discourse as a measure of continuity and change. *Place*, on the other hand, is *particular* to individuals, and must be identified or discovered through concrete analysis and experiential knowledge of actual people; it is less often incorporated into theoretical methods, or even mentioned by professionals. As noted above, without *concrete analysis* of particular situations, no experiential knowledge-of-acquaintance will inform the process of knowledge integration, a comprehensive understanding will not occur, and an enlightened ethical discernment and judgment for action will not be possible.

⁵⁴ Alisdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Indiana Press, 1981). MacIntyre states at one point, for example, "Narrative history of a certain kind turns out to be the basic and essential genre for the characterization of human actions." p. 194.

4.4 The Function of Place in the Construction of Life Story

While engaged in a structural analysis of four autobiographical texts, James Bruner noticed that *place* played an even greater role in ensuring the continuity of autobiographical life accounts than did *time*: "One thing that is striking about all four narratives is the extent to which the spatial distinction home-real world concentrates all four of them on spatial and locative terms in their autobiographical accounts."⁵⁵

The central role of place in autobiography reveals how it is the concrete, material conditions of our lived experience which serve as the primary building blocks of identity and self-awareness.

In these four life narratives too, place is crucial and it shapes and constrains the stories that are told or, indeed, that could be told. Place is not simply a piece of geography, an established Italian neighborhood in Brooklyn, though it helps to know its "culture" too. It is an intricate construct, whose language dominates the thought of our four narrators. For each, its central axis is "home" which is placed in sharp contrast to what they all refer to as "the real world".⁵⁶

Bruner notes that as each individual recounts his or her story, the movement forward is not so much temporal as spatial. The transition is one of continuous movement and action, rather than a simple time succession. Expressions such as, *go to*, or, *get involved*, describe the transition from one place to another, or from one concrete involvement to another, and thereby unify the autobiography. That such movement takes place over time is understood, and seems almost incidental to the meaning of the story. What counts is place.

Jim Cheney supports these observations in his intriguing article, *Post Modern Environmental Ethics: Ethics as Bio-regional Narrative*. Cheney believes that personal relations are elaborated through spatial relations that are fully contextualized. He recognizes the singular importance of narrative in tapping and recounting contextual life experience, but sees a danger of *abstracting* life experience, even with the use of narrative

⁵⁵ Bruner, "Life as Narrative," p. 25.

⁵⁶ Bruner, "Life as Narrative," p. 25.

structure, if the time dimension is used too exclusively to unify narratives. We are biological entities situated in living ecosystems: this constitutes the paramount reality within which even the concept *time* finds its meaning:

*Narrative is the key then, but it is narrative grounded in geography rather than on a linear, essentialized narrative self. The narrative style required for situating ourselves without making essentializing or totalizing moves is an elaboration of relations which forgoes the coherence, continuity, and consistency insisted on by totalizing discourse.*⁵⁷

The importance of geography (social location) to self-awareness can hardly be overstated. Self and geography are always intimately bound together in one and the same narrative. Reflections on the relation between self and geography bring us back to a philosophical problem that remains at the centre of debate in modern philosophy; namely, what is the nature of the relation between mind and matter? Without getting sidetracked on this key question, it is important to affirm that mind and body do function as a dynamic unity: there is no need to contrive a dualistic and hierarchically-structured theory which posits mind *over* or *against* matter. We are our body as much as we are our mind.

Philosophers of Mind have made a contribution to this enigma over the unity of knowing and being. Polanyi, Lonergan and numerous other philosophers believe that the human spirit dwells in the material world *subsidiarily* in such a way that both the world and individuals are changed as a result of this essential participation. How does the human spirit dwell in other things? There is mystery here, which reason alone cannot fully explain. Discussions about *knowing* and *being* point to a dynamic matrix in life wherein the transformation of persons occurs as spiritual transformation of self and participation in the forward movement of society. We can, however, gain a deeper understanding of the importance of geography for self awareness by considering what happens when identity construction is attempted *without* geography.

Jim Cheney refers to Edith Cobb's book *The Ecology of Imagination in Childhood* where mention is made of a child who is left to construct her identity entirely from the imageless space of her interior life. The result? Acute schizophrenia. Cheney suggests

⁵⁷ Jim Cheney, "Postmodern Environmental Ethics: Ethics as Bioregional Narrative," *Environmental Ethics* (Vol. 11:2, 1989), p. 126.

that what we take to be the interior self is not a *substance* at all, but rather, an internalized landscape - what some writers refer to as *mindscapes*. The material fodder for these mindscapes comes primarily from our social situation and physical surroundings, our place. This prompts further reflection on the economic and political context and dominant culture where *self-in-place* resides.

4.5 The Role of Culture in the Narrative Construction of Identity

What effects do *culture* and *social structures* have on the development of self-awareness and identity? Mindscapes are contextualized both in time and place, and are culturally restricted. This observation has central significance for identity formation and the development of dynamic moral awareness:

*Given their constructed nature and their dependence upon the cultural conventions and language usage, life narratives obviously reflect the prevailing theories about "possible lives" that are part of one's culture. Indeed, one important way of characterizing a culture is by the narrative models it makes available for describing the course of a life.*⁵⁸

Some philosophers and sociologists regard the impact of cultural norms, values, and ideals as entirely *restrictive*; they opt for a deterministic theory which views human volition as fictitious - we only think we have choices, in truth, the availability of choices is predetermined by culture. We become, to use Jerome Bruner's expression, "variants of the culture's canonical forms."⁵⁹

Many social psychologists speak of *social identity* in contradistinction to *personal identity*. This distinction is a helpful analytical tool at times, however it is potentially misleading. The development and widespread use of theories which conveniently separate identity into *social* and *private* components tend to accommodate sociological *role* theory, a viewpoint which legitimates an exaggerated distinction between *private* and *public* in its non-critical method. Breakwell himself speaks at times of human reflection and action in

⁵⁸ Bruner, "Life as Narrative," p. 15.

⁵⁹ Bruner, "Life as Narrative," p. 150.

terms of the private and social dimensions of identity:

One's social identity is, roughly speaking, the set of social categories to which one belongs. This notion defines only qualitative identity because there is nothing in principle that prevents another human being occupying a similar locus in the social order as one occupies oneself. The constituents of social identity can be analytically reduced to role and categories.⁶⁰

An ethic of awareness recognizes that identity is continually constructed within a social process, and that the matrix of that construction is a *single-life* praxis. Thankfully, as Arthur Brittan notes, this view has become well established within mainstream human and social sciences: "What seemed revolutionary when Cooley and Mead first articulated the notion that the self is a social process, a sequence of interactions between society and organism, is now established orthodoxy."⁶¹

The *social* fact of humanity is so obvious and elementary it is often taken-for-granted. Yet this must be a guiding reminder for a dynamic process of ethical reflection: identity is shaped (not forever determined) by the cultural context and relationships a person has with others:

A human being learns that he or she is a person from others, and in discovering a sphere of action the source of which is treated by others as the very person they identify as having spatio-temporal identity. Thus a human being learns that he or she is a person not by the empirical disclosure of an experiential fact. Personal identity is symbolic of social practices not of empirical experiences.⁶²

We need to remind ourselves continually that human relationships lie at the heart of all ethical questions and concerns: I and them, us and others, you and me. Narrative helps paint the details of individual and collective life stories, and serves as the primary and most universal form of human self-disclosure and interpersonal communication. If we are to respect the unity of the individual person, we need to use consistent and unifying language that overcomes distorting dualisms on all levels. Rather than speaking of *personal identity* and *social identity*, it is less confusing simply to say *identity*. It is

⁶⁰ Breakwell, *Threatened Identities*, p. 40.

⁶¹ Arthur Brittan, *The Privatized World*, p. 1.

⁶² Breakwell, *Threatened Identities*, p. 38.

obvious that *identities* in the *concrete* belong to *persons*, and persons in the *concrete* belong to *communities* and *countries*. A baby is born into a *particular* community and initially learns the language, norms and ideals through imitation and absorption, in a more or less uncritical fashion. This is as true for mundane social customs such as table manners as it is for moral virtues:

Studies of culture, however, suggest that "virtue is a thoroughly social phenomenon," for groups of all types are distinguished by the sorts of traits and dispositions they foster in their members. Besides recognising the "historicity" of virtue, then, an adequate theory will appreciate its "sociality" as well. This involves acknowledging that an agent's social context determines to some degree the ideals for character he or she will develop. Societies promote ideals through such means as laws, rewards and punishments, rituals and prayers, and above all "narratives".⁶³

Identities may be culturally-based; they are not permanently etched on our being. With the passage of time, and normal human development, there emerges the capacity for self-transcendent reflection and critical thinking. It is at that point that culturally-determined norms, values, and character ideals can be evaluated and changed. Self-understanding is malleable. We can unlearn what we once learned (without any say in the matter) and, if need be, set about learning something else. It is the function of moral awareness to initiate and guide this process of critical reflection and transformative praxis.

4.6 Collective Stories and the Legitimation of Society

Individuals not only construct private life stories, they join together to give support to collective stories. Peoples are able to develop and promote a collective self-presentation of, for example, what it means to be a *Canadian*. Many *particular* cultural components which inform and fashion the identity of individuals originate from within this *collective* narrative. Just as individuals can repress their true identity and present themselves in a far more favourable light than the facts of their life experience confirm, societies can promote a narrative understanding which disguises significant aspects of social and historical truth. Economic and political elites can engineer and promulgate a

⁶³ Anne Patrick, "Narrative and the Social Dynamics of Virtue," *Concilium*, 1987, p. 69-70.

false sense of collective identity, or suppress insightful social information. Indeed, the entire cultural ethos and ideology upon which a collective or national identity is based can itself be disguised. A number of theorists (Hauerwas, Habermas, Baum) have exposed the modern *story of scientism*, which attacks the very use of narrative method, holding that stories are for children, fitting only for an earlier, infantile phase in the evolutionary development of human consciousness; a phase which humanity has since outgrown.

This anti-narrative evolutionary theory of human development was originally conceived by Auguste Comte. Comte argued that in the development of human consciousness, previous stages of knowing were gradually superseded by higher forms of consciousness. There were three main stages. First came *religion*, a view of the world presented as a story; then *philosophy*, a world view presented in the form of metaphysical rational analysis. Then finally, *science*, with its exact methods. According to Comte, only with the advent of scientific knowledge does the human person achieve the final refinement of consciousness. Stories remain pre-scientific and juvenile. With science, primitive myths and religion are dispelled as fantasies of the mind, the products of fears and ignorance. Ironically, Comte's fantastic story, which serves as the rationale for the evolution of human consciousness, also serves as the narrative rationale for modern-day *scientism*. No ideology or world view can escape the need for narrative structure, not even those attacking the use of narrative. Recognizing this subterfuge is essential for critical awareness. If we fail to identify the foundational flaw in Comte's argument, we may fall victim to this scientistic fallacy. As Jürgen Habermas notes:

Comte's law of three stages provides a rule according to which the intellectual development of both individuals and the species as a whole is supposed to have taken place. This developmental law obviously has a logical form that does not correspond to the status of lawlike hypotheses in the empirical sciences. The knowledge that Comte invokes in order to interpret the meaning of positive knowledge does not itself meet the standards of the positive spirit.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), p. 71. The chapter by Habermas titled, "Comte and Mach: The Intention of Early Positivism," argues that this paradox on which Comte based his positivist epistemology makes perfect sense - despite the glaring contradiction - once we discern the true political and economic intentions of early Positivism. Science was becoming the modern *god*, and a professional knowledge elite was being born. Habermas believes this system has for its aim the *pseudo-scientific propagation of the cognitive monopoly of science*.

This discussion of the historical development of cultural narratives leads to consideration of another important component of both individual and collective narratives: cultural *tradition*. It is not by accident that we hear that someone is following in his or her parent's *footsteps*, or what we witness collective projects which stretch over many generations. As Alasdair MacIntyre explains:

*The story of my life is always embedded in the story of those communities from which I derive my identity. I am born with a past; and to try to cut myself off from the past, in the individualist mode, is to deform my present relationships. The possession of an historical identity and the possession of a social identity coincide.*⁶⁵

Trans-generational historical projects are integral to all cultures. It is vital to examine these collective projects. Just as the unifying force for individual life stories is always some imagined final *good* or *telos*, so too do cultural projects aim at some culminating end; a goal which helps shape individual stories: "Within a tradition the pursuit of goods extends through generations, sometimes through many generations. Hence the individual's search for his or her good is generally and characteristically conducted within a context defined by those traditions of which the individual's life is a part"⁶⁶

An appreciation of the central role of cultural tradition in the narrative construction of self opens up future possibilities for the self; insights from ethical reflection into the opportunities which the past and future make available to the present. As MacIntyre states: "Living traditions, just because they continue a not-yet-completed narrative, confront a future whose determinate and determinable character, so far as it possesses any, derives from the past."⁶⁷ This reference to the *telos*, or culmination of narrative, brings us to the next level of investigation into the relation between narrative and ethics; namely, practical ethical considerations on the various narrative components of identity and awareness just discussed.

⁶⁵ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 205.

⁶⁶ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 207.

⁶⁷ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 207.

5. The Art of Achieving and Disclosing Self-Awareness

Subsequent chapters explore the operation of negative social psychological dynamics which interrupt or deaden awareness and derail the search for an integrated and meaningful life story. Before exploring the psychosocial impediments to moral awareness it is worth considering what it means to *achieve* and *disclose* self-awareness.

Human beings naturally seek meaning in their life experience, as well as consistency and intelligibility in their efforts to comprehend their experience and make secure plans for the future. This search to find meaning and consistency requires an ongoing project of knowledge construction through analysis and information integration. The natural desire to know can be interrupted or deadened in a number of ways. Reflecting on the social conditions and human skills necessary to ensure the proper development of moral identity can clarify what, ideally, is required. Such a model can be used to detect impediments.

Developing and sustaining an understanding of self, or identity, requires at least three things: (a) a framework of beliefs, or ideal life story, through which we can integrate and make sense of our life experience; (b) the wisdom, skills and conditions required to make our experiences explicit in consciousness, thereby enabling us to map out a practical course of action; and, (c) the motivation and power to act in accordance with the beliefs and values contained in a master life story.

If we think of life as a journey, we can see that the master life story embodies the *destination*, the particular conditions and skills required to activate consciousness in a continuous and intentional movement toward the destination is the *car en route*; and the motivation and power to act is the *fuel*. Without a master life story, we do not know *where* we are going; without the *car en route*, we do not know *how* to move toward our destination (we have no means); and without the motivation and power to act, we have no *energy* to move toward our destination (we have no fuel).

5.1 Constructed Life Story as Ethical Vision

Life stories are never ethically neutral: they operate as blueprints for self-understanding and human action. They contain *explicit* or *implicit* beliefs and values, either openly professed, or at least privately cherished. We may not always act in accordance with the beliefs and values inherent in a master life story, yet, at such times we are usually partially aware of the inconsistency between our moral ideals and the extent to which we fall short of adherence to those ideals: "There is no present which is not informed by some image of some future and an image of the future which always presents itself in the form of a telos - or of a variety of ends or goals - toward which we are either moving or failing to move in the present."⁶⁸

A master blueprint for a life story is not something we simply *have*, or are born with. Just as knowledge is constructed by the mental activity of the person, so too are life stories. Life is itself a process of creating and clarifying in ever clearer detail the plot and imagined final outcome of our own story. A comprehensive and unified life story allows us to make sense of our experience, and understand - to a certain degree - our place in the grand story of life. These *life* stories are constantly being revised, refined, or perhaps, completely abandoned in favour of other stories, following the advent of new insights or discoveries about ourselves and the world.

Life stories always hinge on some intimation or image of a future, final outcome. Just as we always anticipate the end of a narrative, so too do we ponder the end of our own life. The kind of outcome we envisage for our personal life story has a great deal to say about our present state of self-awareness and the quality of our understanding of the world. The nature of this outcome greatly influences our emotional state, mental attitudes, and consequently, our behaviour, as well as our physical and spiritual well-being. If an imagined life story has a favourable outcome, the influence on the individual will tend to be positive: emotional stability and peace of mind. If the outcome is unfavourable, the influence will tend to be negative: emotional turmoil and mental anguish.

⁶⁸ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 203.

Clearly the most significant point of futurity which raises the question of a *favourable* or *unfavourable* outcome for the construction of a life story is the point of death. Life stories can transcend the boundaries of time and place: we can imagine eternity. Something within tells us that if our existence fades into oblivion at the point of death, then the marvellous ability to experience self-transcendence is more of a curse than an asset. Yet, there is no intellectual certainty about life after death, only the comfort of religious faith for those who have it.

Existential concerns which plagued the thinking and personal lives of philosophers such as Sartre and Kierkegaard are not the *only* anxiety-producing reflections which weigh on the human mind, but they are real, and raise important philosophical and religious questions about the meaning and ultimate purpose of life. Without some answer to these grand questions (Why am I here? Where am I going?) life can quickly take on the character of the absurd: "When someone complains - as do some of those who attempt or commit suicide - that his or her life is meaningless, he or she is often and perhaps characteristically complaining that the narrative of their life has become unintelligible to them, that it lacks any point, any movement towards a climax or a 'telos'." ⁶⁹

These reflections point to the intrinsic link between a life story and a religious or philosophical world view. Before we can unify our lives within the context of a narrative account, we need to have a vision of our final *good*. Without some conception of a final good, it is not possible to order other *goods*, nor integrate the different self-characterizations we hold over time into a unified and intelligible self-understanding or identity.

5.2 The Narrative Construction of Self as Relational

Developing an authentic awareness of self not only requires a life story capable of giving intelligibility to the entirety of one's life experience, including making sense of painful feelings and harsh realities, it also requires recognition of the fact that identity

⁶⁹ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 202.

formation is not a purely private affair. Whatever particular wisdom and skills we acquire to live a dynamic moral life will only prove effective if we have attained some prior sense of the self as inter-dependent and relational.

It is the narrative structure and inquisitiveness of human consciousness that enables and prompts us to *discover* ourselves by constructing a self-understanding or identity, as well as to *disclose* ourselves to others in narrative communication. This observation draws attention to the decisively *subjective* aspect of identity construction. The other aspect of narrative identity is *correlative*. Alasdair MacIntyre discusses the relational character of a narrative understanding of self in his book, *After Virtue*. He first explains how a narrative understanding of self considers each person as the *subject* of a history for which he or she may be asked to give an intelligible account:

*I am not only accountable, I am one who can always ask others for an account, who can put others to the question. I am part of their story, as they are part of mine. The narrative of any one life is part of an interlocking set of narratives. Moreover this asking of and giving of accounts itself plays an important part in constituting narratives.*⁷⁰

A sense of the self as *relational* makes us aware of the social and political dimensions of personal life; it also means that the particular skills required to *avow* personal experiences in consciousness will be, for the most part, interpersonal communication skills: "The self is constituted by and continues to exist in relationship with others. People are social to the core. We can neither become ourselves nor know ourselves apart from our relations with others, and there can be no reality for us apart from these vital relationships."⁷¹ This statement points to *dependence on others*, and *incompleteness*, as two key aspects of the human condition which orient the self outside of itself toward union with others. This internal dynamic tells us that we cannot begin to recognize and realize our *ideal* self in isolation. We need interaction with others. The truth about ourselves is not learned simply by being in touch with our own inner reality, we discover ourselves primarily within the dynamic of revealing ourselves truthfully to others and receiving their positive and, hopefully, formative responses.

⁷⁰ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 202.

⁷¹ Joseph T. Culliton. *Personal Presence: Its Effects on Honesty and Truthfulness* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985), p. 5.

5.3 Narrative as Instrument of Empowerment

It is possible for a person to have a life story capable of accommodating the full range of human experiences, and yet be unable to avow or consciously take ownership of those experiences. Such might be the case if the imagined life story is not a *meaningful* story, or if trustworthy personal relationships needed in the endeavour are missing. Both a meaningful life story, and interpersonal relationships based on mutual love and trust, are essential. What is finally required, however, is the courage and strength of will to acknowledge those threatening engagements we find difficult to bring into consciousness, and to live in accordance with consciously acknowledged beliefs and moral values.

Moral courage is required to endure the suffering which accompanies the explicit acknowledgement of painful truths, and moral stamina is required to go on after such acknowledgements, to accomplish whatever such recognition may demand from us. What is it that is lacking in a person's life when moral courage wanes? Where does moral stamina come from?

Just as the ethical social vision within a life story can generate motivation to act and work to develop meaningful relationships with others, wherein we can both reveal and discover ourselves; so too can the act of self-disclosure and discovery, which takes place within the context of meaningful relationships, lead to a more empowering, positive reformulation of a life story. People who *listen* to us, who *believe* in us, who *encourage* us to attempt some feat...can often empower us to accomplish far more than we would achieve on our own.

What if we have a disempowering life story? No matter how tragic or meaningless an imagined life story may be, I believe every life story contains some *idealized* notion of the self which makes self-honesty, self-improvement, and participation in responsible social change possible. But what if one's master life story is too tragic to generate sufficient moral stamina to move one forward toward a greater realization of the ideal self? Some suggest that the motivation to improve comes primarily from the experience of being cared for and loved: "Those who are loved are inevitably aware that it was the

creative activity of someone else's love that held up their ideal image to them and gave them the confidence and courage to dare to realize it."⁷²

Without the attraction and moral reinforcement that comes from holding the *ideal self in consciousness* inspired by the love of an *other*, it may not be possible, in fact, to believe that our ideal self is very *ideal*, attainable, or even worth pursuing. We may be overwhelmed by the fact of our own prior failures, and the seemingly insurmountable obstacles to change on the road ahead, all of which generates a feeling of powerlessness. Many people understand from their personal experience how the bonds of love and trust established with others can rescue us, calling us to move beyond despair.

*The fact is that we can only experience sorrow for our inconsistencies and failures when we see them in view of our ideal or most authentic selves. When we know that our ideal selves are anticipated by those who love us as our authentic truth, we can muster up the courage to strive to attain this truth, even when it appears unattainable.*⁷³

We can now see that the three essential ingredients for authenticity and continuous moral progress in the journey of life are really only two: a life story and human relationships; the third ingredient (necessary fuel) pertains to the *quality* of our life story and relationships. The necessary fuel (moral motivation) flows from a life story valued as *reasonable* and *meaningful*, as well as from interpersonal relationships that are *trustworthy* and based on mutual love and respect. These two core dimensions are unified in dynamic moral praxis.

Summary

Human beings cannot grasp the full meaning and mystery of life due to the *unlimited* desire to know, and the *limited* capacity to know. As a consequence of this limitation, human beings strive to come to a fuller understanding of self and society by integrating and constructing a meaningful explanation from information and insights about

⁷² Culliton, *Personal Presence*, p. 89.

⁷³ Culliton, *Personal Presence*, p. 91.

reality. This integrating function of mind determines the essential psychological structure of human knowing as *dynamic*.

It is possible that this normal process of knowing can be corrupted as the individual fixates on either an abstract or concrete mode of knowing, and relates to the world with a fragmented consciousness. Such a fixation results in psychological aberrations by constraining consciousness within a static world view which stifles the transformative capacity of human beings. The dynamics of human knowing reveal that human beings are able to step back and to ponder the world. We can experience reality as *presence*, or we can translate the real world into manipulable *concepts and symbols* in a search for insight. Ideally a healthy process of engagement in relationships and social processes combines these two modes of knowing and relating to the world to serve moral, political, and spiritual ends.

The construction of identity and the development of dynamic moral awareness both pertain to the transformation of human consciousness. Neither can occur outside the context of a dynamic interpersonal project, where other people serve far more than simply a *functional* role in the formation and articulation of individual identity. Identity is not the product of two histories (personal and social) which are cleverly woven together. The identity of self is - at one and the same time - constituted by an ongoing interaction between person and society. Each person is the subject of a single social history shared with others. A personal life story must incorporate some version or interpretation of both personal experience (autobiography) and collective experience (social history). Every aspect of a personal life narrative reflects both a subjective (personal) and collective (social) character within the context (setting) of concrete social structures and relations. The imagined future component of an authentic *personal* life story, therefore, contains some form of *social* vision.

Every individual ideally desires a more favourable and morally acceptable self and society. With the limitations of human knowing and the central connection between *awareness, attention* and *responsible moral action*, we can see that these terms are elements of a commonsense philosophical anthropology which critical theologians,

psychologists, sociologists, political scientists, economists and many others accept as a common foundation and basis for dialogue.

The search for a coherent self-understanding and a meaningful and unified world view is a life project which cannot occur without continuous reference to the particulars of our life experience. As numerous philosophers, ethicists, sociologists and psychologists have clarified, the only means we have to access (and assess) continuously the particulars of our life experience (in terms of interpreting the meaning of isolated fragments of information) is through the use of a narrative method for ethics.

Moral praxis requires the voluntary focusing of attention on self and society with an aim to fostering liberating awareness and responsible social engagement. In a just social order, the moral praxis called for is to stabilize and sustain the established order. An unjust social order will demand a praxis of resistance and countervailing social movements. Regardless of the particular social context or personal circumstances - and the unique call to action particular contexts and circumstances presented to people - anything that impedes awareness, or prohibits voluntary control over human attention, is of central importance to ethics.

To appreciate the intricacies and workings of social ideology in modern-day consciousness (chapters 3 & 4) it is beneficial first to consider how people can be active accomplices in processes of awareness-deadening, and how they can even initiate such processes by engaging in self-deception (chapter 2). Unjust social situations which impoverish and weaken people are the fuel for negative emotions, mental confusion and conflict. Negative emotions, in their turn, fuel domestic violence, reactionary politics, and many other tragedies played out in manifold ways on the stage of life. We must not lose sight of the fact that the paramount ethical task for the contemporary era is to call people beyond what some have called, *the data of despair*.

The following chapter on self-deception concentrates briefly on the intrapsychic and interpersonal psychology of impediments to awareness. This focus on the individual requires a prior sensitivity to the contemporary unjust and fragmented social context within which people attempt to make sense of their lives.

Chapter Two

Moral Awareness and the Dynamics of Self-Deception

Everyone, at times, exhibits a tendency to avoid, deny, rationalize or in some manner evade aspects of the truth about themselves and the social world in which they live. Such a tendency impedes moral development, spiritual transformation and positive social change. To live authentically and meet the pressing social problems facing society with moral courage requires watching. Self-deception can represent a major impediment to the emergence and/or operation of moral awareness even in a life praxis dedicated to the development of a more just and humane society. Self-deception can prove a subtle destroyer to those seeming to be wise. To avoid self-delusion and self-inflicted deceit causing mental duplicity, it is necessary to know and understand the workings of these enemies of moral awareness.

A similar core social psychological dynamic operates both with *self-deception* and *identity formation*, namely, the manipulation of consciousness through the selective focusing of attention. These dynamics of knowing can create moral disorder by corrupting consciousness and distorting identity. Thankfully, these negative factors can be identified and neutralized. A basic commitment to be rigorously honest with oneself to attain and maintain a clearer awareness of the structures of defence and denial operating within consciousness is the mark of a dynamic spiritual life, and the surest means to transformative moral awareness.

Self-deception can be viewed as a sustained mental process of limiting *awareness*. The non-performance of human consciousness is at the centre of the dynamics of self-deception. The factors that explain the phenomenon of self-deception also point to the psychological and moral conditions, wisdom, and skills required to bring about liberation from debilitating states of self-deception.¹

¹ The political and cultural significance of self-deception will be addressed in the following chapter.

1. Moral Approaches to Self-Deception

No simple definition of the term self-deception exists to make the phenomenon any less perplexing. The most any definition can do is to offer a general description of what happens when an individual deceives him or herself. There is a tendency to think of self-deception as *lying to oneself*. Upon closer scrutiny, however, *lying to oneself* is an intrinsically paradoxical enterprise. Deceiving oneself entails persuading oneself to hold a false belief to be true. It involves concealing a truth, or one's view of the truth, from oneself. But is this possible? How can a person simultaneously *believe* and *disbelieve* the same thing, while apparently remaining *unaware* of the fact that his or her consciousness and life experience is marked by this basic contradiction?

The enigmatic character of self-deception has prompted philosophers, anthropologists, psychologists, psychiatrists and ethicists to probe the complex dynamics of self-deception in search of a deeper understanding of the human condition. Each discipline has approached the topic with its own unique set of assumptions, perspectives and aims.

The *philosophical* problem has been to explain when false beliefs constitute a state of self-deception, and how self-deceivers generate and maintain these false beliefs. How do we, in the first place, determine what is true or false, rational or irrational, reality or fantasy? What is the nature and function of the human mind? Is the essential self a *unitary* or *fragmented* being? These are the questions philosophers have wrestled with when considering the seemingly paradoxical phenomenon of self deception.

The *psychological* problem has been to examine the structure and workings of human cognition in an attempt to explain the underlying motivation, implicit meaning and psychic dynamics of self-deception. Psychiatrists, psychologists and psychoanalysts strive to determine whether occasions of self-deception constitute particular mental illnesses or psychological disorders.

The *ethical* problem of self-deception has, for the most part, been to attain a correct understanding of the intentions and character of the self-deceiver, from a moral

point of view, to judge correctly whether - or to what extent - self-deceivers act immorally. The problem most often posed by ethicists writing on the theme of self-deception has been to determine the circumstances, factors and parameters which justify holding self-deceivers responsible for their actions.

In his book *Self Deception and Morality*, Mike W. Martin reviews an impressive body of literature on self-deception to discover whether others have found self-deceivers to be *innocent victims*, *culpable*, or somehow both *innocent and culpable*:

*Are self-deceivers perhaps more like innocent victims than like perpetrators of deceit and, as such, deserving of compassion and help? Or, paradoxically, are they best viewed with ambivalence: culpable as deceivers and simultaneously innocent as victims of deception?*²

Martin discerns four general philosophical currents in the literature which he names the *inner hypocrisy*, *authenticity*, *moral ambiguity*, and *vital lie* approaches. Each explanation of self-deception contains a distinct ethical theory. Outlining the basic elements of the particular *philosophical world view* and *ethical theory of self-deception* found in each approach provides a useful framework for further reflection on what constitutes an appropriate ethical response to the perplexing human phenomenon of self-deception.

1.1 Self-Deception as Moral Hypocrisy

Writers in this intellectual stream regard self-deceivers as moral wrong-doers who betray themselves and cause harm to others. They regard self-deception as a *second-order* wrong. In other words, individuals engage in self-deceit to cover and cloud *first-order* immoral behaviour. Martin cites Bishop James Butler as a leading proponent of this view. Butler believed that self-deceit allows moral conscience to be put to sleep, enabling an individual to engage in wrongdoing with less pain.

The inner hypocrisy approach adopts a metaphysical world view with a normative ethical system. An appeal is made to absolute moral principles and rules. Everyone has an

² Mike W. Martin, *Self-deception and Morality* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1986), p. 2.

inner moral light, a *conscience* - so the reasoning goes - and is therefore culpable for self-deceived behaviour. Why? Because self-deceivers choose to ignore what they know to be true, for the explicit purpose of lessening the pain and guilt of continuing a course of action they themselves believe to be immoral or sinful.

1.2 Self-Deception as Non-authentic Living

Those adopting the authenticity philosophical approach tend to emphasize a single ethical ideal, *authenticity*, which is defined in terms of living honestly and avoiding self-deception. This view is based on existential philosophical principles which explain self-deception as the mental consequence of a refusal to deal responsibly with the whole of one's life.

Sören Kierkegaard and Jean-Paul Sartre are the most prominent and best-known representatives of this approach. Both recognized the need for individuals to have a conscious sense of personal responsibility toward life and made this focus the foundation of their philosophical approach. Authenticity means facing and accepting responsibility for what is *known to be true*. These two existentialists differed, however, in their belief on what constitutes relevant significant truth. Kierkegaard held that authenticity requires the goal of achieving full individuality and personal uniqueness, based on moral commitments and a relationship with God. Sartre rejected belief in objective values and God's existence, charging that such beliefs are themselves the products of self-deception. For Sartre the only true virtue was faithfulness to the fundamental fact of personal freedom. In either case, self-deception for both writers is not restricted to matters of moral right and wrong; when we deceive ourselves, we corrupt human awareness and moral praxis.

1.3 Self-Deception as Vital Lies to the Self

Those belonging to the vital lie approach regard self-deception as a valuable coping technique, or psychological defense mechanism, which shields the self from unbearable realities and debilitating truths. Self-deception is viewed as serving a valuable *function* in the maintenance and construction of identity, protecting the individual from unpleasant and painful aspects of reality. This approach takes exception to the excessively moralistic condemnations of self-deceivers found within the preceding two approaches, and focuses on the positive benefits of self-deception. It draws attention to the possible harm which can result from trying to eliminate self-deception completely from our lives, or the lives of others: engaging in self-deception can also contribute to personal growth, self-respect, love and community.

Unlike the *stoic*, who regards moral virtues as *good in themselves*, proponents of the vital lie approach regard self-deception as *morally-neutral*. They believe the moral dimension of self-deception must be assessed in terms of concrete life contexts examined in light of the principles of a *situation ethic*.³ The ethical notion of *the good* in this approach, is based neither on an implicit nor explicit objective code of moral truth. It is derived, rather, from a *situational* and *utilitarian* ethic which regards *survival*, not *truth*, as the most valued ideal. The vital lie approach does not suggest that self-deception is always the right policy, but argues that it may sometimes be the honourable and prudent route, whenever engaging in self-deception is deemed to be the only way to maintain a viable human life.

³ Joseph Fletcher clarifies the foundational ethical position upon which the vital lie approach is based when he states that the situational ethicist, "... avoids words like 'never' and 'perfect' and 'always' and 'complete' as he [she] avoids the plague, as he [she] avoids 'absolutely.'" *Situation Ethics: The New Morality* (Philadelphia, WestMinster Press), p. 43-44.

1.4 The Moral Ambiguity of Self-Deception

The moral ambiguity approach regards self-deceivers as victims of forces beyond their independent conscious control, thereby calling into question whether conduct is completely voluntary. Martin discerns two distinct branches within the moral ambiguity approach. The first trend subscribes to some form of philosophical determinism where the self-deceiver is regarded as having neither full knowledge nor free choice over what he or she thinks or does. Where awareness of wrongdoing is completely absent, moral culpability for self-deceived thinking and acting is ambiguous.

The second branch of the moral ambiguity approach engages in a psychoanalytic reading of self-deceivers, viewing self-deception as the result of unconscious forces.

Freud is considered the originator of this view:

The most sustained effort to overcome this seeming paradox [of self-deception] has been that of psychoanalysis. Its view of human defense mechanisms is surely much more complex than the standard versions of self-deception. Freud's therapy was based on the assumption that people repress much of what they seem not to know, or to have forgotten, and that this material is capable of being retrieved.⁴

Proponents of this approach adopt a morally non-judgmental approach by suggesting that it is only proper to hold people accountable if they have an awareness of moral responsibility, and show a genuine willingness to accept responsibility. Such a disposition seems lacking in self-deceivers. Self-deception is, consequently, viewed as a type of pre-moral condition in which the absence of awareness and free choice makes moral responsibility uncertain. This approach probes the complexities of the human psyche in an attempt to show how theoretical models of moral evaluation fail to give proper attention to psychological dynamics.

Despite noticeable differences between the various representatives of the four general approaches, we notice that three of the four ethical approaches render *moral judgments* on self-deceivers: only the moral ambiguity approach regards the behaviour of self-deceivers as *morally opaque*.

⁴ Sissela Bok, *Secrets: On the Ethics of Revelation* (New York: Pantheon books, 1982), p. 61.

2. Judging the Intentions and Character of Self-Deceivers

In his research on self-deception, Martin found the tendency to present characterizations and judgements on people deemed to be self-deceivers so prevalent in the literature that he made it the primary interpretative device for his study:

Regarded as deceivers, self-deceivers seem guilty for their deception and any harmful effects; regarded as deceived, they seem to be innocent victims. Viewed as liars, they appear insincere and dishonest; viewed as victims of a lie, they appear sincere and honestly mistaken. As deceivers, they seem responsible and blameworthy for cowardly hypocrisy; as deceived, they apparently deserve compassion and help in gaining full awareness of the guile perpetrated on them.⁵

A non-judgmental moral theory of self-deception can be constructed from the psychological insights in the writings of several representatives of the moral ambiguity approach. First, further analysis of the ethical theories informing the moral judgments launched against self-deceivers in the other three approaches to understand better how these views are both untenable, and how they preempt moral awareness by making judgments abstracted from the reality of the person's situation.

2.1 Inner Hypocrisy Characterization: Self-deceiver as Sinner

Representative viewpoints within the inner hypocrisy approach hold that individuals perform *acts* of self-deception to create mental *shrouds* that block awareness of immoral behaviour in consciousness - the attention is deliberately kept focussed on something else. Moral wrongdoing results from the person failing to believe that a given act is morally wrong, while still holding to the basic moral principle which makes the act morally wrong. It's a case of convincing oneself that the act *is morally right*, despite evidence available to one's consciousness that says the contrary. With self-deception, that awareness is prevented from being constructed, or it is somehow obliterated if present, as a consequence of psychosocial factors affecting the life and consciousness of the person.

⁵ Martin, *Self-deception and Morality*, p. 28-29.

The dynamic works as follows: a person first thinks a certain act is, in principle, morally wrong, but then proceeds to deceive him/herself through any number of means into believing that - despite the violation of the moral principle - the act is nonetheless permissible. This view serves as the basis for the judgment of hypocrite.

Such an atomized assessment of moral behaviour is always a potentially misleading abstraction. It is not possible to characterize an individual's behaviour - let alone judge it - without knowing the *intention* and *life context* of the individual performing the act. Besides being *personal*, human actions are also always *social*, and they only become intelligible when they are viewed within a historical and narrative frame of reference.

Writers belonging to the inner hypocrisy approach believe they know the meaning of self-deceived behaviour; they claim to know both the intentions and the identity of the self-deceiver. The intentions of the self-deceiver are (a) to act in violation of what one knows to be right in order to please oneself, even at the expense of others, and (b) to shirk the burden of moral responsibility and moral guilt. The claim is that the individual has (or had) knowledge of right and wrong but freely chose to blur this painful and self-condemning knowledge for the intentions cited above.

Is such a general moral assessment justified? Such would be the case if no other intention could be found to explain self-deceived behaviour, thereby making no other characterization of the self-deceiver possible. Others have, however, as was noted, ascribed quite different intentions and characterizations to self-deceivers.

2.2 Self-deceiver as Coward: The Authenticity Approach

Kierkegaard offered a description of the intentions and characterization of self-deceivers from the vantage point of his objective code of moral values and his fundamental Christian theology. He believed that sin was facilitated by a self-deceptive blurring of consciousness. To be a self-deceiver is to be a *sinner* and a *betrayal of self*. Kierkegaard offers a less harsh analysis of the dynamics of self-deception than does the inner hypocrisy approach, however, believing that most people are simply too far removed from God to

have much awareness of themselves as sinners. The self-deceiver suffers from a weak spirit, and too little moral courage. The self-betrayed sinner lacks consciousness and spirit, and consequently, does not warrant the description and malicious characterization attributed generally by those who follow the general ethical theory in the inner hypocrisy approach. For Kierkegaard, self-deception is a psychological state of moral identity defined by a deformation in consciousness and the human spirit.

Sartre made a slightly harsher judgement. He believed that to deny one's authentic freedom is to be self-deceived. Only *authentic* people can identify and judge self-deceivers. On the other hand, there is no objective basis for criticizing *authentic* persons, in that truly authentic individuals consistently regard human freedom as the foundation of all other values. And how is one to judge between *authentic* and *unauthentic* individuals? Sartre found grounds for judging self-deceivers in his concept of *bad faith*. He believed that *authentic* persons can form judgments on those who seek to hide from themselves the voluntary nature of their existence and its complete freedom. To turn away from or deny the fact of one's own freedom is to act with bad faith. People may do so for various reasons. Sartre judged those who evaded moral responsibility by believing in determinism to be *cowards*, and those who ". . . try to show that their existence is necessary, when it is merely an accident of the appearance of the human race on earth," he judged even more severely, with the derogatory designation "scum." Sartre was careful to point out that, ". . . neither cowards nor scum can be identified except on the plane of strict authenticity."⁶

Adherents of both the inner hypocrisy and authenticity approaches offer negative characterizations of self-deceivers based on fundamental religious and/or philosophical belief systems containing moral principles and values which they hold to be universally available to human beings.

⁶ Martin, *Self-deception and Morality*, p. 65.

2.3 Self-deceiver as Survivor: The Vital Lie Approach

The vital lie approach demonstrates that it is also possible to give a positive characterization to the self-deceiver. Adherents of this approach regard the self-deceiver as *prudent*, or even *heroic*. Whatever the particular characterization given, individuals who engage in self-deception with the intention of furthering their own survival - or the survival of others - are to be commended for increasing the viability of life. This ethical perspective is founded on neither an *evidence-based* nor *truth-centred* pattern of rationality, but on a utilitarian mode of reasoning for ethics and a practical theory of human development.

The particular intentions ascribed to self-deceivers by the inner hypocrisy, authenticity and vital lie moral approaches are based neither on concrete historical data, nor specific biographical information; each characterization is either *inferred* or *deduced* from the underlying philosophical beliefs systems and ethical theories operating in each approach. There can therefore be no verification of any moral theory of self-deception based on an abstract analysis of human intention. The most a general theory can do is to outline a typology of *possible* characterizations, based on the variety of particular experiences of individuals. The contextual experience of the self-deceiver can be morally assessed only after the discovery or disclosure of a sufficient degree of significant information to make such self-deceived experience intelligible within a narrative framework. It is never acceptable to render moral judgments (*positive* or *negative*) on self-deceivers as a class or group.

No clear verification can be found for the particular ethical understanding of self-deception found in either the inner hypocrisy, authenticity or vital lie streams. This leaves us with one remaining option: to develop a non-judgmental understanding of the social psychological dynamics of self-deception, beginning with insights from a more general literature supportive of the moral ambiguity approach to understanding and responding to the self-deception.

3. Self-Deceiver as a Metaphor for the Human Condition

Research on self-deception has tended to focus on the abstract problem of determining culpability for self-deceived behaviour. Within this approach, researchers look for whatever they believe will help to establish a set of working criteria to determine under what circumstances moral responsibility for self-deception exists. When is it appropriate to hold others morally accountable for self-deception? The tendency to assess culpability for self-deception relies on the prevalence of the dominant epistemology discussed in the preceding chapter. It is the *problem-solving* approach to ethics: the problem here being to ascertain guilt. As John Martin Rich notes, however, this widespread tendency within ethics fails to appreciate the complex social psychological dynamics of moral action, and has, consequently, tended to overlook the more fundamental problem of determining the extent to which a person may be rendered *powerless* to act in accordance with cherished moral values:

Belief systems do not clarify what is actually entailed in moral decision and "moral development". That is to say, popular crises in morality have tended to divert energies away from more critical and fundamental inquiry into human nature, both human capabilities and limitations. Any fair assessment of moral accountability requires that the human being be capable of doing that for which he [she] is judged.⁷

This means that it is appropriate to view self-deception as a metaphor to understand the human condition better. But how are we to understand self-deception in the particular? We can all attach a particular face to the concept *self-deceiver* - perhaps an alcoholic brother who flatly denies that he has a drinking problem when confronted with overwhelming evidence to the contrary, or a patient who has no conscious recollection of news that he or she has a terminal disease only days after being told. How are we to understand and characterize such individuals? Are they liars? Moral cowards? Suffering from some mental disorder? Or for some obscure reason, simply unable to face the truth about their situation?

⁷ John Martin Rich et al. *Theories of Moral Development* (Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas, Publisher, 1985), p. 3.

In those many cases where self-deception and denial is associated with addiction the overwhelming conclusion of both the medical establishment, twelve-step recovery programs, and the general population is that self-deception and denial are integral elements of some mental illness or disease.⁸ The danger in characterizing an individual as *mentally ill* or *diseased* is that such judgments may be based on partial and perhaps completely erroneous information. A great deal of attention must be given to all the details of the individual's entire life experience in order to understand concrete experiences of self-deception.

Concepts such as *self-deception*, *split self*, *bad faith*, *false consciousness* and *defense mechanisms* are compelling metaphors. They point to internal conflicts and self-imposed defeats that we recognize as potentially debilitating. As Sissela Bok emphasizes, however, metaphors are only metaphors.

*We cannot easily do without these metaphors; the danger comes when we begin to take them for explanations. As metaphors, they help us to see the paradoxes of human failure to perceive and react; as explanations of how the paradoxes are overcome, they short-circuit understanding and become misleading in their own right - one more way in which we avoid trying to understand the complexity that underlies our experience of paradox. They function then as what I.A. Richards called 'premature ultimates,' bringing inquiry to an end too suddenly.*⁹

The moment we equate a *metaphor* with an *explanation*, we block the development of awareness. When we attach a metaphor to an individual as a label, we wrongly judge that individual, which may prevent us from ever getting to know the real person, and perhaps - if the individual happens to trust and believe our judgment - we may prevent that person from getting to know him or herself better. Unsubstantiated characterizations or *labels*, offer simplified explanations which often bring a necessary and moreinsightful process of self-reflection or clinical diagnosis to an abrupt end : investigations which would likely, in time, bring to the surface core problems or

⁸ The notion that addictions are *diseases* in the medical sense of the term is problematic. Chapter four considers some of the negative impacts on moral awareness and human development that can be caused from characterizing individuals suffering from addictions, or various forms of neurotic or psychotic behaviour, as *diseased*.

⁹ Bok, *Secrets*, p. 64.

unresolved conflicts - conflicts which may make intelligible the social origin and psychological function of addiction, neurosis, and psychosis in the individual's life. Detecting and understanding the source of these conflicts is needed to understand how social contradictions operate in human consciousness, distort and debilitate moral living, and frustrate legitimate human needs.

An ethics of awareness seeks to discover what has interrupted or blocked moral transformation, and to offer ways and means to prevent or escape such pitfalls. The following three sections consider the subtle workings of the human mind in terms of a common human propensity to deal with the harshness of reality, at certain times, under certain circumstances, by deadening awareness.

The most important moral problem concerning self-deception is not the need to determine how to judge culpability, a much more fundamental moral problem stems from the simple fact that self-deception exists. Even if it was possible to determine culpability, we need to ask what is gained by confronting the self-deceiver and holding him or her responsible? What possible good would simple knowledge be to ourselves or to the self-deceiver if the initial knowledge of right was not sufficient to motivate the self-deceiver to act morally in the first place?

When philosophers refer to 'the problem of weakness of will' and the problem of self-deception', they usually have in mind the question how these phenomena are at all possible....When non-philosophers refer to these problems, they are more likely to have in mind the question how weakness of will and self-deception can be overcome.¹⁰

The ambiguity approach holds that self-deception occurs either because of an *unwillingness* or *inability* on the part of individuals to face certain painful and threatening truths. What does it take to confront these frightful aspects of life? Is it even a wise thing to try to do so? Before providing an answer to these fundamental questions, it is important to recognize that whatever the appropriate response to self-deception might be, it is unfair to assume that self-deception is solely the responsibility of a given individual. I agree with Joseph Culliton's observation that,

¹⁰ Jon Elster, *The Multiple Self* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 6.

Most of us are conscious of the fact that we cannot transform ourselves simply by being made aware of our faults. Nor are we capable of experiencing sorrow for our failures, simply because they are revealed to us.¹¹

If individuals should have been loved and encouraged by others, and they were not, they may lack the ability to initiate self-transformation. They may still be waiting to be encouraged to strive for something; they may need to see someone else's faith in them, if their faith in themselves has waned. The correct stance to be taken vis-a-vis self-deception, until finding evidence to justify a different stance, is obviously to regard the alleged self-deceiver as a person in need of compassion and help, keeping ever in mind that we are more than likely not free from having purposely evaded significant aspects of truth in our own lives.

3.1 Consensus on the Core Phenomenon of Self-Deception

The *inner hypocrisy*, *authenticity*, *vital lie*, and *ambiguity* approaches agree that the dynamic process of self-deception tends to follow a certain course. An individual evades aspects of what is known to be true to feel better while acting contrary to what he or she values and knows to be true. To accomplish this, the individual utilizes various psychological techniques which (a) help the person ignore, repress, or distort true values, and (b) help the person think of, or manufacture, reasons which justify the self-deceived course of action.¹² In all cases, the individual deliberately turns attention away from those features of his or her behaviour that make it wrong. *Wrong* is here defined as whatever a person thinks or does contrary to what he or she truly values and desires to do *ideally*. Why do we act against our own judgment and cherished moral beliefs by engaging in self-

¹¹ Joseph T. Culliton. *Presence: Its Effects on Honesty and Truthfulness* (Lanham, Md: University Press of America, 1985), p. 91.

¹² There are numerous ways in which this can happen. According to Martin, self-deceivers might (a) evade understanding by blurring their own grasp of what they know, (b) evade attention through systematic distraction, (c) evade belief via wilful ignorance or rationalization, (d) evade cogent argument by disregarding evidence, discounting relevant facts, or refusing to let oneself see clearly what follows from what, or (e) evade appropriate action using self-pretence or any of the preceding strategies, *Self-Deception and Morality*, p. 15.

deception? Perhaps because we sense that something unpleasant would be uncovered if we exercised our attention, reasoning, or information-gathering skills in a certain direction. To avoid pain, we engage in awareness-avoidance tactics.

The primary motivation preceding the entrance into self-deception is the avoidance of truth - the acknowledgement of which would result in a troublesome awareness and an experience of painful feelings. The *inner hypocrisy* approach explains self-deception as an attempt to evade self-acknowledgement of moral wrongdoing to avoid painful moral emotions: guilt and remorse for harming others; shame for betraying moral ideals; and self-contempt for not meeting moral commitments. The *authenticity* approach explains how self-deception enables the moral and spiritual self to betray itself by refusing to acknowledge - with varying degrees of awareness - its own particular potentials, limitations, realistic options and actual characteristics, to avoid either the painful awareness of human *limits*, or the difficult decisions and challenges resulting from an acknowledgement of human *potentiality*. This approach offers the insight that self-deception can easily take the form of self-deprecation as a result of an unwillingness or inability to appreciate the fundamental dignity of being human, and having valuable talents and intrinsic worth. As Martin notes: "People who display drastically low estimates of themselves, suffering from inferiority complexes, may do so because of self-deception about their own positive attributes and self-worth."¹³

The *vital lie* approach also recognizes that self-deception serves to shield the person from those painful feelings which would accompany the acknowledgement of harsh realities and *debilitating truths*.

¹³ Martin, *Self-deception and Morality*, p. 46.

3.2 Psychic Numbing as Coping Strategy

Psychologists have pointed to a particular phenomenon which often occurs when human beings are subjected to considerable pain or stress. Individuals employ psychological mechanisms of defense which protect themselves from the negative feelings which stress produce, whenever the sources of stress are *kept in mind*. Psychological defence mechanisms are used to minimize or destroy such awareness.

Robert Jay Lifton, who studied the survivors of Hiroshima and other disasters, refers to these techniques and mechanisms as tools individuals use in a process of *psychic numbing*. In his book *People of the Lie*, Scott Peck discusses how psychic numbing is a typical and usually quite normal human response:

It is a simple sort of thing. The sight of a single bloody, mangled body horrifies us. But if we see such bodies all around us every day, day after day, the horrible becomes normal and we lose our sense of horror. We simply tune it out. Our capacity for horror becomes blunted. We no longer truly 'see' the blood or 'smell' the stench or 'feel' its agony. Unconsciously we have become anaesthetized.¹⁴

This virtually automatic recourse to psychic numbing intrigued psychiatrist Victor Frankl. While imprisoned in a Nazi concentration camp at Auschwitz, Frankl observed how the prisoners denied themselves explicit awareness of the surrounding horror to deaden the pain of camp life, maintain sanity, and to survive: "Cold curiosity predominated even in Auschwitz, somehow detaching the mind from its surroundings, which came to be regarded with a kind of objectivity. At that time one cultivated this state of mind as a means of protection."¹⁵ Far from being morally reprehensible, Frankl considered such a process of *awareness deadening* to be a necessary mechanism of survival. Only in this way could morale be maintained, and limited supplies of courage and energy be channelled into the all-important task of, ". . . preserving one's own life and

¹⁴ Scott Peck, *People of the Lie: The Hope for Healing Human Evil* (New York, N.Y.: Simon & Schuster, 1983), p. 221.

¹⁵ Victor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1959), p. 25.

that of the other fellow."¹⁶

These experiences which Peck and Frankl discuss, make the process of psychic numbing more understandable. The moral significance of this psychological process is not always so innocent, however, and others have drawn our attention to how we can undergo a similar process of *desensitization* without necessarily being subjected to *horrific* images or experiences. Psychologist Charlotte Kasl explains how the same underlying psychological dynamics operating in experiences of psychic numbing such as those described by Peck and Frankl, can easily be manipulated by others, with disastrous moral and political consequences:

Images that pair merchandise with sexual arousal and fulfilment are everywhere. And images lie to us. To protect ourselves from the meaning of women-hating ads, we all engage in psychic numbing, a term originally used to describe our massive cultural denial to the threat of the nuclear holocaust, the most extreme form of self-abuse.¹⁷

Others have argued that psychic numbing can occur on a widespread scale without clear reference to either *horrific* images, which bring immediate emotional pain (*Peck and Frankl*), nor *pleasant* images, which distort reality and foster selfish and abusive attitudes and practices (*Kasl*). According to Philip Wexler, in his book *Critical Social Psychology*, members of society avoid the anxiety and confusion which accompanies *becoming* aware, or *remaining* aware, of social contradictions by deadening awareness: "Reified social relations create the psychological conditions for the development of schizophrenia. The majority of the population is spared from this madness only at the cost of numbing their awareness. Those who refuse to be numbed fall prey to the viciousness of the social labelling process."¹⁸

¹⁶ See Victor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, p. 44. Psychologists and social workers involved with survivors of incest and childhood sexual abuse discuss a similar process of psychic numbing. This form of psychic numbing can obviously have a far greater impact on an individual's identity. In some cases, the disassociation from the *reality* as a result of being brutally abused is radical enough to lead to multiple-personality disorders, where the individual survives by splitting or compartmentalizing psychic experience. More will be said about this in chapter four in the context of a discussion of negative dependency.

¹⁷ Charlotte Kasl, *Women, Sex and Addiction: The Search for Love and Power* (New York, N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1989), p. 197.

¹⁸ Philip Wexler, *Critical Social Psychology*, (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), p. 124.

The following chapter makes the connections between social knowledge, ideology, and deadened awareness central to a study of social ignorance. I here refer to the relation between social context and deadened awareness as a reminder that what the moral agent *thinks* and *does* always has social and political significance.

3.3 Denial and the Psychic Mechanisms of Defense

*Of all the responses that seem clearly self-deceptive, to many, denial is most striking. Doctors find, for example, that among seriously ill patients that learn that death is near, at least 20 percent have no memory after a few days of having received such news. Faced with intolerable anxiety, they have blocked out the news.*¹⁹

Anna Freud's work *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence*, proposed a tremendously influential *theory of denial*. Various interpretations of this theory have become firmly entrenched in psychoanalysis and popular *self* and *group* therapy approaches. Interpretations of her theory not always remained true to her teaching.

Dr. Avery Wiseman believes Anna Freud gave the term denial a meaning which has since become confused with particular psychological defense mechanisms to such a degree that the foundational insight into the dynamic nature of denial has largely been lost. Anna Freud held that psychological defense mechanisms of all types are themselves grounded on a fundamental human response to danger; this response is what she termed *denial*. Here denial is presented as a metaphor for a human situation and process, it is not itself a *mechanism of defence*. We again come up against the seemingly inescapable tendency among professionals to transform metaphors into explanations: "In general, denial has been used as a fictitious 'mechanism,' an 'as if' entity that can be triggered promptly by a threatening event or perception, as well as a hypothetical 'explanation' for different kinds of psychopathology."²⁰

¹⁹ Bok, *Secrets*, p. 70.

²⁰ Avery D. Weisman, M.D. *On Dying and Denying: A Psychiatric Study of Terminality* (New York: Behavioral Publications, Inc., 1972), p. 59.

A clear distinction must be made between the human *process* of denying and the *fact* of denial. Denial is not a *mechanism* nor is it an explanatory *concept*. Denial is something human beings *do*. As Dr. Weisman explains,

Denial is a total process of responding within a specific psychosocial context. Negation is only one of the consequences of this process; denial is a final fact, not the process itself. To confuse a total process with one of its defensive aims is like saying that the purpose of driving an automobile is to avoid accidents.²¹

Weisman believes it is an error to view denial solely in terms of *aversion* and *negation* of something unpleasant. A dynamic interpretation of denial refuses to accept negation and aversion as static products of a process. They are, rather, incomplete interpretations of a variety of related acts. Weisman outlines four successive steps which precede the fact of denial: (a) acceptance of a primary and public field of perception, (b) repudiation of a portion of the shared meaning of that field, (c) replacement of the repudiated meaning with a more congenial version, and (d) reorientation of the individual within the scope of the total meaning to accommodate the revised reality.

Why do human beings deny what they should acknowledge? Dr. Weisman believes there is a positive function to denial. He tells us that denial helps us to do away with a threatening portion of reality so that we may then participate more fully in contending with problems - a position similar to the vital lie moral response to self-deception. The challenge for ethicists is not to lose sight of the entire dynamic life process of the individual, continually recalling that *denial* is but *one* characterizing feature of a master life story.

The great insight Dr. Weisman offers into this perplexing process of denial is that the phenomenon is never simply an *intrapsychic* occurrence, but always takes place within the context of *interpersonal* relationships. Denial is selective thinking with the aim of evading painful knowledge; denial is also the manipulation of attention geared to protecting or enhancing self-esteem, positive identity and *value in relationships*:

²¹ Weisman, *On Dying and Denying*, p. 60.

Although a potential danger is apt to evoke denial (as I shall call the combined act and fact), a common threatened danger is a jeopardized relationship with a significant key person. Hence, the purpose of denial is not simply to avoid a danger, but to prevent loss of a significant relationship. This explains why patients tend to deny more to certain people than to others.²²

To grasp the psychological dynamics of denial, we need to consider what is *not taking place* when an individual is engaged in a process of denial: at the most basic level, we can simply say that he or she is not accepting (in the sense of *receiving*) aspects of experience into consciousness. What is meant by *not accepting* or not receiving experiences into consciousness? Not accepting signifies either an *unwillingness* or *inability* to attend to, and consciously avow, the inferred meaning of isolated statements, circumstances and events which are part of experience, and available naturally to consciousness.

Previous considerations on processes of psychic numbing and denial suggest why it may be necessary and prudent to accept certain experiences, memories, etc., into consciousness gradually, or, in certain cases, perhaps not to attend to them at all. Until acknowledgment is possible in a manner that leads to life-enhancing and meaningful consequences, individuals tend to drift in that vague mental space Dr. Weisman calls *middle knowledge*; a cognitive place somewhere between open acknowledgement and utter repudiation. To come to a full understanding of human denial it is probably wise to adopt Dr. Weisman's belief that, "The roots of denial are planted in the biological, social, and emotional soil of life, not in the rules of logic."²³ Further reflection on the dynamics of self-deception will make the apparent paradox less perplexing.

We can deaden our awareness of reality without necessarily engaging in self-deception. Insights from the writers cited reveal how it is possible to view self-deception as a common human experience where certain kinds of life experiences make self-deceptive mental strategies understandable, and in cases like those cited by Frankl, morally-legitimate. These reflections give a measure of credence to the *vital lie* approach.

²² Weisman, *On Dying and Denying*, p. 63. Author's emphasis.

²³ Weisman, *On Dying and Denying*, p. 66-67.

What does it require to become willing or able to acknowledge truth and act on knowledge of moral *right*, thereby either overcoming or avoiding an engagement in self-deception? An answer to this basic question begins with key insights on the dynamics of self-deception found within the non-deterministic branch of the moral ambiguity approach.

4. The Ambiguity Approach: Collingwood, Fingarette, Burrell

The second branch of the moral ambiguity approach is concerned with how self-deception causes, constitutes, or manifests unhealthy adjustments to reality. Freud is considered to be the primary shaper of this approach. R. G. Collingwood and Herbert Fingarette developed related perspectives, holding that the presence of unconscious influences makes blameworthiness for self-deception ambiguous.

In his treatise, *The Principles of Art*, Collingwood presents his understanding of self-deception as *corrupt* or *false* consciousness. Collingwood believed consciousness to be the explicit awareness of our emotions and the specific object of our emotions. We may feel *bad*, but not be conscious of either the feeling or the origin or reason for the feeling. Through the linguistic or symbolic activity of consciousness, feelings are transformed into particular emotions coupled with corresponding ideas. It is in this way that we come to understand their meaning. We not only feel *bad*, but we come to understand our bad feeling as a particular emotion; *sad*, or *depressed*, or *lonely*, and we understand to what the emotion is connected (i.e., grieving the death of a loved one). Corrupt consciousness, on the other hand, is the mis-performance - or the purposeful non-performance of acts of expression within consciousness. Rather than diligently working to understand ourselves, we simply turn our attention elsewhere. In this way, self-deception can operate to deaden moral awareness.

Collingwood regards self-deceivers as attending only fleetingly and indistinctly to alarming feelings or impressions. The self-deceiver quickly turns attention away from the feeling, thereby avoiding developing the feeling into an idea or emotion. Self-deceivers do

not really know the truth they flee because, according to Collingwood, such self-knowledge entails consciousness. Self-deceivers corrupt their own consciousness at a level prior to the intellect's formation of beliefs. This results in a lack of explicit awareness within consciousness. Collingwood believes that to express feelings in consciousness is to affirm ownership of those feelings. To disown feelings is to corrupt consciousness. Disowning feelings can lead to a loss of control over them because they continue to exert an unsupervised influence for which the individual does not assume responsibility, nor likely even detect.²⁴ Collingwood does not classify corrupt consciousness as either an involuntary mishap or voluntary wrongdoing. It is the result of one's own activity, yet it is not exactly the product of a *choice*. He reserved such terms for activities initiated with full consciousness.

Collingwood's way of understanding and evaluating self-deception shares striking similarities with the approach Herbert Fingarette takes in his book *Self-Deception*. Prominent in both accounts are the ideas of psychological disowning, fear of being unable to psychologically integrate what is disowned, refusal to focus explicit attention on certain aspects of reality, rejection of personal responsibility and control, and the resultant moral ambiguity.

According to Fingarette, self-deceivers can be described as persuading themselves to believe what they know deep down, or *in their hearts*, to be false. Rather than grapple with the paradoxical problem of explaining how it is possible to *convince oneself that what one knows to be true is false*, Fingarette redescribed the phenomenon of self-deception. Instead of relying on such cognitive terms as *believe* and *know*, he used the language of action, volition and personal identity. Self-deceivers, he suggested, pursue engagements that they disavow - that is, they refuse to claim as part of their identity or self-image. To avow an engagement is to commit oneself to treating it as an aspect of oneself. In undertaking such identity-forming commitments, people authoritatively create their own sense of who they are. Self-deceivers, however, pursue engagements which are

²⁴ Here we cannot help but recall a similar viewpoint from Max Scheler, a perspective which formed the basis of his now-famous philosophical/psychological treatise *Ressentiment*.

inconsistent with their avowed values, while simultaneously refusing to avow those engagements

Avowing an engagement²⁵ has two primary dimensions: (a) a willingness to focus explicit attention on the engagement, a process which Fingarette referred to as *spelling out*; and (b) the integration of the avowed engagement into the set of other avowed engagements that together constitute our identity from our own point of view. If an engagement conflicts with moral principles and values which the individual does indeed cherish, then avowing the engagement not only brings painful emotions such as anguish, guilt, or shame, it also confronts us with the need to reshape a new identity in the midst of inner turmoil - we suddenly realize that we are not who we thought we were and wanted to be. Self-deception enables us to pursue a disavowed engagement without having (a) to experience emotional turmoil and mental conflict, and (b) to reshape identity. Implicit in this view is a dynamic rather than static understanding of human consciousness. As David Burrell explains, consciousness is never automatic, but requires human agency and personal effort:

*Our rudimentary view of consciousness as awareness will not suffice to offer a plausible account of self-deception. I can be conscious of what I am doing without perceiving myself doing it and I can be aware of what I am up to yet fail to take it into account. It would not be amiss to say that we must be trained to be conscious.*²⁶

To act intentionally requires that we act knowingly; but this does not mean that to act intentionally we need to attend constantly to that knowledge. Burrell believes that self-deceiving forms of ignorance are most often spontaneous. The intentions involved are typically not deliberately thought about with mental concentration, nor are they attended to with any degree of awareness.

To become explicitly conscious of something requires exercising a certain skill. It is inaccurate to characterize consciousness as a kind of *mental mirror*. It is more the exercising of a learned skill where we spell out the features of the world to make sense of

²⁵ Engagements can be an activity, purpose, emotion, perception, belief, experience, or any other aspect of how we discover, interpret, or take account of ourselves and the world around us.

²⁶ Burrell, *Self-deception*, p. 84-85.

experience. At times we all sense it to be a more reasonable policy not to spell out some of our engagements to others. At other times we do not spell out our engagements to ourselves. By adopting such a policy, however, we not only avoid becoming explicitly conscious of what we are doing, we also set up a situation ". . . that allows us to avoid becoming explicitly conscious that we are avoiding becoming explicitly conscious!"²⁷

A distinctive orientation within psychoanalytic theory and clinical psychology reflects a similar view of human consciousness. William Glasser, the originator of *Reality Therapy*, challenges basic assumptions of conventional psychoanalysis by arguing that what is really below the level of consciousness are not obscure aspects of previous life experience, but rather, what the individual is doing *in the present*:

*In a sense the patient is aware of his present behaviour, but it is only a meagre awareness. Incorrectly assuming that the patient is fully conscious of his present behaviour, the conventional therapist emphasizes the past; in so doing he misses the extent to which the patient lacks awareness of what he is doing now. The Reality Therapist insists that the patient face his present behaviour.*²⁸

Psychiatrist Scott Peck offers a similar analysis of human consciousness when he suggests that individuals often deceive themselves and avoid dealing with many of the realities of life by remaining so busy thinking and talking about obsessions and compulsions, that no time is left to become aware of basic *problems* underlying more obvious *symptoms*.²⁹ Because *symptoms* often serve as *signs* for what we would rather not see, there is a similar tendency to *treat* or *annihilate* symptoms instead of facing them squarely to discover their meaning.

Proponents of this psychoanalytic approach offer important insights into the social psychological dynamics of human consciousness. A narrow - and at times - *exclusive* focus on the *present*, with an accompanying exclusion of the significance of both the *past* and the *future*, can certainly, however, create its own form of blindness.

²⁷ Burrell, *Self-deception*, p. 85.

²⁸ William Glasser, *Reality Therapy: A New Approach to Psychiatry* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), p. 55

²⁹ Peck, *People of the Lie*, p. 25.

5. Overcoming and Preventing Engagement in Self-Deception

Collingwood, Fingarette and Burrell agree that self-deception enables us to pursue a particular course of action (or a manner of living) without having to suffer inner conflict and emotional turmoil: the self-deceiver does not simply avoid *truth*; the self-deceiver flees awareness of *painful truth*. Like the other approaches, proponents of the moral ambiguity approach also recognize that - by virtue of the very definition of the term self-deception - awareness of moral *right* does indeed exist at some point prior to engagement in self-deception. Rather than speculating on the particular intentions or motives of the self-deceiver, however, this approach is satisfied that the *avoidance of painful feelings* constitutes an adequate explanation for why an individual enters into self-deception. The focus admirably shifts to the problem of preventing or overcoming self-deception.

An understanding of self-deception as the *disavowal* from consciousness of those engagements which conflict with our values and ideals shows how preventing or overcoming self-deception requires the *avowal* of these engagements. This presupposes that we are both *willing* and *able* to bring into explicit consciousness painful emotions such as anguish, guilt, shame or fear. It is entirely possible that a person may be sincerely *willing* to avow engagements, but lack the wisdom and skills necessary to effect a transformation of consciousness. To be able to explain - to ourselves or to others - what we are doing, or experiencing, (or what we have *done* or *experienced*) is not as simple as we might first think. Especially if the motivation underlying actions is not fully comprehended.

Being able to *spell out* engagements presupposes a readiness to reshape identity. It is this intrinsic link between self-deception and identity formation which offers the clearest insight into what conditions must exist, and what skills are required to overcome or prevent entrance into self-deception. Within a framework for understanding the self as *story*, self-deception can be described as both (a) the purposeful avoidance of painful information (which we know *in our heart*, but refuse to make explicit in consciousness), as well as (b) an attempt to preserve a partial or false identity.

To learn the skills necessary to overcome or avoid self-deception, and to sustain an honest knowledge of self, we need a method suitable for an ongoing process of self-inquiry, capable of incorporating into a unified framework the full range of human experience we seek to avow in consciousness, acknowledge to others as part of who we are, and integrate into our self-understanding and master life story.

5.1 Meaningful Self-Disclosure: The Antidote for Self-Deception

In order to form and sustain a coherent understanding of self, or construct an integrated identity, three fundamental things are required. These were spelled out in the previous chapter as: (a) a master life story by means of which we can integrate information and make sense of our experiences; (b) the wisdom, conditions and skills required to make our experiences explicit in consciousness, and (c) the motivation and power to act in accordance with the beliefs and values contained in a master life story. These three general requirements for achieving an integrated identity are also the key ingredients in the recipe for an antidote to the poison of self-deception

5.1.1 SELF-DECEPTION AS A MISSING OR MEANINGLESS MASTER LIFE STORY

As was mentioned in chapter one, the type of outcome we envisage in our master life story has a major impact on our present emotional state, mental attitudes, and consequently, our behaviour and physical well-being. If a life story has a favourable outcome, the influence on the self will tend to be positive; if the outcome is unfavourable, the influence will tend to be negative. As David Burrell states, "Our ability to 'step back' from our deceptions is dependent on the dominant story, the master image, that we have embodied in our character."³⁰

We need a story that allows us to recognize our failings and enables us to accept responsibility for those failings in a non-destructive way. But what if we can not find

³⁰ Burrell, *Self-deception*, p. 95.

sufficient meaning and order in our lives? What if the outcome we envision for our life story is wholly negative? Burrell suggests that it makes perfect sense to view a process of denial or self-deception as a normal consequence of not having a master story capable of making one's experiences intelligible: "Self-deception is correlative with trying to exist in this life without a story sufficiently substantive and rich to sustain us in the unavoidable challenges that confront the self."³¹

With an understanding of self-deception as the disavowal of painful feelings from consciousness, and the insight that identity formation and self-understanding require a narrative structure, we can see that without a meaningful master life story capable of rendering emotional pain intelligible, a degree of denial or self-deception seems unavoidable. Being aware of the negative consequences of not having a meaningful master story, and recognizing our basic cognitive predisposition to be selective regarding what we choose to attend to, makes self-deception less perplexing.

Reading the inner hypocrisy, authenticity and vital lie approaches from the perspective of a dominant *life story* is revealing. The commitment to the goal of *survival* in the vital lie approach not only serves as the rational moral justification for self-deception, it may also point to the absence of a *master story* with the power to make the painful and tragic realities of one's life intelligible and *survivable*. Without a meaningful life story, one can grasp how engagement in self-deceptive, yet *self-maintaining*, strategies may be viewed as the morally-preferable course of action.

The inner hypocrisy approach, on the other hand, assumes that a *master story* with the power to make sense of the painful and tragic realities of one's life is virtually constitutive of being human: self-deceivers chose not to rely on their innate life story for selfish and sinful reasons.

³¹ Burrell, *Self-deception*, p. 88-89.

5.1.2 SELF-DECEPTION AND MISSING OR CORRUPT RELATIONSHIPS

Developing the necessary skills to embrace the reality of one's situation and avoid engagement in self-deception requires a dominant life story capable of giving intelligibility to painful feelings and harsh realities. It requires us to recognize and respect the fact that identity formation is not a purely personal affair. Viewing the human person as *relational* establishes the *social* character of a master story. It predetermines that the particular skills required by the individual to *avow* personal experiences will be primarily *interpersonal* skills. Overcoming or preventing self-deception cannot be separated from the process whereby we both reveal and discover ourselves in personal communication with others:

And it seems to be another fact that no man [woman] can come to know himself [herself] except as an outcome of disclosing himself [herself] to another person. This is the lesson we have learned in the field of psychotherapy. When a person has been able to disclose himself [herself] utterly to another person, he [she] learns how to increase his [her] contact with his [her] real self, and he [she] may then be better able to direct his [her] destiny on the basis of this knowledge.³²

Any theory of knowledge or self-awareness which overlooked the basic human need to engage in dialogical relationships with trusting others would fail to perceive how self-deception can result from the absence or corruption of such relationships. Coming to a truthful awareness of our limits and capabilities requires the affirmation and recognition of *self* and *other* within the context of human relationship: "The self is constituted by and continues to exist in relationship with others. People are social to the core. We can neither become ourselves nor know ourselves apart from our relations with others, and there can be no reality for us apart from these vital relationships."³³ But something else is required. It is not easy to trust ourselves to others:

³² Sidney M. Jourard, *The Transparent Self* (New York: D. Van Nostrand Company, 1971), p. 6.

³³ Culliton, *Personal Presence: Its Effects on Honesty and Truthfulness*, p. 5.

Self-disclosure, however, requires courage. Not solely the courage to be, as Paul Tillich wrote of it, but the courage to be known, to be perceived by others as one knows himself to be. We can paraphrase the Delphic oracle who advised, "know thyself", and declare, "make thyself known, and thou shalt then know thyself".³⁴

This brings us to a consideration of the third requirement for a healthy process of identity formation and moral growth which avoids engagement in self-deception: *moral courage*.

5.1.3 SELF DECEPTION AND THE ABSENCE OF MORAL COURAGE

It is conceivable that we have both a master story capable of accommodating the full range of our experiences and still remain unable to avow those experiences. Such might be the case if we lack a *meaningful* master story, or if we find ourselves without *trustworthy* personal relationships to aid in this endeavour. A meaningful master story, and interpersonal relationships based on mutual love and care, are both essential if we are to prevent, or to overcome, engagement in *awareness-avoidance* strategies. What we need finally, is the courage and strength of will (a) to acknowledge those threatening engagements we find difficult to bring into consciousness, and (b) to live in accordance with our avowed beliefs and moral values. Avoiding the dynamics of self-deception requires a degree of moral courage to endure the suffering which invariably accompanies the acknowledgement of painful truths. And we need moral stamina to motivate us to *go on* to accomplish whatever such recognition may demand from us: "What the self-deceiver lacks is not integrity or sincerity but the courage and skill to confront the reality of his or her situation."³⁵

Our view of the final outcome of our master story lies at the heart of our ethical and spiritual lives, and operates as a key motivating factor for moral action. If the outcome is tragic, if our master story concludes with an epilogue that *life is meaningless*,

³⁴ Jouard, *The Transparent Self*, p. 6-7.

³⁵ Martin, *Self-deception and Morality*, p. 88.

then the moral stamina to act in accordance with our knowledge of what is truthful and morally preferable will be greatly diminished, and may significantly reduce our ability to endure suffering and pain, and hence, to escape the urge to engage in strategies of avoidance which can lead to, or constitute, self-deception.

Just as the character of a master story can motivate us to develop meaningful relationships within which we can discover both ourselves and others in mutual self-disclosure, so too can the act of self-disclosure and discovery in meaningful relationships lead to a more empowering, positive reformulation of our master life story. Overcoming or preventing self-deception requires such a dialogical process.

Summary

Developing and sustaining an honest understanding of self requires at least three things: (a) a master story through which we can integrate and make sense of our life experience; (b) the conditions and skills required to make our experience explicit in consciousness; and, (c) the motivation and power to act in accordance with the beliefs and values present in our master story. Self-deception can be understood as a normal consequence of not having a meaningful master story capable of making life experiences intelligible or the necessary *wisdom, conditions, and skills* to avow the full range of human experiences.

Self-deception must be understood as a dynamic process of knowledge and awareness evasion, which can only be properly identified and morally assessed in concrete situations using a theory formed around the centrality of narrative. Four approaches were examined. Each response attributed certain intentions and characterizations to the self-deceiver which were not empirically verifiable, but were inferred or deduced from the underlying philosophical beliefs and ethical theories present in each approach. There can be no verification of a general theory of self-deception from an abstract analysis of human intention; moral judgments on self-deceivers are, therefore, not verifiable.

All theories based on a metaphysics focused on the *sameness of an underlying substance* must be rejected. We need *experiential knowledge* as well as *abstract knowledge*, which no theory can offer by itself: knowledge about self which is grounded in personal and historical experience. It is necessary to view the self not as a static substance, but as a configuration of personal experiences and events woven together by the mind into a unified identity. The historical and contextual experience of the self-deceiver can, therefore, only be assessed within the structure of narrative.

The relational character of a narrative configuration of self (identity formation) predetermines that the particular skills and life changes we need to *avow* our experiences will be primarily interpersonal skills. Overcoming or preventing self-deception cannot be separated from the process whereby we reveal and discover ourselves in interpersonal communication. A meaningful master story and interpersonal relationships based on mutual love and care are both essential for generating the moral sentiment necessary to overcome or avoid entrance into self-deception. Just as the character of our master life story can motivate us to develop meaningful relationships, wherein we can both reveal and discover ourselves; so too can the act of revelation and discovery within the context of meaningful relationships lead to a more positive and power-giving reformulation of that story. Overcoming or preventing self-deception requires just such a dialogical process.

Deception can easily interrupt or prevent moral growth. The challenge is to uncover the fundamental psychological dynamics of self-deception and gain insight into what conditions or skills are needed to avoid or overcome engagement in evasive and self-deceived behaviour to thereby facilitate moral transformation and subsequent engagement in politically-responsible social change.

When cultural, economic and political conditions are such that facing certain truths results in emotional pain and psychological confusion for many people, it then becomes necessary to undertake a broader analysis of the dynamics of social ignorance in order to uncover the root source of much of what might - upon first glance - seem to be solely the personal faults and failures of individuals. This observation leads naturally to the study of social ignorance in the following chapter.

Chapter Three

Ignorance and the Coherence of Fragmented Society

To say we do not understand or that we are ignorant of the contemporary political situation is to say that we are not individually or collectively responding to it in a life-enhancing way. . . . Rather than learning, in the sense of discovering new ways of remaking our social and physical environment, we are pathologically and defensively learning not to feel, not to see, and not to touch.¹

You have dressed the wound of my people without concern; peace, peace you say, but there is no peace. (Jeremiah 8: 11)

Discovering new ways of remaking our social and physical environment requires a thorough examination of the social structures and mental patterns of consciousness which help to explain social ignorance in contemporary society. A critical analysis of the different forms which ignorance takes in modern consciousness provides a practical means of exposing social contradictions and damaging myths within culture. It is important to expose contradictions and debunk damaging myths. Social ignorance can have serious moral consequence. It can contribute to the legitimation of an unjust and dehumanizing social order. This situation offers a decisive challenge to an ethics of awareness.

1. Society as a Construct of Consciousness

Russell Jacoby credits Sigmund Freud as the source for the radical insight that social revolutions must happen within human consciousness as well as social history:

If Freud was "conservative" in his immediate disregard of society, his concepts are radical in their pursuit of society where it allegedly does not exist: in the privacy of the individual. Freud undid the primal bourgeois distinction between private and public, the individual and society; he unearthed the objective roots of the private subject - its social content.²

¹ Larry D. Spence, *The Politics of Social Knowledge*, (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1978), p. 290.

² Russell Jacoby, *Social Amnesia: A Critique of Contemporary Psychology from Adler to Laing* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975), p. 26.

The *content* of consciousness is *social* information. Freud alerts us to the powerful force of social influence on psychic formation, despite his restrictive conservative political world view and repressive cultural philosophy. More recent social science research makes it possible to make relational and structural links between the deformation of personal consciousness and the social mechanisms that generate and mediate damaging social symbols. Discovering the social roots of psychic phenomena is important. It is also crucial to discover the various methods and techniques that privileged and powerful members of political and corporate elites employ to manipulate social information and produce ignorance. Gunnar Myrdal, writing on the issue of international economics and underdevelopment nearly forty years ago, spoke of the *convenience of ignorance*, where

*. . . people who are better off have usually done their best to keep their minds off the equality issue. In the first place they have tried to remain ignorant of the poverty and distress of poor people. . . . Ignorance is seldom random but instead highly opportunistic. In every country there have been whole systems of psychological and ideological barriers, protecting the well-to-do classes from knowledge of social facts which would be embarrassing to them.*³

The pervasiveness of powerful and subtle psychological manipulations and social deceptions in contemporary capitalist society makes a frank approach to a study of social ignorance essential. Deception, as Christopher Lasch notes, is not benign, although it may present itself as such: "By using accurate details to imply a misleading picture of the whole, the artful propagandist . . . makes truth the principal form of falsehood."⁴ It takes a great deal of work to detect, name, and eliminate these distortions and falsehoods, especially with the increasing secrecy of economic and political affairs. Uncovering the ways in which the human mind is formed, informed or deformed by social information, symbols, ideas, images, and signs fosters awareness, empowering people to reclaim control over the reflective process in personal consciousness, and the economic and political processes in their daily lives.

³ Gunnar Myrdal, *Economic Theory and Underdeveloped Regions*. (Bombay, India: K. K. Vora, 1958), p. 135.

⁴ Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*, (New York, N.Y.: Warner Books Inc., 1979) p. 143.

Awareness of how social ignorance obscures the *fragmented* character of consciousness and social reality in contemporary society can help to identify those particular skills and conditions needed to displace social ignorance with accurate and insightful knowledge. This effort is formidable given the sheer magnitude of impediments preventing such a state of social awareness and engagement in contemporary society.

Many people feel compelled to adjust to damaging social trends for want of alternative ways of acting and surviving within society. People fear the death of democracy and freedom, as so-called international economic realities supplant democratic decisions to attract transnational corporations to invest in the economy and money markets. It seems to be a time of *kairos*, a point in social history where an entire people are called to an awareness of one fundamental moral choice: uncertain and perhaps painful freedom - or slavery and the final death of alternate social dreams? A tough moral choice indeed; often easier dealt with by turning attention to the many diversions our culture offers. The ethical task under these conditions and circumstances seems clear: to actively encourage a creative alternative (and practical) political imagination together with various counter cultural movements to build a culture of hope for future improvements to create moral community.

A critical social imagination can motivate individuals and groups to collectively construct life-enhancing alternatives to negative social conditions and unjust institutions. The requirements for sustaining a life praxis guided by a moral and social vision can be difficult to achieve. It is necessary to form habits through repeated commitments and actions. By so doing, one's lifestyle and identity are increasingly shaped by a movement toward one's moral and ideal social vision, to whatever extent that is possible in the particular circumstances of individuals. The development of moral awareness in today's world requires a commitment to investigate continually one's personal life and contemporary political situation, to identify hidden influences and structures operating within consciousness, producing ignorance, and influencing (and perhaps *directing*) one's daily life. Social ignorance can exist as a barrier to moral insight and human transformation: revelations and events can signal a shift in consciousness (from a state of social ignorance to awareness) which can, in turn, lead to shifts in central life activities,

habits, associations, etc.

Becoming aware of the extent of our ignorance involves searching out the contradictions within *self* and *society*; contradictions which often exist *first* within the structures of society, and manifest themselves *secondarily* in the life experience and consciousness of society's members. Social ignorance can easily pose as knowledge until we are able to locate missing pieces of the social puzzle or identify fundamental factual or logical inconsistencies which expose the distortion, rationalization or ideological deception first believed to be *knowledge*. The wisdom in acquiring and integrating social information is knowing how to organize new information using the tools of critical thinking to discern the psychosocial dynamics of ignorance operating outside the normal scope of awareness:

The real power of language to effect social change implies a lot more than being able to create a rational discourse where justificatory claims are respected. The real power of language is in its capacity to organize irrationality, to bring to the surface incompletely repressed preconscious awareness and to rouse the blocked wishes and fantasies which move between private delusion and collective illusion.⁵

As noted at the outset, some believe Freud made a major contribution to the search for tools to understand or *make rational* the unconscious conflicts and irrationalities submerged in human consciousness. This is also the challenge of a critical ethical inquiry into the dynamics of ignorance: to investigate personal delusion and collective illusion to bring to the surface what exists at the level of the pre-conscious, or what Paulo Freire refers to as *submerged* consciousness. But is it true that ignorance is a moral problem in developed societies?

2. The Moral Problem of Social Ignorance

Tremendous technological strides are taking place in developing a global information knowledge base and communication network. Never has there been such a rapid flow of information around the world. Libraries and computer databases are

⁵ Philip Wexler, *Critical Social Psychology* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), pp. 139-140.

brimming with vast stores of information, and daily news stories tell of evermore amazing technological discoveries. Is it appropriate to speak of social ignorance as a serious moral problem? The modern world's massive storehouse of information has unfortunately also created a deceptive social myth about a corresponding increase in human intelligence.

The moral problem of ignorance obviously has to do with the *quality* of knowledge. The *wisdom* a person shows in deciding what is important to know, or pay attention to, at a given time is key. The amount of information or technical knowledge a person has is incidental to the moral quality of the person's life, and indeed, too much of the wrong kind of information can be a major barrier to achieving a dynamic ethic of awareness and moral transformation. Swallowing a flood of data flowing over a computer terminal hooked up to networks on the *information highway* can take on the form of addictive behaviour not unlike heavy drinking of alcohol, disengaging individuals from dynamic social life and interpersonal relationships.

It takes the wisdom generated by faith in some moral or religious vision to navigate the reams of information and sort out the most important truths and insights needed to live a moral and peaceful life in community. One moral guide a person can use to discern the degree of wisdom present in a given situation of human *knowing* is to ask whether it is *knowing* that will better enable a person to live the ethical life he or she aspires to live. These qualities are more important than the *quantity* of knowledge one has.

The quickest means to attain a good measure of wisdom is to ponder the fact that we *don't know* a great deal more than we *know* about almost everything we claim to know something about. . . and we know very little of the sum total of what there is to be known. Reflections on what we do not know should form a healthy attitude of caution about existing actions and political trends in the world. Hans Jonas defines the need to increase awareness of our ignorance a *moral imperative*; without such awareness it will not be possible to recognize the potential negative consequences of denying or *ignoring* the fact and extent of human ignorance in our knowledgable but perhaps unwise information age:

The gap between the ability to foretell and the power to act creates a novel moral problem. With the latter so superior to the former, recognition of ignorance becomes the obverse of the duty to know and thus part of the ethics that must govern the evermore necessary self-policing of our oversized might.⁶

To police oversized might. . . seems an appropriate message for those with power. But what of the real victims of social ignorance, those without political and economic power? Identifying and overcoming social ignorance can also *empower*. Along with awareness of how social psychological dynamics operate in human consciousness, which are also supported and mediated by social institutions to produce social ignorance, comes the moral obligation to discern the dynamics of social ignorance on a daily basis. Insight into the presence of ignorance-producing dynamics can signal a fundamental shift in consciousness and change in one's central life activities. A commitment to achieve one's optimal moral vision in life obliges us to discover these transformative tools. Realizing one's optimal moral vision requires more than simply being true to what is *known* to be true. An ethics of awareness also calls for the continuous expansion of moral vision through a commitment to *prevent entry into*, or, depending on circumstances, *to overcome*, the awareness-killing dynamics of social ignorance.

To discover the tools of critical thinking a person needs what C. Wright Mills called a "sociological imagination;" a mind with, ". . . the capacity to shift from one perspective to another - from the political to the psychological;"⁷ or, as psychologist Edmund Sullivan prefers to call it, a "psychological imagination" which attempts to ". . . provide a critical interpretation of what is happening within people in the context of wider social structures."⁸

⁶ Hans Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 8.

⁷ C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (New York: The Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 7.

⁸ Edmund V. Sullivan, *A Critical Psychology: Interpretations of the Personal World*, (Toronto: Plenum Press, 1984), p. x.

3. Discerning the Origin and Forms of Social Ignorance

Discerning the possible causes for social ignorance provides the theoretical framework for a more sophisticated investigation of human consciousness in contemporary society. It is possible to discern three interrelated theoretical categories which explain possible sources or underlying causes for social ignorance.

3.1 Ignorance: The Result of a Restricted Capacity for Awareness

Human attention is limited. People are not normally able to give their attention to more than one or two items at a time. This basic psychological fact not only means that our capacity for awareness is quite restricted, it also means that a degree of social ignorance is a *constituent* component of human consciousness.

This observation may seem elementary, however, an operating *awareness* of our ignorance is not automatic; in fact, it can be quite difficult to attain. Human beings seem to manifest a root insecurity about losing self-esteem, which fosters a tendency to bolster the self to compensate for insecurity: we naturally tend to profess to others how much we *know*, not how much we *do not know*. Candid-camera on-the-street interviews with passers-by offer ample evidence of the extent to which individuals try to avoid being judged ignorant. Succumbing to the pressure to bolster one's self-esteem by presenting a favourable image of oneself to others can greatly diminish our awareness of our ignorance.

More decidedly, the structural dynamics of human knowing are prohibitive for attaining a conscious and operating sense of our ignorance. Whenever we focus our attention on one thing, we are *paying attention* to the object the mind is set on, and we are simply not inclined to be aware of that which we are ignorant. Becoming conscious of our ignorance requires a rigorous effort to bring to the attention of the mind those things we are not immediately attending to; and that requires use of a method with some built-in mechanism designed to foster self-reflexive thinking in our daily lives.

3.2 Ignorance as the Product of Self-Deception

Ignorance can be understood as the product of self-deception in all those situations where an individual either *becomes*, or *chooses to remain*, ignorant of what was - or could have been - known, as a direct result of evasive actions taken by the self. This is not to suggest that we deceive ourselves each time we chose to remain ignorant. We may have a tacit awareness that we are ignorant of a great many things - and even consciously opt to remain ignorant of those things - without engaging in the dynamics of self-deception. The majority of decisions we make are arbitrary choices which simply reflect our personal interests or preferences, i.e., a decision to watch the news on one television channel rather than cartoons on another. Still, all such decisions reflect aspects of an individual's way of life, and have a formative influence on identity.

On other occasions, however, such choices have greater moral significance. In making those decisions we are not only morally responsible for what we decide to think about and do, we are also, in part, responsible for what we decide to exclude from consciousness. The fact that humans have a restricted capacity to know is itself not a defence for every particular case of social ignorance, in some cases there is a moral obligation to find out what we do not know.

Self-deception involves an unwillingness or inability to bring into consciousness aspects of what we value as *good* or sense to be *true*. Individuals can engage in strategies which lead to the *repression*, *rationalization* or *ignorance* of knowledge in such a manner as to leave themselves unaware of that which they know is true and morally significant, but would rather not be aware. Within an interpretive framework of the self as *story* we can understand self-deception as a *vague commitment to ignorance* which enables the self to resist personal transformation in the interest of preserving a partial or false identity. We engage in the dynamics of self-deception when we chose to become or remain *unaware* by following a subtle strategy of knowledge evasion. Self-deception reflects a prior decision to remain ignorant of threatening information for fear of what changes such knowledge may demand of us. When we allow ignorance to serve a functional role in personal identity

maintenance we risk becoming self-deceived and socially ignorant, depending on whether the choice is purely arbitrary or morally-significant.

Ignorance which results from self-deception comes from either an *unwillingness* or *inability* to face painful truth; it does not always constitute personal moral failure. Nonetheless, self-deception does represent an impediment to human transformation and responsible social change.

3.3 Ignorance as the Result of being Misinformed or Deceived

Ignorance can also result from being misinformed or deceived. Such deception can take many forms: information may be withheld, information may be given in a partial or distorted manner, or individuals can be told or taught lies. People are routinely misinformed by others, who have themselves been deceived or misinformed by others, who are also unaware of their ignorance. The propagation of falsehoods can easily take on the character of a social epidemic when access to enlightening social and historical truths is kept hidden or ignored. Regardless of the particular methods employed, misinformation or deception occur whenever truthful knowledge of ourselves or the world is not made available,⁹ or deliberately excluded from historical and social explanations.

These ideal categories explaining sources of ignorance demonstrate that it is impossible to explain the origin of all social ignorance. Common sense tells us that all three categories contribute to the sum total of a given individual's state of ignorance. Ignorance can, however, take on a decidedly *collective* character, which raises an

⁹ In July of 1992, as a registered lobbyist for the National Farmers Union (NFU), I submitted a request to the Access to Information department of Agriculture Canada for government documents on the North American Free Trade Agreement. The requests were for policy and impact studies undertaken by the federal government to measure and predict the likely effects of the NAFTA on Canadian Agriculture and family farms. At first, government officials ruled to exempt *every word of every document*, and refused to release anything. After public protest and considerable media coverage of the issue, several hundred pages of documentation were released, however, all information was deleted other than chronological data about officials meetings, and the occasional statement suggesting that things were proceeding well. After the Commissioner for Access to Information confirmed that the law did not require the government to release the documents, along with dozens of phone calls to government offices to get movement on the requests, it became clear that the federal government had no intention of releasing this critical information to the NFU.

important question for ethics and the social sciences: is it possible to identify one of the above three categories (*restricted capacity, self-deception, deception*) as the principal origin or cause of specific expressions of collective social ignorance within the dominant cultural ethos of contemporary society? Some sociologists believe the origin of most social ignorance in modern capitalist societies results from the deception of the masses by dominant elites. This theory has appropriately been dubbed *the dominant ideology thesis*.

4. Social Coherence, Ignorance, & the Dominant Ideology Thesis

The dominant ideology thesis proposes that the reproduction of social relations within capitalist societies is made possible by the presence and pervasive influence of a dominant cultural ideology. This approach assumes the existence of a dominant system of images and beliefs which creates a collectively-shared false consciousness. The dominant ideology is comprised of erroneous political and economic social explanations, which members of subordinate groups and classes incorporate uncritically, and claim as their own essential world view. The key elements of the dominant ideology thesis are outlined by the authors of a book by that title:

The thesis argues that in all societies based on class divisions there is a dominant class which enjoys control of both the means of material production and the means of mental production. Through its control of ideological production, the dominant class is able to supervise the construction of a set of coherent beliefs. . . [which] penetrates and infects the consciousness of the working class. . . and functions to incorporate the working class within a system which is, in fact, operating against the material interests of labor.¹⁰

This theory holds that collective false consciousness is created and re-created through the control and manipulation of the media, the selective censoring of school curricula, and the formative influence of pervasive beliefs, symbols, and values which are perpetually mediated and reinforced by the political, judicial, educational, cultural, and economic institutions of society. Dominant ideology is seen to originate within a *power*

¹⁰ Nicholas Abercrombie et al., *The Dominant Ideology Thesis* (London, England: George Allen & Unwin, 1980), p. 2.

bloc, economic elite, political elite, knowledge elite or some combination of all such groups who cooperatively legitimize the status quo while benefitting personally from their preferred place in capitalist society.

Dominant ideology theories hold that members of subordinate classes and groups remain unaware that they internalize the dominant ideology; that is, they are not aware that they think and act in ways which contribute to the continuance of inequitable social relations, and that they thereby unknowingly help to perpetuate structural social injustice.

Those who posit the existence of a dominant social ideology usually do so to explain the observed quiescence of subordinate classes and marginal groups within class societies. The fact that members of subordinate groups - even when subjected to extreme exploitation and degradation - often accept their subordination, is offered as evidence for the existence of a dominant ideology. The operating assumption is that if subordinate groups were aware of the cause of their subordination and oppression, they would not offer explanations for economic injustice and social ills which disguise the true source of social injustice, nor would they continue to give their support to the real culprits.¹¹

*He or she who has discovered and described particular social evils and pointed to their causes must account for the apparent absence of rebellion or the failure to hear the call to revolution. Motivated as they often are by what is best in the species, at great effort and danger to their lives, reformers are pressed to conclude that their failures are due to some malevolent socializing enemy that has placed false ideas in the minds of the people.*¹²

Social theorists who adopt the dominant ideology thesis offer a relatively simple and comprehensive explanation for social ignorance. The focus is on the superstructures of an entire society, and the members of elites who own and/or control those structures.

There are problems with the dominant ideology thesis. As Nicolaus Abercrombie et al., point out, dominant ideology theorists make a number of assumptions which are not

¹¹ Wilhelm Reich expressed this view in his book, *Sex-Pol: essays 1924-1934* (New York: Vintage Press, 1972): *The problem is not that the ruling class disseminates and defends its ideology; the problem is why the masses accept it.*

¹² Spence, *The Politics of Social Knowledge*, p. 59.

verified, many of which are often not examined. They include: (a) the actual relation between ideology and dominant classes are seldom considered, (b) the apparatus for the transmission of ideology and values is not investigated in detail, and (c) and the incorporation of subordinate groups and classes via ideology or integration by shared values is all too often simply taken for granted. In other words, empirical research is not provided to validate the claims made by many dominant ideology theorists. The theory's attraction is that it offers a tenable explanation for the coherence of unjust society. Is it possible to explain how societies *cohere* in the sense that they continue to function as a relative whole - where groups and individuals each make their contribution to *functional coherence* - without appealing to a dominant ideology theory?

The image of society as a coherent *whole* is largely an illusion. Notions of national unity and statements about the homogeneous presence of human rights and freedoms within society can act as an *idealized cultural construct* which camouflages social tensions, and exaggerates the degree of cohesiveness which exists within society. Historical and present-day examples of social protests, organized lobby groups, labour strikes, critical social research, and the work of development education organizations and the churches are but a few examples of current social phenomena within Canada which reflect a considerable degree of critical social analysis and intentional organized resistance to the status quo. By their very existence, these countervailing trends challenge the credibility of dominant ideology theories. Along with such *living* examples demonstrating the existence of critically-informed social thinking and political resistance within Canada, there are at least three *theoretical* arguments which offer alternative explanations for the production of social coherence besides the dominant ideology thesis. It is only by utilizing all these theoretical models that concrete situations can be analyzed and morally evaluated.

4.1 Social Coherence as Forced Compliance

Social coherence through coercion can take various forms, ranging from a visible (*overt*) military presence to a more disguised (*covert*), but equally powerful, rule of law.

Politically-defined conditions for a *legal strike*, along with the ever-present threat of *back-to-work* legislation, define, for example, the limits of labour protest within many democratic countries, and offer good examples of how the rule of law can work to orchestrate social coherence. Demonstrations of forceful coercion by military or police agencies are rarely required; the *potential* for such physical force is all that is required to maintain order.¹³ Obedience and satisfactory role-performance is all dominant groups require of subordinates, not the internalization of an ideology.

Forceful ideological indoctrination often accompanies military force, such as occurred in China after the Tiananmen Square massacre.¹⁴ This compliance from military repression differs from the unconscious and *voluntary* incorporation of values and beliefs which happens as a result of the subtle influence of a pervasive dominant ideology, as is argued by dominant ideology theorists. Social ignorance in coercive societies often results not so much from forceful indoctrination (deception) as from control over access to critical and revealing information, combined with restricted opportunities to reflect upon, and investigate, social experience, perhaps due to a highly regimented and harsh lifestyle, or the refusal by authorities to make social knowledge available. The suppression of critical thinking need not be accompanied by overt physical force; it can result simply from the structural forces and realities of capitalism which individuals believe they must adjust to in order to survive.

¹³ Tony Wilden reviews the ways in which the Canadian government can use coercive force against its people and suspend human rights in his book *The Imaginary Canadian* (Vancouver, B.C.: Pulp Press, 1980). As he explains, the *potential* for coercive force against Canadians by the R.C.M.P. and Military is much greater than we tend to realize. When the federal government invoked the war measure's act against the people of Quebec during the infamous *October crisis* of 1970-71 - or when it sanctioned an invasion of a Mohawk reserve in Quebec during the summer of 1990 - Canadians were reminded of just how quickly Canadian citizens can lose basic rights and freedoms.

¹⁴ Systematic and extensive ideological training comprised an integral part of the daily routine of those imprisoned after the Tiananmen Square uprising was crushed by the Chinese Army on June 4, 1989. Between 3 - 4 thousand unarmed and non-violent demonstrators were, in the words of Jaggi Singh, "... unceremoniously killed by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) of China at Tiananmen Square." See, Jaggi Singh, "Global Amnesia," *The World Affairs Canada Quarterly*, Fall 1993, pp. 23-25. See also, Timothy Brook, *Quelling the People: The Military Suppression of the Beijing Democracy Movement*, (Lester Publishing Ltd. 1992).

4.2 Social Coherence as the Manipulation of Economic Need

Social coherence can also be assured from the economic compulsion experienced by workers; what Max Weber called the "dull compulsion of economic relations". Marx also offered a theoretical analysis of how the dynamics of production under capitalism continually reproduce the separation between labour-power and the means of production. When workers neither own nor control the means of production they must repeatedly sell their labour-power (and their *attention*) in order to live. They require wages. Without wages they can not pay their bills. If they do not pay their bills, they will find themselves hungry and homeless. This cyclical process whereby labourers work, to earn wages, to buy from the owners of the means of production those goods which the workers themselves produce, forces wage-earners to reproduce and perpetuate the very conditions and structures of exploitation that entrap them. Workers deprived of control over the means of production are compelled to submit to managerial authority in order to live. The imperatives of everyday life (buying food, meeting monthly rent or mortgage payments, etc.) constitute a powerful coherence factor within contemporary society.

Another factor which can cause quiescence in subordinate classes is the *stream of rewards* which capitalism provides individuals. Often, the greater the degree of compliance with the capitalist system, the greater the rewards. This is a powerful coherence factor. Rewards can easily entice members of subordinate classes to compromise moral values and social ideals to benefit personally from the competitive economic system. In a more pragmatic sense, workers may, as Abercrombie suggests, fear what a courageous commitment to higher principles may mean in terms of short-term loss and suffering: "Radical transformation by revolutionary means would lead inevitably to disruption, exchanging the hope of better things to come in some moment in the future for the almost certain loss in the short and medium terms of the benefits already enjoyed."¹⁵

Reflecting on the all-too-familiar fact of economic insecurity and worry for so many people, and the quite understandable reluctance to trade existing benefits for the uncertain *hope of better things to come*, reveals how subordinates are pressured to accept the dominant value system of a structurally-unjust society without necessarily believing that dominant ideology is good or true.

The fact that many individuals reflect critically on economic and political conditions within society offers a strong argument against the need for an abstract theory which conjectures the uncritical internalization of a pervasive dominant ideology by masses of individuals. Workers do resist exploitation. However, these purposeful collective actions often seek only to maximize worker benefits or minimize exploitation for the members of particular interests groups or sectors of the workforce. This form of collective social action may modify - but never threaten to transform - the existing system. There is no alternative vision or system proposed, only a reformed or *negotiated* version of the status quo which *leaves the essentials intact*:

The class conflict of early capitalism is replaced in late capitalism by class compromise. This important development, involving the loss of class identity and the fragmentation of class consciousness, has arisen from the manner in which wages are negotiated. Wage negotiations, particularly in the monopolistic and public sectors of the economy, are effectively "political" compromises between capital and labour represented by unions.¹⁶

The motivation for negotiations is often directly determined by the economic imperative to live. At other times, negotiations are driven by philosophies of individualism and materialism, aimed at maximizing personal pleasure and security. Given these conditions, social ignorance may at times result from personal strategies of knowledge evasion (self-deception) where the compromising of social ideals and moral values are repressed or ignored in the interest of self-serving short-term goals.

¹⁵ Abercrombie et al., *The Dominant Ideology Thesis*, p. 153. Hopelessness can interrupt moral transformation and social change, as Paulo Freire points out, "Hopelessness is a form of silence, of denying the world and fleeing from it." *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 80.

¹⁶ Abercrombie et al., *The Dominant Ideology Thesis*, p. 17.

Some argue that despite the fact that actions by individuals and groups actually resisting exploitation show a degree of awareness concerning the injustice which affects them, there remains a more fundamental *structural* form of social ignorance. They point to the social ignorance members of subordinate groups suffer as *false consciousness* caused by a basic lack of agency and power which defines their lifestyle. Subordinate members must - it is argued - incorporate a dominant ideology because their life testifies that they neither see clearly the extent to which the system deforms human existence, nor challenge the oppressive source of their experience of alienation and powerlessness, notwithstanding periodic bouts of resistance against oppressive aspects of the system. Is this a sound argument?

A distinction must be made between *ideological incorporation* and *legitimation of the social order*. As Jürgen Habermas explains, the concept of legitimation is not equivalent to that of ideology indoctrination. Legitimation of the social order (social hegemony) is often achieved by steadily increasing the level of material rewards. A *legitimation crisis* becomes increasingly more likely with the growing inability of the social system to deliver instrumental rewards. If Habermas is correct, individuals only *believe in* the system in so far as the system is able to meet the personal needs or demands of society's members. In other words, they may disagree with the basic values and principles of society, but conditionally accept the system, as long as they are not personally made to suffer too much.

In Canada, for example, it is obvious that the political struggle of labour has been

channelled - at least until the present time¹⁷ - into the maximization of economic rewards through institutionalized wage bargaining. This *economism* need not be based on either *conscious* or *unconscious* adherence to a particular social philosophy or political ideology. Indeed, a growing number of Canadians are consciously opposing numerous policies and programs of the neo-liberal (also referred to as *neo-conservative*) corporate agenda of the federal government.

The failure of the majority of citizens to insist on the dismantling of inequitable structures and to work for a fundamental reorganization of society may be primarily rooted in the workers' experience of capitalism. Workers may struggle to maximize personal benefits while complying with the logic of the economic system simply because they need to live. This is especially likely to be the case when people have no hope that the fundamental structures of the system can be changed for want of practical or economically-feasible alternatives. It would be foolish to draw the conclusion that participation and compliance to unjust powers and structures with such a view is evidence for the internalization of a dominant ideology.

¹⁷ There is a relatively new phenomenon within Canada social movements, with the emergence of a national coalition of social groups and labour unions which unite many different sectors of the population together in one umbrella organization: the Action Canada Network, an organization that came into being as a coalition of groups fighting the unification of the BCNI and conservative government agendas in a neo-conservative program. This organization has a more radical agenda than has been evident in either collective bargaining within labour unions or the lobby efforts of various community-based interest groups. This coalition came together to oppose the Canada-U.S.A. Free-Trade Agreement, continued to resist the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and now works to maintain Canada's social safety net and sovereignty over its own affairs. Having participated in the Action Canada Network Assemblies representing several organizations (Rural Dignity of Canada, Cooper Institute and the National Farmers Union) it has become obvious to me that, despite the fact that no clear and unanimous consensus on all issues exists among a growing list of member organization and groups, the Action Canada Network, nonetheless, represents a viable new social movement which has as a shared objective and long-term agenda to work for a more significant transformation of society than has been evident within Canada during recent times. The recent signing of the GATT agreement (Dec. 1993) and NAFTA (Jan. 1994) by the Liberal government has sent destabilizing shock waves through the ACN as a national organization and its future seems more uncertain. The labour movement, the backbone of the ACN, continues to suffer severe setbacks as commitments to collective bargaining are broken and ignored with impunity.

4.3 Social Coherence as the Result of not having Alternatives

In his discussion of ideology and social cohesion in American society, Michael Mann makes a distinction between *normative acceptance*, where the individual internalizes the moral expectations of the ruling class, and views his or her own inferior position as legitimate; and *pragmatic acceptance*, where the individual complies because he or she perceives no realistic alternative.¹⁸ Canadian social psychologist, Peter Archibald, considers the inability to imagine or hope for practical social alternatives the primary reason for low participation among workers in the political process during the 50's in Canada:

... it is much less ignorance than a sense of "fatalism" which leads to the low participation by workers in interest groups and the official political process. In this regard it is noteworthy that feelings of powerlessness have been shown to limit information seeking, political participation and within-system protest activity (Gore and Rotter 1963).¹⁹

The presence of coercive forces can make a significant contribution to the inability of workers to imagine life-enhancing social alternatives and work towards the realization of a new society. The economic imperative to live often coexists with an ever-present threat of forced social repression, and can quickly stifle the emergence of an alternative political imagination.

Pursuing clearly-articulated social alternatives and sustaining organized opposition to the status quo requires considerable organizational skill and effort. Compliance with the status quo may come down to the pragmatic fact that people do not have the money, time, or energy to accomplish such feats. There are many factors which mitigate against progressive, organized social change. In capitalist societies, effective political education and organization is crucially impeded by the division of labour; the mobility and instability of the work force; a structurally sustained high unemployment rate, which increases competition and insecurity among workers; homelessness, poverty and alienation within

¹⁸ Michael Mann, "The Social Cohesion of Liberal Democracy," *American Sociological Review*, vol. 35, no. 3, 1970, p. 425.

¹⁹ Peter W. Archibald. *Social Psychology as Political Economy* (Toronto, Ontario: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited, 1978), p. 147.

urban centres; and families and communities coming apart in the continuing dissolution of rural towns and villages.

The ability to imagine and decide to realize practical social alternatives - and then to engage in an actual strategic action campaign to effect change in the direction of goals we chose - becomes ever more difficult as transnational corporations and world financiers rapidly increase their ownership and control of resources and economies throughout the World. It appears that we are well established in what Christopher Lasch referred to as the *Age of Diminishing Expectations*. Signs of a cultural shift from *optimism* to *pessimism* are everywhere. The character of negotiations between owners and workers within our liberal culture in decline has shifted from an attempt to maximize personal security by attaining increased benefits to an attempt to mitigate the further loss of same. Private dreams are viewed as less realizable. Motivated by feelings of uneasiness and fear, the modern anxious mind finds itself pondering images of various *worst case scenarios* to be avoided, rather than developing strategies to attain one's dreams. With high unemployment workers make fewer demands for fear of being replaced; newlyweds soon abandon their dream of owning their own home, as they struggle to pay monthly rent; etc.

A social vision with positive goals - such as the equitable distribution of wealth among all members of society - may still be privately cherished by the majority of people, but a sense of powerlessness and personal insecurity work to destroy the belief that such a moral social vision is realizable under existing circumstances. With no creative praxis or practical strategies to realize a more desirable social vision, social imagination tends to become abstracted from the historical social process, and gradually becomes more like a fantasy than a fundamental life goal around which one orders thinking and central life activities. It is painful to dream continually of a better world once hope in the possibility of being able to realize one's dream disappears.

Negative social visions embodying fatalistic outcomes are increasingly evident in the culture and collective consciousness of people. Contemporary experience seems to echo Horkheimer and Adorno's pessimistic conclusion that the Enlightenment process would culminate not in social emancipation and transcendent spirituality, but rather, in

mass culture, providing only empty entertainment, petty amusement, and a deceptive state of social ignorance.

4.4 Noam Chomsky: Ideological Indoctrination as Manufacturing Consent

Linguist, media critic and activist, Noam Chomsky, has remarked that about 80% of the population incorporate the values of the dominant culture, or in other words, internalize an ideology. Is he offering a variation on the Dominant Ideology thesis? In his book, *Manufacturing Consent*, Chomsky investigates the dynamics and mechanisms of *thought control* in a democratic society. The key components of his extensive research on the manipulation of consciousness by the media has recently been profiled in a film by *Necessary Illusions* and the *National Film Board of Canada*, with the same title as Chomsky's book: *Manufacturing Consent*.

Chomsky borrowed the phrase from Walter Lippman's book, *Public Opinion* (1921), where Lippman uses the expression to describe how technological developments were enabling the ruling elites to utilize new techniques of media and public information control, representing a virtual revolution in control of the mass population. This echoed the age-old political view of democratic society which says that ignorant masses are incapable of grasping why certain social and political decisions need to be made, and that it is often in their best interest to be lied to and kept ignorant. Members of the political elite fear that if common citizens are given revealing social knowledge they would likely become too arrogant to submit to a rule of law. They deem it better not to risk such social disruptions, choosing rather to create the illusion of public consent, while, in truth, it is only a handful of people belonging to the privileged class who actually set the course for social change. To ensure the continuance of the dominant society, this specialized class employ *necessary illusions* to manufacture consent for the dominant view of things. These illusions are communicated to the public through cultural mechanisms and media institutions which regurgitate propaganda, and systematically divert the attention of people away from social contradictions and activities which would, if they were known, call into

question the legitimacy and authority of the established leaders, and perhaps the moral legitimacy of the established order.

Who are the targets of propaganda? Chomsky outlines how the dominant elites need to package propaganda in two distinct ways to ensure social coherence and ideological conformity. First, the political class - about 20% of the population which plays some role in public and political life - are provided information and propaganda which appears to foster political debate. Politicians and business elites appear to take serious note of their enlightened concerns and ideas. In reality, the debate is highly constrained and never directly challenges the ruling elites and the system they own and control.

The remaining 80% of the population are encouraged not to think and not to pay attention to anything important. They are encouraged to trust the professionals, bureaucrats and politicians who *know*. With the majority of the population, the main aim is to subvert critical thinking by doling out a constant supply of diversions, among which are sports, entertainment, tabloid information, romance novels, etc. In both targeted groups, the aim of ideological propaganda is to quash investigation of the institutions and authorities within society and to mobilize public support for the dominant system.

Chomsky goes far beyond advocating a simple abstract theory of ideological indoctrination; he exposes the mechanisms and structures by which information is filtered, processed, censored or distorted to win public consent. He thereby encourages people to think critically and become socially *aware*. He explains how the elite media, i.e., the *New York Times* and major television networks, are beholden to the corporate elites who buy advertising; approximately 60% of newspaper content is advertising. Not only does this connection ensure that the elite media's true *customers* (corporate - political elites) are not fundamentally challenged, it can at times result in explicit acts of complicity and cover-up between the dominant media and the dominant corporate and political elites, where the media deliberately suppress damaging social information.

Chomsky has provided powerful research into such a case of complicity with the American involvement in the atrocities which the Indonesian government has inflicted on the people of East Timore since the invasion in 1975. This ongoing campaign of genocide

and mass displacement has resulted in the murder of hundreds of thousands of Timorese citizens. Chomsky claims that the U.S. has not only refused to push for action at the United Nations on behalf of the Timorese, it has supplied approximately 90% of the arms to the Indonesian government to effect the slaughter. The Western media has given so little attention to the atrocities against the Timorese that few Western citizens are even aware of the reign of terror.

Chomsky and Edward S. Herman found that although the genocide which occurred in East Timore under the Indonesians was equally as horrid as that which occurred in Cambodia under the Pol Pot regime, the degree and type of media coverage the two cases received in the Western press was quite different. Between 1975-1979, the *New York Times* carried 70 column inches of biased coverage on the genocide of the East Timorese, and an astounding 1,175 column inches of coverage on the Pol Pot genocide. Chomsky and Edward draw two conclusions from their studies:²⁰ (a) the dominant elites do nothing to prevent genocides unless there is some vested political, economic or military interests to defend or serve; and, (b) the media elite can keep the vast majority of people ignorant about the truth by distorting, or simply withholding, insightful information. The local media, although not coercively forced to reproduce the distortions, do so as a matter of routine each morning when the major news stories (i.e., the *New York Times* daily news lineup) come in on the wire.

Does Noam Chomsky support a Dominant Ideology thesis? As a critical thinker, Chomsky is interested in challenging all forms of social authority to test whether they are legitimate. The structures of control in society prevent people from having the kind of information needed to investigate and demand moral accountability from authorities. If people internalize the values of the system, it is only because they don't know the full truth. Chomsky believes it is within the capacity of human beings to discover the truth about the world by asking questions and working to attain a different perspective on

²⁰ Noam Chomsky & Edward S. Herman, *The Political Economy of Human Rights: Volume 1 & 2* [The Washington Connection and Third World Fascism; After the Cataclysm: Postwar Indochina and the Reconstruction of the Imperial Ideology], (Montréal, Quebec: Black Rose Books, 1979).

society than that presented by the dominant elites. His is a campaign of critical education for social justice. If citizens incorporate the dominant ideology, they do so primarily because they are being hood-winked into believing lies, not as a result of actually believing in the distorted and unfair system beneath the superficial ideological justifications.

In the final analysis it is not very helpful to think in terms of a pervasive internalization of the existing dominant ideology to explain *social ignorance* or *social cohesiveness* in class societies. The existence of legal, political, military and economic structures and conditions which exert a *coercive* and *stifling* influence on society's members offer valid alternative explanations for the presence of social cohesiveness and collective ignorance. The organized response of *the people* following the elimination of such coercive forces has, in numerous historical cases, demonstrated that subordinate classes and marginal groups were neither as ideologically-incorporated nor socially ignorant as social theorists had suspected: changes in social structures and conditions finally provided the historical opportunity for the effective awakening of a repressed or dormant knowledge, generating transformative awareness and dynamic moral praxis.

Individual members of society may not be free from the influence of a dominant ideology. These general reflections on the dominant ideology thesis, and coercive social forces, are meant to show how the character and functioning of a dominant ideology must be identified, analyzed and explained in terms which make sense of the actual situation within society. Although dominant ideology theories offer attractive explanations for both social ignorance and social cohesiveness, they remain *abstract* theories unsubstantiated by the concrete historical experience of individuals, groups and classes within society. It is important to remind ourselves that, ". . . the people never experience dominant ideologies in some abstract form,"²¹ and that, ". . . the functional relation of ideology and economy is . . . specifiable only at the level of concrete societies. There cannot be a general theory of ideology."²² The uncritical acceptance of any abstract theory precludes undertaking

²¹ Richard Gruneau, ed., *Popular Cultures and Political Practices*, (Toronto, Ontario: Garamond Press, 1988) p. 24.

²² Abercrombie et al., *The Dominant Ideology Thesis*, p. 185.

critical social analysis, and can be the source of a form of social ignorance where the entirety of one's life experience is founded on a distorted or false relationship with reality.

An ethical investigation of the social psychological structural dynamics of ignorance tells us that social ignorance not only results from the uncritical acceptance of an *abstract* social theory, such as some variation of the dominant ideology thesis, or some over-arching cultural world view; it can also result from the *reproduction of social fragmentation in human consciousness*, encouraging individuals to regard abstract social knowledge as concrete knowledge; a mental process which destroys the means whereby the particulars of social knowledge can be properly assimilated into a dynamic and critically-enlightened social analysis. This mental process produces a confusion from shifting *unconsciously* from concrete (experiential) to abstract (fully human) knowing. We may have reams of information about society, but no way to integrate that information into a revealing social theory which offers clear insight into what is occurring within society. We remain at a loss to know what we need to do to respond to situations in an enlightened moral way.

Political and economic structures within pluralist societies provide a social context wherein social ignorance takes the form of highly dispersed social knowledge. The result for individuals is a fragmented human consciousness which alienates people from the historical facts and concrete dynamics of their social world. Members of society obtain only an *abstract* understanding of - and relationship to - society, and suffer a diminished capacity for transformative action.

5. Ideological Ignorance and Abstract Society

In his book, *The Abstract Society*, Anton Zijderveld offers an insightful cultural analysis of modern pluralistic society. The thesis of his book is contained in the following statement:

*Modern society is essentially abstract society which is increasingly unable to provide man with a clear awareness of his [her] identity and a concrete experience of meaning, reality and freedom. This abstract nature of society is caused primarily by its pluralism, i.e., by its segmentation of its institutional structure.*²³

What Zijderfeld means by *abstract society* is that society becomes increasingly abstract in the experience and *consciousness* of society's members. *Society* is not a fixed reality, or independently existing entity; it is, he tells us, ". . . nothing but a concept which refers to the actions and interactions of countless individuals."²⁴ Zijderfeld believes that the ideas underpinning the process of modernization have not only changed the socio-economic and socio-cultural structures of society, but have done so in a manner with grave implications for the epistemological and psychological constitution of human beings, e.g., human consciousness.

Summarizing the key elements of Arnold Gehlen's influential philosophical anthropology,²⁵ Zijderfeld explains how human consciousness underwent a qualitative change during the transition from traditional (feudal) to modern (industrial) society. Although he acknowledges that the pre-modern world view of medieval European society was based on an highly idealized metaphysics, he suggests that rather than alienating individuals from their *lived-in* social world, the medieval metaphysical world view permeated the entire culture, and actually served to cement social relations in a typically

²³ Anton C. Zijderfeld, *The Abstract Society: A Cultural Analysis of our Time* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1970), p. 48.

²⁴ Zijderfeld, *The Abstract Society*, p. 49.

²⁵ Like Zijderfeld, Wolfart Pannenberg, in his study, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1985) bases his theoretical approach on the philosophical anthropology of Arnold Gehlen. Gehlen further developed the theoretical positions of Max Scheler found in his ground-breaking book, *Man's Place in Nature* (Boston, 1961) as well as the work of Helmuth Plessner. The dominant orientation of this anthropological approach holds that human beings must be interpreted in terms of their behaviour and social conduct. Unlike behaviourism, however, this approach recognizes the special dignity and status of human beings, evidenced by the capacity for self-transcendence, or, what Plessner called *exocentricity*, and both Scheler and Gehlen referred to as *openness to the world*. Zijderfeld speaks of this capacity in terms of what he calls the *Homo Duplex theorem*. This capacity to either transcend, i.e., *go out* of the self, or *retreat within* the ego is central to both Pannenberg's and Zijderfeld's anthropology and cultural analysis.

community (*Gemeinschaft*²⁶) fashion:

*Medieval man lived and thought under the spell of abstract metaphysics, but this abstraction did not enter into his [her] consciousness as an alienating force. On the contrary, social life was firmly rooted in a strict stratification pattern, which abstract metaphysics helped to explain and legitimate.*²⁷

With the coming of the democratic and industrial revolutions - ushering in what is referred to as *modernity* - the old political and economic order crumbled. Democratic governments gradually replaced monarchies; capitalism quickly supplanted feudal economies based on barter and trade mercantilism. These characteristic changes in social order define the political and economic transition from feudalism to modern society and have been detailed and clarified by a number of sociologists.²⁸ Mapping the road from the medieval to the modern world becomes somewhat more difficult when an attempt is made to discern the impact of the political (democratic) and economic (industrial) revolutions on human consciousness. Examining the historical consequences of these continuing social processes on the development of human consciousness remains a key task for a critical social psychology and ethics.

5.1 Pluralism: the Social Source of Fragmented Consciousness

What replaced the abstract homogeneous metaphysical world view of the European feudal era? One inclination might be to respond promptly with *the principles and values of liberal democracy*, but, upon more careful reflection, we can see that this answer is far from satisfactory. Although the principles and values of liberal democracy may constitute a social philosophy which defines the fundamental character of the dominant cultural ethos of Western industrialized nations, they do not signify a

²⁶ This form of social organization will be defined and clarified in chapter six.

²⁷ Zijderveld, *The Abstract Society*, p. 64.

²⁸ For an excellent sociological analysis of the impact of the industrial and democratic revolutions on sociology and political theory, read Robert A. Nisbet, *The Sociological Tradition* (New York: Basic Books, 1966), especially chapter two, "The Two Revolutions."

comprehensive and unified metaphysical or religious world view.

What then, replaced the abstract metaphysical world view which characterized human consciousness during the feudal era? The most we can answer is *religious and metaphysical pluralism*. This is truly one of the central and defining marks of modernity; democratic societies reflect in their pluralist character the loss of the unifying and socially-cementing force of a culturally-shared metaphysical world view. In many ways this has been a liberating and positive change: it gave rise to the emergence of emancipatory critical thinking, scientific and technical discovery, and - as a result of the plurality of world views within society - continues to challenge human beings to become more tolerant, open-minded and understanding of other religions, cultures and points of view. It has also, however, brought negative social consequences and human liabilities. These unwanted effects have prompted key questions which have guided social psychological inquiry for countless contemporary analysts and theorists such as Eric Erikson, Kenneth Kenniston and Eric Fromm. Within an existentialist-psychoanalytic approach, such writers speak of the philosophical *paradox* and psychological *burden* of modern freedom. More is said on this cultural analysis in chapter six.

Regardless of whether this monumental change in consciousness is welcomed or lamented, there is no question that the democratic and industrial social revolutions have fundamentally altered how human beings think, act, and relate to one another:

We see that the process of growing human freedom has the same dialectic character that we have noticed in the process of individual growth. On the one hand it is a process of growing strength and integration, mastery of nature, growing power of human reason, and growing solidarity with other human beings. On the other hand this growing individuation means growing isolation, insecurity, and thereby growing doubt concerning one's own role in the universe, the meaning of one's life, and with all that a growing feeling of one's own powerlessness and significance as an individual.²⁹

In an attempt to clarify the transformation of human consciousness which occurred with the transition from feudal to modern society, Zijderveld introduces a theory developed by the Dutch historian Jan Romein. By means of a cross-cultural comparative analysis, Romein formulated a theory of human consciousness which draws a sharp

²⁹ Eric Fromm, *Escape From Freedom*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976), pp. 35-36.

contrast between members of *industrial* and *non-industrial* societies. Romein outlines the basic characteristics of consciousness within non-industrial societies with the use of a model he calls the *Common Human Pattern* (CHP). His thesis is that rather than perceiving non-industrial peoples as having *primitive* consciousness (*primitive* understood as underdeveloped or infantile) we should, instead, regard the character of consciousness in members of industrial societies as a deviation from the Common Human Pattern.

Romein attributed the following characteristics to the Common Human Pattern: (a) a subjective attitude toward nature and the inability to objectify the world, (b) a conception of life as part of a cosmic philosophy, (c) thinking patterns which are not abstract in the formalistic and rational sense of the word, but concrete and pragmatic, (d) life experience rooted in the here and now, where the stream of time is neutralized in the myth of the eternal return, and (e) an attitude which accepts and respects established authority.

We can see that the type of social integration existing between members who share this Common Human Pattern is similar to what sociologist Emile Durkheim defined as *mechanical* solidarity - as distinct from the *organic* solidarity resulting from the interdependence of members living in a pluralist and structurally-differentiated society. With increased sensitivity in recent times to native culture and traditional aboriginal lifestyle - many aspects of which echo the description of CHP offered by Romein - Canadians are now in a better position to appreciate the insights of this form of comparative cultural analysis. With the worsening environmental crises confronting the world, important lessons can be learned about sustainable lifestyles from such inquiries. We can also better comprehend the radical consequences which the industrial and democratic revolutions have had for contemporary thinking and acting.

There is little doubt that the historical movement from a *closed* (feudal) to an *open* (modern) and undetermined world view has radically altered the structure of human consciousness. Zijderveld and Romein believe that the Enlightenment *gained*, by way of a new sense of personal freedom and responsibility, but also *lost*, by way of a certain psychological and social security. The combination of modern science and technology,

democratic pluralism and the structures and logic of capitalism have worked together to create an increasingly complex and fragmented social reality, shaping human consciousness and experience:

Within these sectors an increasing division of labor (specialization) became mandatory, which again increased the already established institutional complexity. In this way, an "internal pluralism" within institutional sectors accompanied the "external pluralism" between these sectors. Sectors divide into sub-sectors, functions into sub-functions, positions into sub-positions. The individual is required to construct a more or less coherent life span in this institutional labyrinth.³⁰

While the Enlightenment brought a new awareness and experience of personal autonomy, it also gave each individual the burden of constructing personal identity and finding meaning in a pluralistic, fragmented world. This was not always such a difficult task with homogenous cultures and supporting social structures. Capitalism, however, fosters competition and division, leaving individuals and families cut-off from - and distrustful of - others. Social security support programs are waning from cuts in funding; economic insecurity and poverty are increasing. People are increasingly being left to find their own way to survive by adjusting to a hostile social environment which lacks the *coherence* of community and is *fragmented* in character:

... modern man seems to stay in an open universe with its co-ordinates crumbling off. He [she] often seems to be left alone with a deep feeling of meaninglessness, unreality and absurdity. He [she] knows a frightening awareness of being compelled to realise freedom and creativity without or even against traditional structures.³¹

This poses a central problem for ethics: what is the appropriate moral and political response for members of modern society to build social solidarity, and how are we to transcend, through organized collective social action the complex and fragmented sources of negative impacts and implement sustainable and democratic alternatives?

³⁰ Zijderveld, *The Abstract Society*, p. 74.

³¹ Zijderveld, *The Abstract Society*, p. 57.

5.2 Constructing Identity in Modern Pluralistic Society

The process of identity formation necessarily involves meaningful interpersonal relationships which make mutual disclosure and self-discovery possible. Social values and cultural ideals always influence the character of identity: we construct identity with the norms, values and character ideals presented to us from within our family, community traditions and wider social culture.

A critical analysis of the impact of pluralist society on life experience and human consciousness examines the connections between social and cultural changes, and changes in thinking, habits, and lifestyles. The key to insightful analysis is making the root connection between the type of formative social values and cultural ideals available in modern fragmented society and the impact of those cultural models and symbols on personal identity formation. The process wherein an individual continuously constructs and reformulates identity is not only influenced by the available *content* - comprising principles, values and idealized images of particular character types present within culture- - but even more fundamentally, by the *structure* of social relations. One's actual *process of engagement* with the social world understood as *praxis*, *social location* (place), and *daily routine* operates as a primary determinant of identity.

For those living in modern pluralist societies such as Canada, the increasing fragmentation of society into sectors and sub-sectors tends to isolate individuals from one another, encapsulating them in private and segregated worlds. This encourages the development of an abstract consciousness of society, and frustrates the process of integrating life experience into a coherent, meaningful, dynamic and narrative account of identity:

The individual in this pluralistic society encounters considerable problems in establishing his [her] "identity". While the CHP-man has his identity ascribed to him [her] right after birth, modern man caught up in various partial allegiances is faced by many choices of identity construction.³²

³² Zijderveld, *The Abstract Society*, p. 72.

Living between various institutional sectors, each requiring a behaviour that conforms to its autonomous norms and values, Zijderveld believes the individual will automatically develop a pluralistic and malleable identity.

Marxian dualism of conflicting classes has changed into a situation in which industrial man [woman], from worker to manager, feels threatened by an abstract reality, usually called "the system". Such an abstract and levelled society does not, of course, have the power to form the identity of the individual coherently. The modern individual wonders what his [her] place actually is within the still obvious inequalities of income, wealth, status and power. The world becomes vague to him [her].³³

A specialized and fragmented set of social relations obviously tends to discourage the all-important cognitive and moral process whereby the multi-varied aspects of personal experience are integrated into a coherent and intelligible whole. In abstract society we become *specialists in our field* by continuously attending to a relatively limited number of items. We become increasingly ignorant of everything else to the degree to which we selectively focus attention on fewer things, and do not spend time reflecting on the connected meaning of things.

Not only is it extremely difficult to construct an integrated and meaningful *life span*, given the fragmented character of social experience, what is perhaps more important, from the perspectives of social psychology and ethics, is the consummate effect such a lifestyle has on the individual. If body and mind is encapsulated in the world of a laboratory, factory, university, or government department, trapped beneath increasingly constricting social forces, then there is not likely to be either the time, means, nor inclination to obtain even a basic awareness of the internal workings - and the cultural, economic and political significance - of other *sectors* and *sub-sectors* of society. The individual can, for numerous reasons, fail to integrate insights from different areas into a unified, comprehensive understanding of society. Such a situation makes people subject to manipulation and exploitation.

This process whereby individuals become *encapsulated* in a private *microscopic*

³³ Zijderveld, *The Abstract Society*, p. 73. Alasdair MacIntyre says much the same thing while discussing the relation between narrative and identity in *After Virtue*: "... to think of a human life as a narrative unity is to think in a way alien to the dominant individualist and bureaucratic modes of modern culture." p. 211.

world connects with the psychological limitations of human attention discussed in chapter one. The key sociological insight from a realization of the psychological limits of human attention is that within a pluralistic, highly technological and fragmented social reality, human autonomy no longer has a great deal of freedom to resist encapsulation in private worlds dominated by an abstract social consciousness. The range of human choice has become increasingly restricted to concerns about what particular microscopic concrete world we prefer, or have available to us, in which we will then live out our day-to-day functional routine. The particular demands of a given closed routine establish a limited range of life experiences, and determine the particular skills needed to function adequately within that particular *bureaucratic fragment, work sector, or perhaps, ghetto* of society. In the vast majority of spaces within the system, the available and competing options differ little: they all offer a life experience and human consciousness marked by fragmentation. Like a house full of rooms full of oppressed people - separated from one another only by structural walls - individuals encapsulated in a fragmented social world - in a system that forces individuals to compete against others - can easily fail to see the bigger picture of social life, as well as the degree of social solidarity and power that could come from a shared analysis, understanding and social vision uniting the people in the different rooms in a common project of their own making.

5.3 Pluralism, Everyday Routine, and the Unity of Life Experience

The concepts of *daily routine* and *everyday life experience* are insightful for an ethical investigation of the social psychological dynamics of human consciousness and moral awareness. What are the *normal* social explanations which guide citizens in their day-to-day involvement with society? Is there a foundational pattern in human consciousness which structures the discernment and moral evaluation of social explanations? To fathom how people participate in the reproduction of social relations, discovering what they actually do and think when they move from job to home to social activities, leisure activities, associations and organizational involvements, etc., it is

necessary to find a language which can report the observations on the day-to-day, week-in-week-out, lifestyle of individuals.

Arthur Brittan suggests in his book *The Privatized World* that it is not necessary to formulate a *theory* of pluralism to guide us in social analysis; experience itself confirms that *pluralism* constitutes the basic structure of everyday life in contemporary industrialized capitalist nations:

*Whether or not it was ever possible to construct over-arching world views, the fact remains that pluralisation is the "normal" way in which participants live their lives today. Everyday life, from this point of view, is a mish-mash of unrelated and encapsulated routines, each of which is taken for granted by participants.*³⁴

Pluralist society constitutes the paramount reality in which we live our daily lives in Canada. This social fact defining lived experience is so obvious that it is often completely overlooked. Never attending to routine, or subjecting the *ordinary* to analysis and reflection, can lead to a particular form of blindness or subverted consciousness which leaves us unaware of the subtle processes of social change taking place before our very own eyes. This form of social ignorance comes as a result of a lack of sensitivity and attention to the immediate world of daily experience, and is often a direct consequence of abstract consciousness: "In so far as participants are not 'conscious' of the ordinariness of everyday routine, they have no need to examine the typicality of the world they live in. But, of course, the world does not stand still, routines are interrupted, personal and social crises infringe on the calm of mundane reality."³⁵

By not attending to everyday life, individuals can fail to have a dynamic and *immediate* relationship with the world; they begin to view the world only *indirectly*, through a *reification* of the social world which presents itself as fragmented images and unsubstantiated theories. The social *meaning* of an individual's life under these circumstances becomes the particular, specialized, and localized, *functional* contribution to fragmented society.

³⁴ Brittan. *The Privatised World* (London, England: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), p. 22.

³⁵ Brittan, *The Privatized World*, p. 21.

5.4 Abstraction and Social Location: The Significance for Identity and Awareness

A number of authors have drawn attention to the importance of social location and geography in identity formation. It was earlier noted that Jim Cheney's understanding of ethics as *bioregional narrative* offers one means of grounding life narratives in geography - rather than in some obscure linear notion of the self. This approach can help us avoid the danger of *totalizing* or *abstract* discourse. What does this perspective have to say about the significance of social location for identity in a society where fragmentation, social uncertainty and abstraction are the characteristic and defining marks of both personal *consciousness* and lived *experience*?

If *self* and *geography* are bound together in a life narrative providing a sense of identity, it is essential that we gain a clearer understanding of the *geography of abstraction*; or, to put it another way, how abstract consciousness interferes with our ability to ground identity in whatever geo-political social reality we call home. To relate to the world through abstractions, rather than through the immediate experience of concrete engagement in society, is to *distance* oneself from the narrative grounding which underpins a sense of self. As Zijderfeld notes, a small rural community presents a good example of how abstraction increases with distance and size, with significant repercussions for identity formation and the quality and style of community life:

If this community is not affected yet by the emigration of younger generations to the urban and industrial centres, the villager will experience his society as a concrete reality. Social control, strong as it may be in this small Gemeinschaft-setting, can still be grasped as being necessary and meaningful. It is part and parcel of the taken for granted world. Since everybody knows his place in the local hierarchy of status, power and prestige, one has a clear experience and understanding of identity.³⁶

Unfortunately, the crises evident with the loss of family farms and the rapid dissolution of rural communities in nations throughout the world, has made the

³⁶ Zijderfeld, *The Abstract Society*, p. 52.

Gemeinschaft characteristics of rural society less and less identifiable.³⁷

*Abstraction, as I said before, also increases with size. If a rural community modernizes and grows into a big industrial metropolis, it will become abstract. Face-to-face relationships will shrink into a few friendships based on the individualistic principles of privacy and will be difficult to maintain because of social and geographic mobility.*³⁸

Although the gradual assimilation of rural communities into sprawling urban centres is certainly a significant social trend happening on a global basis, *urbanization* more fundamentally signifies a transformation of consciousness and lifestyle characterized by the waning and supplanting of homogeneous values (which formerly served to cement rural community lifestyle) with the values and principles of the urban ethos. The intrusion of the urban ethos into human consciousness, and the displacement of traditional family and community values and ideals, promotes the dissolution of *thick* bonds between people characteristic of *mechanical* social solidarity.

How - in an abstract society - are rural citizens to comprehend the forces and trends which affect their daily life and threaten the stability and coherence upon which personal identity is based? With great difficulty:

*This sense of abstraction grows with the increase of social distance. High in the clouds of abstraction dwell the political leaders of the country: abstract figures, never seen by anybody in the village in a face-to-face relation. Their abstraction increases because of their geographic remoteness.*³⁹

Social distance leads to abstract social knowledge. The further we live from those who rule over us and actually dictate the conditions, terms, and direction of social change, the more that social reality, which forms the ground of identity, becomes alienated from our daily experience and consciousness. When the inherent human desire (and need) to

³⁷ Canada has witnessed the loss of about 1/2 of *all individual and family farms* since 1971. The rate of farm loss is accelerating, with 26.24% of all remaining individual and family farms being lost in the last five-year census period (1986-91). The other side of this trend has been the increase in corporate farming: the number of non-family corporations farming has grown from 911 in 1971 to 4,035 in 1991 [Source: *Census Overview of Canadian Agriculture*, Statistics Canada, 1992]. A recent book which examines recent trends of dissolution in rural Canada is, Ray D. Bollman, Ed., *Rural And Small Town Canada* (Toronto, On: Thompson Educational Publishing, Inc.), 1992.

³⁸ Zijderveld, *The Abstract Society*, p. 55.

³⁹ Zijderveld, *The Abstract Society*, p. 53.

explain social change is frustrated by social ignorance, we are often left with no alternative but to generate our own theories to explain social events through best-guessing speculation; we end up with an imaginary picture of the social world which exists more in our minds than in reality.

Social fragmentation and highly specialized living routines make us particularly vulnerable to accepting, more-or-less uncritically, those theoretical social explanations presented to us by others, usually professionals, who appear better equipped with time and training to *know*. Whenever a restricted lifestyle prohibits critical social analysis and moral reflection, there is often a corresponding tendency to leave social planning to the experts, and to abdicate one's moral responsibility.

But what if the social knowledge produced by experts is unreliable due to the same restrictive experience identified earlier as part and parcel of contemporary fragmented society? Professionals may have sufficient time and intellectual skills to investigate social reality theoretically, but lack *knowledge-of-acquaintance*, which separates speculative theory from authentic social knowledge - the only kind of knowledge which can identify and clarify the dynamics and contradictions of social reality.

We need to recall insights from William James, Michael Polanyi, and Bernard Lonergan, outlined in the opening chapter on how to attain revealing insights into the social conditions and dynamics underlying the reproduction and continuous reformulation of society to appreciate how authentic knowledge construction comes only from a praxis (intentional thinking and doing) which integrates experience and theory, personal and social. When the vast majority of citizens accept social knowledge generated by a special class of people *uncritically*, there is danger that such a social division of labour on the basis of knowledge will effectively make transformative social praxis impossible by sanctioning a social order where some think (theorize) while others do (labour). We need to reflect further on the social psychological dynamics at play in the institutionalized world of social knowledge production and use.

6. Social Ignorance and the Pathology of the Abstract

Neurologists and social scientists have drawn attention to pathological disorders where individuals become encapsulated in the world of the *concrete*, and lack the capacity to complete tasks requiring other than behaviour governed by specific stimuli.⁴⁰

Considering what has already been written about the limitations of experiencing the world through a fixated abstract mode of knowing, it should come as no surprise to discover that encapsulation in the concrete world is not the only form of *epistemological pathology*.

Larry D. Spence points to the one-sided and class-based viewpoint of much contemporary social science as the reason for a noticeable failure among physicians and social scientists to investigate the equally inhibiting cognitive tendency he terms the *pathology of the abstract*. Spence argues that individuals encapsulated in the concrete, and those suffering from the pathology of the abstract, are equally passive in certain ways, and neither can effect necessary changes in their frame of reference: "People alternate between abstract and concrete attitudes according to the requirements of their situation and the task at hand. But if either attitude becomes dominant, inappropriate behaviour will result."⁴¹

Spence suggests that the *pathology of the abstract* occurs when individuals are deprived of, or deny themselves, access to direct *knowledge-of-acquaintance* with the social and productive processes. What fills this gap? What takes the place of experiential first-hand knowledge-of-acquaintance? This seems an appropriate place to discuss the relation between abstract knowledge and false consciousness.

⁴⁰ Kurt Goldstein, *Human Nature in the Light of Psychopathology* (New York: Shocken, 1963), pp. 94-108.

⁴¹ Spence, *The Politics of Social Knowledge*, p. 131.

6.1 Social Abstraction and False Consciousness

The term *false consciousness* is ambiguous in meaning and is seldom defined exactly the same way. Some see false consciousness as the product of ideological indoctrination or covert deception; others point to a pathological tendency within individuals as the source.⁴² Despite the somewhat confusing and conflicting meanings given to this term, the concept remains an insightful and useful term to describe how a complete *world view* and dynamic life process can be fundamentally flawed.

The basic distortion creating false consciousness has less to do with the *content* of our thinking than the *type of relationship we have with the world*. A failure to direct the attention of the mind back and forth between the two modes of knowing creates a fixation either on *concrete* or *abstract* knowing. Characterizing false consciousness as either *pathological* (personal) or *ideological* (social) simply indicates where the author of a particular theory believes abstract consciousness originates, either from within the individual person or from within society. *False consciousness* refers fundamentally to a logical (or illogical) manipulation whereby abstract phenomena are treated as if they were real and concrete. This process is perhaps better explained by saying that in acquiring and reflecting on social knowledge, we become confused and unable to clarify the distinction between the *objects* and *dynamics* of social reality, and the *ideas* we have of those objects and dynamics.

Marx applied the concept of false consciousness in this fundamental way, as a cognitive process of *reification* (i.e., perceiving abstract concepts as accurate representations of real things). With his philosophical and economic social theory, he applied the concept of false consciousness to social and economic circumstances in capitalist society. He believed that human beings are not sure what is real or true because they are alienated from ownership and decision-making processes. False consciousness

⁴² Joseph Gabel, for instance, in his study *La Fausse Conscience* (1962, p. 51) argues that the reification of abstract phenomena can be interpreted in psychiatric terms as schizophrenia, that is, as a kind of logical disease in which the individual constructs an abstract world but treats it as if it were real and concrete.

reduces human beings to *things* and *commodities*, thereby perverting human freedom and creating a form of slavery. He characterized false consciousness as a particular mode of existence entirely entangled in an abstracted world, remote from everyday reality and meaning. For the young Marx, *false consciousness* represents a state of estrangement and alienation that leaves human beings under the spell of abstract forces. We can build on this fundamental insight to come to a clearer understanding of how a fixation on one of the two *modes of knowing*, tends to coincide with a social division of labour common to hierarchically-structured societies.

Russel Jacoby, in his book *Social Amnesia: A Critique of Contemporary Psychology From Adler to Laing*, offers an insightful comment on the concept of reification which he describes as a form of *social amnesia*: "What is often ignored in expositions of the concept of reification is the psychological dimension: amnesia - a forgetting and repression of the human and social activity that makes and can remake society. The social loss of memory is a type of reification - better: it is the primal form of reification."⁴³ Jacoby believes that this general loss of memory should not be explained solely in psychological terms - often memory loss is the result of an historical dynamic that is quite different from simply *forgetting*; rather the general loss of memory is social amnesia - memories and knowledge are driven from the mind's eye by the social and economic dynamic operating within society. It is easy to see how a class society which encourages individuals to fixate on either an abstract or concrete mode of knowing can facilitate this process of social amnesia. That which fills the void caused by the *social forgetting of reality* is what others have called *reification*.

⁴³ Russel Jacoby, *Social Amnesia: A Critique of Contemporary Psychology From Adler to Laing*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975), p. 4. Interpreting false consciousness as reification, and defining reification as the loss of collective memory (especially of historical suffering) was the view of theodor Adorno and many social theorists who shared the belief that the loss of historical memory was the precondition for all forms of domination. [See, David W. Livingstone and Contributors, *Critical Pedagogy and Cultural Power*, Garamond Press, Toronto, Ontario, 1987, p. xi.]

6.2 Abstract and Concrete Fixation: A Class Analysis of Social Ignorance

Individuals can become engrossed in abstraction, or they can immerse themselves in the material world of immediate experience. Ideally, as Polanyi and Lonergan explain, healthy human knowing involves an ongoing process wherein the focus (attention) of the human mind moves back and forth from an immediate experience of concrete particulars to abstract theorizing within the context of intentional human activity. This process points to a basic human need to understand - in ever greater clarity - the meaningful connections between particulars encountered in our daily experience. The goal of this process is to assimilate fragments of information into an evermore comprehensive synthesis which offers an insightful or *revealing* explanation of complex human and social phenomena.

If we accept the basic elements of Zijderveld's thesis - that the fragmentation and complexity of modern pluralist societies make it increasingly difficult to integrate knowledge of particulars into a unified picture of what is actually taking place within society - we begin to see how this alternating process of acquiring and assimilating knowledge can be stymied by structural impediments. Some critical theorists have argued that with the enormous difficulty of this task, many individuals will find it easier to abandon the process and become fixated in one of two ways - a tacit decision will be made either to remain in (a) the cerebral world of abstract theory or, (b) the concrete world of immediate uncritical experience and material labour. Regardless of what option is chosen, or available, something fundamental to the healthy development of awareness and transformative engagement in the world is lost, and in its place, a basic dependency structure is established:

A person who chooses to live in terms of an abstract attitude requires people who are capable of the concrete activities of production and maintenance. He [she] also must repress awareness of his [her] own concrete behaviour. For, as [Kurt] Goldstein points out, all concrete behaviour takes place within a frame of reference or selected context conceived abstractly and all behaviour is at the same time concrete. No one can escape the concrete any more than anyone can escape the abstract. The choosing and living of one or the other of these attitudes thus represents a loss of autonomy.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Spence, *The Politics of Social Knowledge*, p. 147.

Others have interpreted this symbiotic division along class lines, within a more general critique of capitalism. They argue that the division of labour within class societies makes the type of fixation response to this epistemological tension predictable. Melvin L. Kohn, for example, had this to say about blue-collar workers:

... their occupational conditions and their limited education gear their thinking processes to the concrete and the habitual; their inexperience in dealing with the abstract may ill equip them to cope with ambiguity, uncertainty, and unpredictability; their mental processes are apt to be too gross and rigid when flexibility and subtlety are most required.⁴⁵

Spence believes those in positions of power within hierarchical social systems which institutionalize a split between *thinkers* and *doers* can paradoxically claim to promote the development of the human species, while at the same time, holding to the idea that such development requires the restriction of development. Even before the emergence of capitalist class society, age-old hierarchical social and political structures guaranteed that the *knowing few* ruled over the *ignorant many*, and were set up to ensure that the many remained ignorant. In Book II, of Plato's *Republic*, Socrates maintains that the most hated state of the soul is a state of untruth or ignorance that is not recognized - that is, the ignorance of the human being who has been deceived. In Book III, however, Socrates explicitly says that *it is fitting for the rulers, if for anyone, to use lies for the good of the city*, while condemning the right of any citizen to lie to rulers. Furthermore, the Republic itself is founded on the *noble fiction* or caste-lie that the various classes are genetically or socially determined to be superior or inferior. Spence draws our attention to the deceitful irony of this philosophy:

Since the majority of the citizenry will have been lied to about their own nature, their past culture, and the nature of their rulers, and since poets and artists who seek new descriptions and expressive wisdom about the world are to be controlled or expelled, the citizens of the Republic will have been deceived, made ignorant, and thus put into a hateful state of soul.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Melvin L. Kohn. "Social Class and schizophrenia: A Critical Review," *Journal of Psychiatric Research* 6 (Supplement 1) (Pergamon Press Ltd, 1968) p. 166.

⁴⁶ Spence, *The Politics of Social Knowledge*, p. 61. How similar lies are promulgated concerning the erroneous *disease* concept of alcoholism and other addictions for the so-called *good of the people* will be discussed in chapter five.

Because true knowledge requires both concrete involvement in the social world and abstract reflection about the concrete world, the hierarchical structuring of society guarantees the continued production of social ignorance, with devastating consequences for the health of individuals and society alike. With a structural division within society between those who predominately *think*, and those who mostly *labour*, the health and development of citizens is necessarily compromised. Social survival, on the other hand, is ensured through a symbiotic relationship between the *knowers* and the *doers*, where members of both sides regard members of the other with a certain degree of suspicion or disdain, quick to point out what the *other* is lacking by way of experience and knowledge:

The worker of the hand tends to lose, or rather to deny, his [her] freedom by becoming encapsulated in the concrete. He [she] aids this process because he [she] wishes to avoid the obvious limits of a life governed by the pathologies of the abstract. He [she] sees the worker of the head as a being of words and formulas, ignorant and helpless, yet dangerous because of this lack of respect for materials and life.⁴⁷

The worker of the head is afraid of succumbing to a world of crude hedonism since his [her] ignorance of the world of material production limits his [her] awareness of the nonsymbolic aspects of life to simple but long-denied bodily needs.⁴⁸

These reflections lead to an important debate taking place within a whole range of disciplines in the social and human sciences revolving around one key question: what constitutes an adequate method for social inquiry? This question will be addressed in the following chapter. Since it has fallen to the *worker of the head* to make a living while engaged in intellectual pursuits and social investigation, it is fitting to explore in more detail the essential distortion of perception which accompanies a lifestyle characterized by non-engagement in the dynamics and circumstances of the concrete day-to-day social world.

⁴⁷ Spence, *The Politics of Social Knowledge*, p. 138.

⁴⁸ Spence, *The Politics of Social Knowledge*, p. 139.

6.3 Critical Reflections on the Knowledge Elite

There is a tendency among members of the so-called knowledge elite (professional knowers) to use concepts, symbols, theoretical models and social metaphors to consider and interpret social phenomena, rather than acquiring more reliable information from concrete experiential analysis. With a healthy process of information integration people *experience* the world, collect information, and construct meaningful social knowledge; those suffering from the pathology of the abstract *impose* symbolic definitions onto the world:

*The social investigator. . . usually ends by making it impossible for his theories about society to be falsified. An unfalsifiable theory, however, is not capable of producing information. The result is social myths - elaborate thought structures constructed out of a minimal number of crude assumptions about human life.*⁴⁹

The Dominant Ideology thesis offers a good example of how theoretical explanations which attempt to increase our knowledge and understanding of society can work to conceal the circumstances and relations of particular social situations:

*Theories do not and cannot order or reorder the world. People order, or rather construct and reconstruct political institutions. With any task of construction, a theory is a useful, even necessary guide to such activities. But, being only guides, theories are subject to revision as they are tested in practice. To the extent that we attempt to make a theory 'reorder the world' we must repress, annul, and deny reality.*⁵⁰

T.W. Hutchinson explored the function of knowledge and ignorance within the theories and economic forecasts of British economists during the 60's and 70's. His research led him to conclude that there is a *crisis of abstraction* within the discipline. He finds the crisis particularly disturbing because it is happening at a time when economists are being called upon to provide the social information and projections upon which social policy decisions are made: "At the present juncture, a clearer understanding of what can, and what cannot, be obtained by abstraction is essential for obtaining a clearer and more accurate view of the limits of economic knowledge and the extent of economic ignorance -

⁴⁹ Spence., *The Politics of Social Knowledge*, p. 133.

⁵⁰ Spence, *The Politics of Social Knowledge*, p. 183-4.

especially with regard to the baffling problems of economic policy."⁵¹ He claims that, although an infinite number of economic *models* are being constructed by economists and professors of economics teaching in colleges and universities, these models are not being developed to explain particular historical and present-day problems. Consequently, such models - or the basic assumptions on which they are built - tend to foster an attitude of abstract fixation, which increases ignorance of the actual economic reality.

The negative impact of relying too much on professionals - who rely too much on abstract models - is compounded by the fact that people tend to trust the dictates of professionals as if the information had the accuracy and precision of the natural sciences. Christopher Lasch views the widespread cultural tendency to accept uncritically the opinions of professionals as an expression of the deep sense of insecurity which marks personal consciousness in contemporary society: "The conversion of popular traditions of self-reliance into esoteric knowledge administered by experts encourages a belief that ordinary competence in almost any field, even the art of self-government, lies beyond the reach of the layman."⁵²

Do professional *knowers* warrant such trust and acquiescence from the masses? No; for two reasons: (a) when people relinquish control of their decision-making to so-called experts, they can easily fall victim to negative patterns of dependency and social conformity, and cease to be subjects of their own history; and (b) the claim to scientific exactitude often made by knowledge experts can be entirely illusory; the widespread belief that experts have such precision can generate pervasive social myths which obscure social contradictions and structural injustices.

Hutchinson demonstrated the *unscientific* character of economic forecasts made by British economists from 1963-1969 on the issue of *devaluation*. He found an intense debate between university economic professors, where approximately 50% were in favour of devaluation, while 50% were opposed. How can predictions and forecasts of the future

⁵¹ T. W. Hutchinson, *Knowledge and Ignorance in Economics* (Oxford, England: Basil Blackwell, 1977), p. 91.

⁵² Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*, (New York, N.Y.: Warner Books Inc., 1979) p. 226.

be science? An infinite number of not-yet-known variables need to be factored into the predictive equation. Faith in the ability of experts to predict the future is, in part, a denial of freedom, and can represent a mind-set akin to philosophical determinism.

Hutchinson declares that there is no kind of ignorance more dangerous than ignorance regarding the limitations of one's knowledge. He argues that students of economics are in danger of falling prey to just such ignorance:

The student is involved in a high degree of abstraction from the very beginning of economic analysis. As soon as he [she] confronts the curves sweeping elegantly and impressively across the blackboard or the pages of a textbook, he [she] is liable to be involved with the assumption of an extent and precision of knowledge, or a freedom from ignorance and uncertainty, which is, in fact, never possessed either by the real decision-makers in a market, or by the economist.⁵³

Eva Etzioni-Halevy offers support for Hutchinson's conclusions in a her book, *The Knowledge Elite and the Failure of Prophecy*: "Economists provide a prominent example of intellectuals or members of the Knowledge Elite whose elegant and impressive theoretical models recently have not been matched by impressive practical contributions to society."⁵⁴ Etzioni-Halevy offers a much broader study of professional knowledge systems than Hutchinson by considering how the *crisis of abstraction* affects all branches of the social sciences and humanities - in other words, those professional disciplines and university departments which continually struggle to justify their usefulness within capitalist societies:

The recent squeeze on funding for higher education and research has made it more important than ever for the Knowledge Elite to legitimize its endeavour by convincing the public of the usefulness of knowledge. Hence the Knowledge Elite has become especially persuasive concerning the beneficial effect of knowledge for policies - precisely when it has become evident that these policies are not as effective as was previously thought.⁵⁵

She explains how the creation of *theory* (abstract reflections) in the humanities and social sciences, and the formation of *policy* (practical initiatives) are structurally separated,

⁵³ Hutchinson, *Knowledge and Ignorance in Economics*, p. 92.

⁵⁴ Eva Etzioni-Halevy, *The Knowledge Elite and the Failure of Prophecy*, (London, England: George Allen & Unwin, 1985), p. 92.

⁵⁵ Eva Etzioni-Halevy, *The Knowledge Elite and the Failure of Prophecy*, p. 35.

and indeed, fundamentally diverge from each other; the criteria for their success are entirely different, and their struggles for survival proceed along entirely different paths.

THEORETICAL KNOWLEDGE in the social sciences and humanities is comprised of sets of cognitive statements about social reality and the human condition. To succeed, theoretical knowledge must prove its worth by being (a) innovative and original, (b) plausible and convincing, and (c) internally consistent. It thrives on criticism and controversy, but ultimately only survives as an intellectual *contribution to knowledge* if it stands the test of argumentation within the intellectual community. The reward for such contributions to knowledge is recognition and attention for the author.

POLICY, on the other hand, is a series of guidelines for action, and is accepted when geared to the fulfilment of social goals. A policy must show promise of tangible results, be economically feasible, cost effective and capable of winning the support of powerful interest groups and/or widespread public approval. Its chances of survival diminish with opposition, but if it does survive on the agenda of political and/or administrative decision-making bodies, the reward for the author of the policy is usually political power.

The true test for the value of the Knowledge Elite is to calculate the benefits its members have brought society. How have those who make their living from the production, accumulation and dissemination of social knowledge fared in bridging the gap between theory and concrete social policy in recent times? Although it is easy to discover brilliance in an analysis of countless social problems in numerous books, Etzioni-Halevy concludes that uncertainty prevails:

The image of Western society that emerges today is more that of a groping society which is increasingly overwhelmed by the complexity of its own problems and its ever more pronounced internal contradictions. And the Knowledge Class, and the intellectuals in particular, may best be seen as groping together with the rest of society in the face of those increasingly intractable problems.⁵⁶

Etzioni-Halevy concluded that both the *internal demands* and the *environment* within which theoretical knowledge is produced is typically not conducive to emancipatory social change.

⁵⁶ Etzioni-Halevy, *The Knowledge Elite and the Failure of Prophecy*, p. 52.

7. Social Psychology: Legitimater of Social Ignorance

One would expect the branch of inquiry best equipped to expose social contradictions and their relationship to human disorders to be Social Psychology. Unfortunately this does not appear to be the case. In his book *Critical Social Psychology*, Philip Wexler argues that Social Psychology as an entire tradition - with a few exceptions - has served as a cultural defense against social knowledge by sublimating, repressing and denying social contradictions. His research exposes how social psychology has consistently treated social organization as if it takes place in a society without any organized pattern of social production: there is a curious omission of structured social relations within their actual historic and class contexts, which amounts to a tacit denial of the operational dynamics of social reality. Professionals specializing in the study of social psychology can generate considerable social ignorance by using a method of investigation which does not recognize the fact that human thinking and acting happens in a dynamic social and political context: "The abstraction of human interaction from the concrete sociohistorical situation has been the central blindspot of social psychology; the critics, very often, manifest the same blindspot."⁵⁷

Wexler claims that social psychology texts transcode the social into *ideological, contradiction avoidance categories*. Rather than developing theories which aid in the investigation of social interaction, in relation to specific social and historical conditions, many social psychologists produce a series of abstract theories which interpret changing social conditions, while at the same time, ideologically distort the nature of interaction under those very same conditions.

Wexler defines social psychology as a range of methods which effectively block awareness of how society is formed, and obscure the relation of the individual to that formation. It presents itself as a series of cultural defences which operate at a variety of levels of abstraction. This cognitive structure selectively reinforces popular methods of becoming, or remaining, socially ignorant, thereby contributing to *contradiction containment*. The exclusion of the concrete in accommodating and legitimating forms of

⁵⁷ Wexler, *Critical Social Psychology*, p. 2.

social psychology can be seen in a number of recent theories: "Social interaction is reduced to internal mental structures in cognitive attitude theory and ethnomethodology; later, with changing production relations, person and process disappear in equity and exchange theories."⁵⁸

The focus in these social psychological theories is on the social dimension of *individuals*, or on *interpersonal* relationships in small groups; in both cases, however, human subjectivity is viewed within a context that refuses to transcend conventional social role theory. The actual process of social interaction is left untreated:

*... revival of individual trait theories, attribution theory, revised versions of cognitive and attitude theories are all expressions of a new idealism [abstraction] in social psychology which rely on various models of moral and cognitive development which ignore the entire process of social interaction.*⁵⁹

Equity theory, on the other hand, introduces the concept of the marketplace into interpersonal relationships as an abstract *metaphor* in such a way as to theorize an explanation for *exchange*, without ever making reference to relations and structures of production. In this way, equity theory objectifies social interaction without the slightest reference to human exploitation and social injustice. The blinding capacity of social psychology becomes greater as the actual structures and dynamics of the marketplace which are ignored by many social psychologists, become increasingly powerful factors defining the relationships between human beings.

Another example of how social psychologists tend to view social reality simply as the *taken-for-granted* world, with no critical historical analysis explaining how present-day society has achieved its current form, can be found in the explanation given for the phenomenon of social fragmentation in contemporary society. As Wexler explains, the popular theory of *roles*, found in the majority of social psychological writings, uncritically accepts social fragmentation, and then attempts to adapt the human person-in-relation to the fragmented world as if it was the only possible social arrangement:

⁵⁸ Wexler, *Critical Social Psychology*, p. 97.

⁵⁹ Wexler, *Critical Social Psychology*, p. 101.

In role theory, specialization is taken as a neutral, transhistorical social necessity and not as a specific sociohistorical organization of human activity. Indeed, role theory studies the forms of alienated social being as social facts rather than as an historically produced and socially organized limitation on the expression and development of human capacities.⁶⁰

Wexler's critique of social psychological methods and theories shows how all sociological theories which exclude reference to the actual contradictions of society can obscure and distort the social psychological dynamics operating in society.

7.1 Towards an Insightful Social Psychology

The production of ignorance by social psychological theories happens in the same way as with other superstructural abstract theories: by excluding the dynamics of social production and interaction occurring within concrete social situations. It is necessary to *concretize* theoretical reflections on social psychological dynamics to overcome abstract fixation. This is the essential task of a critical social psychology: to discover the reality hidden by the ideological concepts of conventional psychology. "The task of a newer critical social psychology is to redeem and articulate the increasingly repressed social psychological dynamics that make possible the reproduction of the current organization of social life."⁶¹

To gain practical insight into current social reality we must begin our reflection with a theory which facilitates a concrete examination of historically specific contradictions within social processes. Only through such a critically-informed approach will it be possible to create the awareness of both self and society necessary for responsible social praxis. The starting point for such an emancipatory ethical project must be the conscious *recognition* of human suffering accompanied by a corresponding *commitment* to identify with people who are suffering, and to remove the causes of their suffering: "Critical theory stresses that knowledge can contribute to emancipation and

⁶⁰ Wexler, *Critical Social Psychology*, p. 83.

⁶¹ Wexler, *Critical Social Psychology*, p. 78.

enlightenment - to critical, rational action, based on a self and social awareness."⁶² The desire for transformative praxis based on self and social awareness serves as a foundational link between social psychology and ethics. The principal task of a transformative ethic of awareness is therefore to identify and explain the economic, political, and ideological forces which shape the lives of individuals, and to offer tools to evaluate those dynamic forces from a moral point of view. The aim is to clarify strategies and initiatives that can be taken to advance a collective liberation process: "The challenge here is to win back our consciousness from the invading abstractions (knowledge) and ideologies which distort our awareness of ourselves and of the social processes in which we are implicated."⁶³

Social theories are *maps* to help us find our way as we search for insightful social information on the road to greater personal transformation and social change. The most insightful theory will not itself bring us one step closer to the destination we seek without the courage and force of personal commitments, and organized social action.

To begin the task of redeeming and articulating the repressed social psychological dynamics of the current organization of society within Canada, it is necessary to clarify the functions ideology can serve within the various sectors of Canadian society. We need to analyze how ideology is simultaneously misleading and socially effective. We will be much closer to making the concept of ideology *practical* when we see it for what it is: an elaborate system of ideas and symbols which create a cultural *hegemony* within our society. This insight makes it possible for us to identify and expose negative aspects of social ideology.

Understanding ideology as cultural hegemony is to see how human consciousness utilizes ideology to shore up real social relations necessary for the functioning of class societies, while at the same time concealing structures of human manipulation and social inequality. Such an approach makes concepts such as *collective deception* and *collective*

⁶² Wexler, *Critical Social Psychology*, p. 2.

⁶³ Holland, p. 267.

repression more intelligible. Property rights and civil freedoms, for example, are necessary for the proper functioning of market capitalism; however, they do not operate simply on the level of individual actions and beliefs. They are practices and lived experiences which are nevertheless misleading, since they also help to conceal the exploitative character of capitalist relations of production.

How exactly do individuals participate in unequal relationships in such a way as to render impotent their cherished hopes and desires? Coercion does not explain everything, as some social psychologists such as Peter Archibald seem to suggest. Wexler takes Archibald to task for presenting what he believes to be a one-sided and misleading explanation of psychological deformation resulting from coercion by the powerful:

*The failure to realize historic human hopes is not simply, as critical social psychologists like Archibald suggest (1978, p.12) the result of coercion by the powerful. Social emancipation is inhibited by the internalized self-restraint and self-deformation of the powerless and the oppressed.*⁶⁴

Wexler does not suggest that Archibald is all wrong, but rather that his belief that *individualistic voluntarism* should be supplemented by an analysis of *coercive power* in social interaction mistakenly suggests that these two dimensions of human life in society alone tell the whole story. The reproduction of society is not accomplished simply by individual choices in a rational market, or through coercive conformity, although these are both powerful contributing factors; but rather, through the manipulation of human consciousness which destroys or prevents the development of critical awareness. There is need for a social psychology that can avoid the artificial split between *choice* and *coercion*, and to describe, instead, the dynamics of the social relational processes.⁶⁵ Wexler explains how the real aim of a critical social psychology is to discover the social reality hidden by the ideological concepts of conventional social psychology.

In the opening chapter it was mentioned that the original interest in the dynamic psychology of human attention found in William James was all but lost when Freud

⁶⁴ Wexler, *Critical Social Psychology*, p. 26.

⁶⁵ Wexler, *Critical Social Psychology*, p. 79.

supposedly discovered the unconscious. With the recent celebration of William James' centennial, there has been a renewal of interest in his insights into the workings of the human mind; the psychic power of human attention has once again regained its rightful place as the central power organizing and directing human experience. Indeed, bourgeois psychology operating as *privatized* psychology had already effected a shift in focus from the *id* to the *ego*; the problem here being that bourgeois psychology failed to integrate the *self-directing* individual into social and political reality.

7.2 Privatized Psychology and the Death of Critical Insight

William Glasser has developed a extremely popular therapeutic approach to mental health he calls *Reality Therapy*. This theory can be viewed as a variation on the psychological developments popularized by neo-Freudian revisionists such as Adler, who developed what has been termed *ego*, or *Individual*, psychology. This approach rejects the traditional psychoanalytic focus on the unconscious (id impulses) in favour of the conscious (ego). In light of earlier comments concerning the rightful place of the *conscious* as the primary director of psychic energy and life praxis, Adler's reaction against Freud seems at first glance to be a positive advance. The problem with ego psychology is that it fails to retain something fundamental in Freud: a critical self-reflective understanding of the dynamic connection between person and society within consciousness. As Jacoby explains of the neo-Freudian revisionists such as Adler and William Glasser:

*The inner dynamic of individual and society is severed and replaced by a mechanical model of the individual adjusting or maladjusting to values, norms, goals, and so on. These 'values' and 'norms' are not examined as the coin of a repressive society, but are traded and exchanged at face value.*⁶⁶

The following statement from a work by Adler reflects the liberal ideology which - like William Glasser, Victor Frankl and many others - throws the onus of responsibility

⁶⁶ Jacoby, *Social Amnesia*, p. 24.

onto the individual for rectifying whatever psychological problems he or she may have:

The purpose of the book is to point out how the mistaken behaviour of the individual affects the harmony of our social and communal life; further to teach the individual to recognize his [her] own mistakes, and finally to show him [her] how he [she] may effect a harmonious adjustment to the communal life.⁶⁷

Harmonious adjustment - not social transformation - is the politically sound therapeutic strategy offered in the mistakenly-dubbed tradition of *humanistic* psychology.

One of the most prominent and respected approaches among professional psychologists is the research into moral development by Lawrence Kohlberg [a student of Jean Piaget]. John Martin Rich situates Kohlberg's theory in the same tradition of conformist psychology, an approach which fails to transcend the personal and private world of the individual, which results in the same attribution of blame against individuals as Glasser and Adler. As Rich puts it:

They [certain critics] question the "theoretical egocentrism" of Freudian and certain post-Freudian paradigms, including that of Kohlberg. These dominant models focus primarily on internal, individual, and differential measures of man and morality which constitute a set of preconceptions about the nature of human beings, their morality, and the possibilities (or impossibilities) of socio-educational change begins to emerge. These formulations tend to "blame the victim" rather than the larger social order, for any obstacle or difficulty that the individual cannot overcome.⁶⁸

Others writing in the same liberal vein, such as Victor Frankl and Eric Fromm, are more sensitive to the debilitating effects social conditions can have on individuals. These writers engage in cultural analysis, and are critical of social conditions, which they believe contribute directly to personal mental conflicts and psychological problems. These writers often fail to incorporate the insights they obtain from reflections on such social conditions into their therapeutic theories of human transformation. Rather than recognizing the historical and malleable character of many oppressive social conditions - and how a project aimed at transforming those conditions can constitute the appropriate historical meaning to fill the *existential vacuum* of human experience of which such writers speak - they tend, rather, to focus on the universal tensions of human life, and thereby trivialize both history

⁶⁷ Adler, *Understanding Human Nature* (Greenwich, Connecticut, 1969), p. ix.

⁶⁸ Rich et al. *Theories of Moral Development*, p. 23.

and politics. They make self-transcendence through idealism the only route for legitimate healing: "The revisionists take what is a product of history and society - anxiety and insecurity - and translate it into a universal element of man's being - into biology. They gain existentialism and lose history."⁶⁹ Jacoby accuses the post-Freudian tradition of ego and self-psychology of effectively removing individuals from social and historical change:

This psychology is the ideology of conformism and synchronization in the era of late capitalism. The reality of violence and destruction, of psychically and physically damaged people, is not merely glossed over, but buried beneath the lingo of self, meaning, authenticity, personality. The more these cease to exist, the more they are invoked. . . . The concepts are less than critical; they are blank checks that endorse the prevailing malpractices with cheery advice on inner strength and self-actualization.⁷⁰

By restricting their focus to the private self-directing individual, such writers promote the illusion that the individual has the power to transcend the negative influence of these forces and conditions - despite the continued existence of those social conditions - as if ignorance of society was the door to self-knowledge and freedom.

Although psychologists such as Gordon Allport, Carl Rogers, Eric Fromm, William Glasser and Victor Frankl recognize the need for meaningful relationships with others for the process of identity formation and mental health, *they all agree the primary responsibility for fulfilling these needs lies with the individual*. They recognize that individuals need help, but they suggest that it is entirely up to the individual to *help oneself* by seeking out means for self-improvement and social integration through self-help organizations, *small encounter groups* (Carl Rogers), a *key person* (William Glasser) or some such meaningful regular association with like-minded or like-suffering others. Jacoby sees this approach as the consequence of privatized conformist psychology:

One helps oneself because collective help is inadmissible; in rejecting the realm of social and political praxis, individual helplessness is redoubled and soothes itself through self-help, hobbies, and how-to manuals. It is an old formula to keep bourgeois society on its tracks: while business dominates mind and body, one is admonished to mind one's own business.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Jacoby, *Social Amnesia*, p. 47.

⁷⁰ Jacoby, *Social Amnesia*, p. 58.

⁷¹ Jacoby, *Social Amnesia*, p. 51.

Sociologists too have pointed to the need for intentional small communities as a means of empowering or healing the ills they see resulting from capitalism and the fragmented bureaucratic structures of mass society. On the other hand, such attempts at self-maintenance can easily serve to support the very structures which cause much of the psychological and physical suffering which exists in society, by fostering the illusion that personal therapy offers an answer to the problem. Wherever the source of personal suffering lies with unjust or oppressive social structures and conditions, and those social forces remain intact or worsen, a conformist psychology may seem to be successful in repairing certain individuals, but often not without those people first having to become socially ignorant.

The polarization between social *theorists*, who analyze the structural ills of society, and social *psychologists*, who focus on the solitary individual in deference to social structures, makes it a formidable challenge for either group to grasp the social psychological reality which makes a truly responsible ethical and political life praxis possible. As Rowan suggests in his book, *The Structured Crowd*, viewing responsibility as an *either-or* is prohibitive for critical awareness and social transformation:

On the one hand we can see the world as from the "I" (the first person) and take responsibility for our lives, owning our own experience and seeing any attempt to blame others as a diversion and an avoidance of the real issue. This is the view taken up by most forms of therapy, counselling or personal growth. On the other hand we can see the world as controlled by 'them' (the third person) and show how every detail of our lives is dominated by the structures, the ideologies and the norms of a hierarchial society based on property, profit and class, seeing any attempt to turn the blame inwards as a diversion and an avoidance of the real issue. This is the view taken up by most politically or socially oriented groups.⁷²

Obviously what is needed is both human and social transformation, and this demands the integration of psychoanalysis and social analysis in a single dynamic praxis aspiring to personal and social goals, which are, at one and the same time, both ethical and political. The search for meaning and understanding will only overcome the artificial split between public (politics) and private (morality) when individuals embrace ethical ideals based on

⁷² Rowan, *The Structured Crowd*, p. 139.

concern for the suffering of others. It is necessary, therefore, that one's search for meaning and mental health take the form of a collective transformative praxis which strives towards an ever-more perfect realization of an emancipatory, utopian and ethical social vision.

Christians refer to this utopian vision (as Karl Mannheim used the word) as the *Reign of God*. Christians - like critical social scientists⁷³ - recognize how utopian social vision offers a map and direction for life praxis, and the final vision can not be attained perfectly within history, given the limitations and practical shortcomings of material existence. Utopian social imaginations are not, however, impractical. They creative awareness of what the current situation demands through a sustained comparative contrast with the data of experience and social analysis. Just as the ideal types and models of, for example, *Gesellschaft* and *Gemeinschaft*, provided the intellectual framework for productive social inquiry, so too can a utopian social vision, and the actual circumstances of contemporary society, provide the basis for productive, critically aware, and morally responsible social action. Utopian social imagination can also elicit strength and courage to engage in meaningful social projects with others. Of course, living one's life based on an emancipatory ideal social vision suggests that a person acts on certain fundamental beliefs concerning what it means to be a human being. This brings us back to the need for some narrative moral content for one's master story.

Richard Shaull has spelled out some of the assumptions and convictions which form the foundation of Paulo Freire's theory of human transformation and social change in

⁷³ Brian Fay discusses various types of human limits at great length in his book *Critical Social Science: Liberation and its Limits*. He argues that the following human limits make the full realization of an ideal social vision impossible, something which critical theory must take into account: limits to the powers of human reason; limits and vulnerabilities resulting from the fact that human beings are embodied creatures, embedded in community, which makes the ideal realization of autonomy impossible. Fay expresses the effect of these limits on narrative understanding and life praxis as follows: "In the narratives we use to capture our identities there are no absolute beginnings and no absolute endings, and there is no absolute plot which connects them. The narratives which we tell about ourselves never achieve finality, but are inherently open and anticipatory. This is the reason why we must be content with only partial glimpses of who we are, and must accept relative opacity as our lot." (*Critical Social Science: Liberation and its Limits*, p. 207). I would qualify Fay's position by adding that a religious world view can provide an absolute (although not fully determinable) despite the fact that such an end will itself spell the end of both history as well as the various limits identified by Fay.

his forward to Freire's book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Among these is Freire's belief that human beings act upon and transform their world and thereby have the capacity to realize a fuller and richer life. Freire assumes that every human being has the capacity to engage in life with critical awareness effecting transformation:

Every human being, no matter how 'ignorant' or submerged in the 'culture of silence' is capable of looking critically at the world in a dialogical encounter with others. Provided with the proper tools for such encounter, he [she] can gradually perceive his [her] personal and social reality as well as the contradictions in it, become conscious of his [her] own perception of reality, and deal critically with it.⁷⁴

Summary

Social ignorance serves a functional role in ensuring the reproduction of social relations and the relative coherence of society. There is, however, no simple nor single explanation for either the origin or existence of all social ignorance. We can understand the origin of social ignorance as (a) the product of self-deception, (b) the result of being misinformed or deceived, or (c) the result of a restricted capacity for knowledge or awareness. All three sources of ignorance must be taken into account in critical social psychological analysis and ethical reflection.

Appeals to superstructural abstract sociological or cultural theories, such as that proposed by the dominant ideology thesis, deny or ignore the dynamics whereby individuals participate and cooperate, either knowingly or unknowingly, in the maintenance and reproduction of unjust social relations. Such abstract theories are serious impediments to the development of critical awareness and transformative praxis. Comprehending the social psychological dynamics and structural elements of social coherence involves a complex social analysis.

We can deceive ourselves and chose to remain ignorant of significant truths; turning attention away from facts and factors which both challenge and threaten us. This leads us back to those suggestions offered in chapter two for preventing or overcoming

⁷⁴ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 13-14.

self-deception.

We can also be deceived by others. This points to the need for a pro-active, investigative engagement in social reality where we *think for ourselves* with a critical attitude characterized by a healthy suspicion of unsubstantiated social information; a *hermeneutics of suspicion*, as some authors have called it.

Attaining and maintaining a critical attitude means incorporating concrete (experiential) and abstract (theoretical) modes of knowing to avoid the dangers and pitfalls of an excessively *fixated* mode of relating to the world frustrating critical thinking and blocking awareness. A cultural analysis of fragmented, industrial society and an increasingly complex and specialized social division of labour, must go hand-in-hand with an analysis of contemporary human consciousness. Fragmentation and specialization have negative consequences on the constitution and construction of identity, and seriously impede the incorporation into comprehensive master stories of both moral and political dimensions of human life.

The culture of pluralism - and the economy of global capitalism - are changing the way people relate to one another. It also changes consciousness from one founded on a coherent sense of society, and identity within that society, to the isolated and fragmented world of the private person. Human 'autonomy' is sought only in the private world of the individual, while society becomes to the individual more and more a foreign and foreboding force, feared far more than it is understood.

Much modern psychology remains content to view personal sufferings from the perspective of the individual's personal and family life. Such privatized psychologies do not challenge the legitimacy of their own fragmented approach, and in so doing, perpetuate a false understanding of suffering and the fragmentation of consciousness. The following chapter builds on this foundational social psychological analysis of social ignorance by examining factors influencing the *reception and transmission of social information which contribute to social ignorance within society*.

Chapter Four

Ideology and Scientific Knowledge

What exactly is Ideology? Ideology is often used in a strictly pejorative sense, in the same way the young Marx used the word when talking about the particular ideology of his day he characterized as a professorial mode of knowing removed from historical and social reality. The term ideology has also had a long history of use as a concept for describing different belief systems and world views. This chapter uses the term ideology in its non-pejorative sense, as a useful concept to explore how beliefs and values shape one's view of society, as well as one's methods of selecting, collecting and verifying information.

What are we to make of claims that some social knowledge is *scientific* knowledge, knowledge completely *true*, free from all ideological taint or bias? When people accept important social information as *scientific* knowledge, powerful negative cultural ideologies and determining social forces can captivate consciousness and act as impediments to transformative awareness. Ideological influences and selective criteria are always present in the acquisition and communication of social knowledge. An ethics of awareness seeks to identify the constraining effects of ideological influences operating in our personal and social life to enable people to decide freely what to believe and what to do rather than to be blindly influenced by dangerous social myths posing as facts of life.

Ideology is transmitted by social institutions, and sociology (the study of society) is such an institution. It is therefore crucial to examine how sociological methods and theories can create and transmit ideology. Before examining the long-standing and important debate over the question of whether it is possible to obtain ideologically-untainted or *value-free* social knowledge, first it is important to clarify further how ideology does not pertain to a *thing*, but a *dynamic activity* of human consciousness.

1. Ideology as a Category of Human Consciousness

To understand the dynamics of social ignorance we must - as was discussed in the preceding chapter - rescue the notion of ideology from *superstructural* sociological and social psychological theories, and recognize how ideology always operates as a *category of human consciousness*. We need to carry a continuous awareness that no mental construction can reveal the actual and unique manner in which individuals receive and respond to a dominant social ideology. Nor will an abstract theory indicate the degree of awareness or moral responsibility which is guiding the actions of particular individuals or groups at a given place and time in society.

Ideological ignorance always effects its work at the level of individual consciousness. The daily personal lives, routines, associations, occupations and experiences of people are central to an ethical study of ideological impediments to moral awareness. What countless observations from the social sciences reveal is that there is obviously no one *class* or *group* within society that constitutes the collective reservoir of ideological ignorance. Individuals from all walks of life can - as they go about their own business - be quite unaware of how they may be making a personal contribution to some positive social trend. Likewise, individuals can be unaware of their contribution to systemic social evils. Individuals can participate in perpetrating social evils with a vague awareness that is purposely kept vague due to its unpleasant consequences. It is also possible to be painfully aware of one's reluctant and/or morally ambiguous adherence to ideology, and yet, continue to comply with those social norms and rules which ensure the survival of both a particular ideology, and the actual social practices and injustices particular social ideologies support.

Individuals may internalize ideologies by basing their lives on them, but this itself does not mean that human freedom or awareness is completely deadened, or that individuals who comply with ideology necessarily are content with their situation. There are likely other factors at play. The important point is that people may be quite aware, or

could readily become aware, of how much they don't like the ideology and systems they reluctantly support. Ideologies are not so much *believed* as *tolerated*, and they are only tolerated as long as the system which they support continues to deliver the goods. This is what Jürgen Habermas suggests by his use of the concept *Ideological legitimation*.

Habermas believed that in developed societies with market economies and democratic political governments, there exists a core ideology-mediating process which functionally encourages people to participate in the legitimation and reproduction of the social system, including unjust structural aspects of society often resulting in immoral crimes against humanity. Members of society can be aware of how they contribute to the reproduction of both just and unjust aspects of society, or they can make their personal contribution unknowingly.

Ideology need not lead to *submerged* (Freire), *repressed* (Freud) or *false* (Marx) consciousness. With awareness of ideological influences comes moral responsibility to choose between competing values and possible lifestyles. The intellectual calm and security that can come with adherence to an ideology often goes hand in hand with the emotional comfort offered by group conformity. *Ideology* pertains to the *thinking* (abstract) side of this dynamic; *social conformity* primarily to the *doing* (concrete) side; more will be said on this in chapter six.

What is the origin of ideology? Reflections on the social constitution of identity make it clear that ideology does *not* originate in the autonomous human spirit. We construct our knowledge from the materials available to us in the cultural and social world in which we live. We are born into a particular society at a particular time and place. Not a global society, but a village, or an urban street, or perhaps a farm. From the time of our birth, we immediately begin to incorporate - quite uncritically - the language, cultural symbols, moral ideals, and culturally-determined patterns of behaviour and social mannerisms of our particular society. This essential relationship between the development of human consciousness, language and society has been at the heart of the linguistic studies of Claude Levi-Strauss, and the social psychology of numerous writers belonging

to a current of thinking known as *Symbolic Interactionism*.¹

What is the historical origin of ideology? This is a philosophical question that can only be answered by examining one's underlying metaphysical or religious world view. Some point to the hierarchical structure of social organization as the source of a distorted cultural social imagination, which makes social division and inequality seem necessary or in some way acceptable. Thankfully, the vast majority find this view to be morally repugnant, falling far below the spiritual capacity of the human person for community with others in relationships of mutual service and care. A theological world view might locate the source of ideology in the spiritual deformation of human consciousness, portrayed most succinctly in the biblical story of the Fall. Regardless of the particular biblical interpretations, theological anthropology from all Christian churches accepts as fundamental that the tendency to selfishness and sin is a universal mark of the human condition. No purely historical or social revolution could bring about the transcendental healing and promise of resurrection and eternal life which forms the heart of the Christian Creed. *Emancipatory* researchers from all faiths and perspectives locate the source of social ideology in political and economic elites who have the power to keep insightful social information secret, and make lies and distortions publicly accepted truths.

The ethicist and critical social psychologist will discover and name symbols and values prominent in culture, seek out the means whereby they are *transmitted* within society, and identify the agents generating and transmitting the messages. It is only by engaging in the political and economic operations of society that these factors can be detected and countered. Only after locating the source of social evil is it possible to understand how distorted images and ideas *operate* in human consciousness as ideology, have such a devastating impact on our lives, yet continue to be viewed as purely personal problems with their source in personal life stories.

An even more urgent matter to resolve for the sake of practical moral action is

¹ As Arthur Britain states in *The Privatized World*, Levi-Strauss's programmatic slogan, ". . . whoever says 'man' says 'language,' and whoever says 'language' says 'society' sums up the current commitments of hundreds of practitioners in the social and human sciences." p. 15.

how to uncover the dynamics which explain *how* and *why* intelligent people can be content to justify their support for unjust systems and social actions with social explanations and theories that are unproven, or simply mistaken, yet often cause enthusiastic involvement and support for social movements and trends supportive of the dominant ideology and elites. Such ideologically-induced states of moral blindness can only be healed with the awakening of moral awareness and the individual becoming engaged in a self-determined dynamic relationship with society. Ideology can easily stand in the way of such a process of reflection and action. The moral approach best suited to respond to the captivating experience of negative ideology is an ethic of awareness.

Critical social scientists speak of institutional vehicles within society as *transmitters* of ideology. All social institutions are information exchange mechanisms through which ideas, myths and symbols are passed on to other people: "Educational institutions, churches, the mass media, the publishing industry, and other agents serve as conduits of cultural reconstitution, by continually reproducing the language and symbolic universe of a society."² But such an insight is really not very enlightening. The question posed by ethics and social psychology remains unanswered: why do individuals participate in social institutions which ensure the reproduction of ideologies supporting injustice within society? Answering this question concretely requires concrete analysis. However, concrete analysis needs the guidance of a *theoretical* understanding of how individuals ensure the reproduction of ideology and social structures that recognizes how the *acquisition* of social knowledge can contain methodological errors and limitations that can distort interpretations of reality. It will also examine how the *structural process* whereby both the *acquisition* and *dissemination* of knowledge within educational institutions can work to discourage critical and integrative teaching methods, stifle critical thinking, and block the development of an ethic of awareness. Consistent with all types of aberrations in dynamic moral consciousness, ideological ignorance is an interruption, or distortion, in the abstract-concrete dialectic needed in every sound research method.

² Barry Adam, *The Survival of Domination: Inferiorization and Everyday Life* (New York, N.Y.: Elsevier North-Holland, Inc, 1978), p. 30.

2. Unifying Concrete and Abstract Knowledge in Social Inquiry

Among the greatest barriers to insightful and emancipatory social knowledge are sociological methods and research techniques which see no need for the social theorist or researcher to be engaged in a responsible praxis geared toward the transformation of self and society. Every person must make sense of experience to understand his or her place in the world. The misguided search for *objective*, and so-called *value-free*, social knowledge continues to perpetuate a pathological division between concrete and abstract methods of obtaining social knowledge - as was discussed in general terms in the previous chapter - and is largely responsible for the *crisis of abstraction* existing within some professional circles. Acquiring insightful social knowledge requires the integration of the two modes of knowing (i.e., concrete and abstract) into a single method of social inquiry and learning theory.

2.1 Social Ignorance and the Misguided Quest for Value-Free Knowledge

*Epistemology, or the structure of the knowledge we accept, is grounded upon an ethical decision.*³

Epistemology is in itself ethics and ethics is epistemology.'

Social knowledge is always constructed by the activity of human consciousness in a restricted social environment. Social knowledge is, therefore, always selective and biased. The view that it is possible to investigate and interpret society and obtain a completely *objective* and *value-free* knowledge is completely untenable. Deciding where to assign time and attention reveals how the very act of making research choices has a moral and political significance directly related to the approach the researcher takes when gathering social data.

³ P. K. Feyerabend, *Knowledge Without Foundations* (Oberlin, Ohio: Oberlin Printing Company, 1952), p. 56.

⁴ Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), p. 127.

Values enter into the search for social knowledge in two distinct, yet interrelated ways: it impossible to *obtain* knowledge in an entirely neutral and objective manner, nor is it possible to *use* knowledge without either an implicit or explicit reliance on values. Values are *explicit* when researchers consciously avow them and rely on them to guide their research. Values are *implicit* when researchers deny their existence; by doing so, they render themselves blind to the directing influence of values.

Refusing to acknowledge the influence of values in social research not only diminishes the capacity for critical awareness, it can also encourage individuals to absolve themselves from moral and political responsibility for the social knowledge they *obtain*, or the particular social skills they *exercise*. This is made possible by the separation between the process of acquiring *knowledge*, and the possible economic and political agencies or agents through which the social *uses* of that knowledge are decided. This fragmentation between *knower* and *doer* can lead to a breakdown in the dynamic moral process that requires individuals to take moral responsibility for both *thinking* and *activity*.

No where has there been more dissension among sociologists than with the question of the role of values and goals in social theory, a debate referred to by scholars as *the value controversy*. Graham C. Kinloch has identified the boundaries of the dispute in his book, *Ideology and Contemporary Sociological Theory*:

*Mainstream sociology, for the most part, continues to insist that it is capable of producing scientific, objective knowledge, relevant to the solution of major social problems in contemporary society. . . . On the other hand, there is growing, though still limited, awareness of the extent to which this and indeed all "knowledge" is ideological, in that it represents the vested interests and viewpoints of particular social groups in specific situations.*⁵

The outcome of this polemical debate has been determined: those clinging to a *value-free* epistemology for social research have lost by default. While some individuals still attempt to repudiate arguments demonstrating the impossibility of a value-free acquisition of social knowledge, most simply ignore the information, considering the facts as politically irrelevant. At no time has the claim that there is always an intrinsic and necessary link

⁵ Graham C. Kinloch, *Ideology and Contemporary Sociological Theory* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1981), p. 3.

between *facts* and *values* in social research been refuted in an intellectually-convincing manner. Thankfully, as Daniel Callahan and Bruce Jennings note: ". . . the notion that all social scientific inquiry contains certain normative or ideological biases is now virtually universally acknowledged."⁶ The majority of credible thinkers now recognize that facts and values are irrevocably linked, although they may not fully explore the radical implications of this basic truth.

What is to be made of the claim that all knowledge is ideological? That social knowledge necessarily represents the vested interests and viewpoints of particular social groups is simply a testimony to human freedom. Having interests is not a *bad* thing. Just as the realization that social knowledge is never completely free from elements of ideological distortion should not diminish our efforts to achieve empirically verifiable social information, neither should the realization that social knowledge always reflects particular viewpoints, which serve certain social and political interests, be interpreted as an indictment of the integrity or worth of the social sciences. Positive and life-enhancing ideologies (belief systems) deserve to be valued. If social knowledge is to be of benefit to humankind, it is proper that it be sought and used to serve valued social goals. The important thing is that the values and perspectives present within sociological theory and research be made *explicit*, and defended on ethical grounds. It is also important to develop a criteria and framework to show how the interests served by social researchers can be shown to be legitimate on the basis of fundamental philosophical or religious truth claims which are, albeit, *assumed* to be true, but nonetheless both desirable and intellectually *defensible* as a foundation for morality.

⁶ Daniel Callahan and Bruce Jennings, *Ethics, The Social Sciences, And Policy Analysis* (New York, N.Y.: Plenum Press, 1983), p. 26.

2.2 The Importance of Making Value-Orientations for Social Research Explicit

While many critical social researchers expose ideological elements they detect within the social theory or research findings of other social researchers, according to sociologist Derek L. Phillips, most sociologists continue to ignore important *epistemological* questions raised by sociologists such as Karl Mannheim, C. Wright Mills and Robert Merton: "Questions about what it is to 'know' something and about who are to establish the criteria or standards for showing that one does know or that one group knows better than another, are simply ignored by most sociologists."⁷

Not only have key epistemological questions been largely ignored - despite the fact that a growing number of sociologists openly acknowledge that values do guide sociological research - few sociologists have ventured to articulate an explicit value-orientation within their own research. As sociologist Dennis Foss states in his study, *The Value Controversy in Sociology*: "Those who are most critical of value-free sociology, and thus most disposed to an extraepistemic orientation, have been more concerned with identifying and justifying value stands that are present in the field than with actually presenting and justifying their own value orientations."⁸

Foss makes a case that sociologists must adopt a ". . . new orientation that would provide a goal for the discipline, orienting the numerous decisions that must be made and that demand reference to values in addition to expanding our knowledge."⁹ His particular orientation is based on the goal of *freedom*; a goal which he believes constitutes the *ultimate benefit* to which sociology should be directed. Foss is probably correct to say that sociologists who are critical of other sociologists have shown little interest in presenting and justifying their own value orientations. David Lyon represents at least one

⁷ Derek L. Phillips, "Epistemology and the Sociology of Knowledge," (*Theory and Society*, Vol. 1, 1974), p. 60.

⁸ Dennis C. Foss, *The value Controversy in Sociology* (San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass, Inc.), p. 92. Foss refers to the "epistemic" orientation of sociology as the accumulation of knowledge. An "extraepistemic" orientation refers to the way in which social knowledge is used.

⁹ Foss, *The Value Controversy in Sociology*, p. 110.

exception to the rule.

In his book *Sociology and the Human Image*, David Lyon makes the case that sociologists who are also Christians should allow their Christian beliefs and values to determine the goal of their sociological research, which, for him, is summed up in the Hebrew concept of *shalom*. It is not necessary to begin comparing and evaluating different *value* orientations to recognize that some such moral or spiritual aim must serve, either implicitly or explicitly, as the motivating and unifying factor in every search for social knowledge. To make such an orientation *explicit* is a mark of intellectual honesty. To argue that such a value orientation does not exist, or to deny that a value orientation needs to be made explicit, is a dangerous form of ignorance; it is to deny ownership of one's actions and to risk having one's skills, discoveries and accomplishments appropriated and exploited by others; perhaps powerful individuals who may be only too eager to make *their* value orientations known, but who may also use such accomplishments selfishly, or for the purposes of evil and destruction.¹⁰

¹⁰ Two well-known historical examples of individuals who refused to take responsibility for their technical expertise or scientific discoveries resulting in atrocious social evils are, Albert Speers and J. Robert Oppenheimer. Spears served as the chief architect for Hitler, and Oppenheimer was the leading scientist on the team which developed the *atomic fission* bomb, and somewhat later, the *thermonuclear fusion* bomb. Spears has been the subject of numerous studies on self-deception, given his own admission at war trials that his commitment to his vocation of architecture kept him from considering the implications and consequences of his actions.

Oppenheimer, on the other hand, considered fully what he was doing, but was committed to a value-free approach to science, which allowed him to absolve himself from responsibility for his actions and discoveries. In the days preceding the dropping of the first atomic bomb on Japan, a number of scientists tried to strike up a petition to submit to the U.S. President, urging him not to drop the atomic bomb on Japan, unless, and until, U.S. surrender terms had been explained to the Japanese and rejected. There was also hope that a benign demonstration of the bomb's power would occasion such a surrender. The scientist who initiated the petition approached one of his colleagues, Edward Teller, and although Teller was sympathetic towards signing it, first decided to confer with his authority, Oppenheimer. In later testimony, Teller recounted that Oppenheimer told him that he thought it improper for a scientist to use his prestige as a platform for political pronouncements. At the time, Teller felt relieved with Oppenheimer's response, and decided not to sign the petition. With no petition, the bomb was dropped on two separate Japanese cities, signalling one of the most brutal acts of aggression by human beings against human beings in the 20th century. To his credit, four years after the bombing of Japan, Oppenheimer opposed the further development of the hydrogen bomb, largely on political and moral grounds. Philip M. Stern, *The Oppenheimer Case: Security on Trial* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), p. 80.

2.3 Value-Free Research and the Rationalization of Social Injustice

The notion that research should rely on an emancipatory method and ethical vision is based on the fundamental belief that every person should enjoy peace, equality and justice. This viewpoint is not without its opponents. Some social theorists reject such a vision, repudiate engaged research, and end up rationalizing or blindly supporting social inequality. Much evil can result when these arguments become culturally-fashionable. These rationalizations can be easily identified and exposed as forms of human selfishness and hatred.

Philip Green deals with two dominant types of arguments which rationalize social inequality as either unavoidable or necessary.¹¹ The first approach attempts to convince us that it is pointless to pursue radical social change, arguing that social inequality has its source in the the natural order of things, resulting from the different genetic make-up of individuals and groups. From the sciences of *genetics* and *eugenics* to the political racism of *Apartheid*, these systems of thought speak of *biological determinism*, or *natural inferiority*, or some other unfriendly characterization, which attempts to explain why some people are poor and stupid, while others are brighter, and consequently, able to acquire culture and appreciate things only more intelligent and civilized human beings can appreciate.

The second type of argument is the neo-liberal world view expressed as a political philosophy founded on an individualist ethic that *rejects the use of public power to achieve egalitarian social ends*. Common to a whole spectrum of these neo-liberal arguments is the belief that individual well-being must be the source, as well as the criterion, of social justice. Individual rights and freedoms are protected (especially property, investment, and trade rights) while collective rights are virtually non-existent. Missing from this approach is a tenable notion of the *common good*, expressed in social and political terms. Neo-liberal arguments endorse liberal values and human rights, yet

¹¹ Philip Green, *The Pursuit of Inequality* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981).

oppose extending them to those excluded from the benefits of economic wealth.

Each type of argument, i.e., *genetic* and *neo-liberal*, as different as they are, both arrive at the same conclusion:

In both cases, intellectuals have discovered supposed grounds in ethical or political principle that have the same practical effect as the biological arguments discussed in the earlier essays: they make planned social change seem in some sense wrong, or against nature.¹²

If we rationalize human suffering as necessary or meritorious, or otherwise reconcile ourselves to social injustice and human suffering, we block the development of a transformative moral awareness from the very outset. Such theories destroy the reflective and creative subjectivity of individuals in the interest of preserving a social arrangement which makes possible a preferred way of life for the privileged and *powerful few*; a way of life which depends on the subjugation or mistreatment of the *disadvantaged many*. Such are the social consequences of world views - systems of ideas and beliefs which offer explanations for what it means to be human. When those explanations are premised on fundamental falsehoods, the dynamic process whereby reflection and action would normally lead to critical awareness is either prevented from happening or brought to an abrupt end. A central task for an emancipatory ethic of awareness is to develop criteria for deciding what values and goals should serve as an orientation for social research under contemporary social conditions.

3. A Model for Assessing Social Knowledge Claims

Social knowledge claims always need to be validated. We are constantly being challenged to give our sources, and to defend information as legitimate and trustworthy. The fundamental and familiar *who, what, when, where, how, and why* which guides our daily human inquiry also forms the basic structure of a theoretical model needed to evaluate social knowledge claims. Of all the possible questions in these categories, which are most important to ask? Answering this question is made easier with a review of the

¹² Philip Green, *The Pursuit of Inequality*, p. 11.

key insights from two interrelated traditions within sociology: *critical sociology* and the *sociology of knowledge*.

Developing criteria for testing the validity of social knowledge requires that the *thinking* of the researcher be subjected to a process of critical questioning. This process of critical self-examination constitutes the essential sociological approach known as the *Sociology of Knowledge*:

*The sociology of knowledge requires, above all, that the sociologist's own thinking about a distorted reality should itself be constantly questioned, for the thinking of the sociologist is not immune to the prevailing social conditions that shape human consciousness.*¹³

The sociology of knowledge approach recognizes that all knowledge about social reality carries with it certain ideological, political and evaluative convictions. This approach is suspicious of all social knowledge claims. It aims to uncover the roots feeding personal and social experience, shaping consciousness, and explaining the dynamic workings of the social base out of which knowledge emerges.

Knowledge of society is always the product of a dialogical exchange between the social investigator and the social world in which the investigator lives. Distinctions between the researcher (*subject*) and society (*object*) can not be clearly delineated. Every *what* question concerning the knowledge claims which the researcher presents must be accompanied by a corresponding *why* question aimed directly at the researcher. These *why* questions can be categorized roughly as (a) questions dealing with the *perspective* of the sociologist, and, (b) questions dealing with the *interests* of the sociologist. Obviously, these perspectives overlap and merge in the same lives.

Questions dealing with sociological perspective consider the sociologist's *beliefs* and *values* about society and human nature (world view) as well as the *angle* from which the sociologist stands within society (social location). Sociologist Karl Mannheim made a distinction between what he called *particular* ideologies and *total* ideologies based on these same two variables (i.e., *social location* and *world view*). Particular ideologies are

¹³ G. Llewellyn Watson, *Social Theory and Critical Understanding* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1982), p. xix.

beliefs which express the interest of a particular social group, providing a partial and distorted view of reality. Total ideologies, on the other hand, are beliefs which present a distorted world view (*Weltanschauung*). *Class* or *group* interests can lead to ideological distortions affecting a total world view.

Mannheim's important distinction draws attention to how the philosophical or religious foundation of an individual's world view can have intellectual integrity as a belief system, and yet serve ideological purposes by legitimating class or group interests. There is a certain affinity between *perspectives* and *interests* within a unified body of social knowledge. Identifying and exposing key *interests* can help to determine both the *world view* and *social location* perspectives of the social researcher or theorist (and vice-versa).

Although a critical and suspicious attitude must determine the general approach, or *method of inquiry*, required to formulate criteria for testing sociological knowledge, such an attitude does not, in itself, constitute a criterion. The formative character of any criteria will be determined by the information obtained from asking a specific set of questions. An infinite number of questions could be raised, both about the *character* and *content* of social knowledge claims, as well as the beliefs, values, interests and intentions of the social researcher. Many questions can only be formulated in dialogue with particular social theories or research projects; still, it is nonetheless possible to outline a core theoretical model comprising key questions appropriate to ask of all social research. There are essentially three aspects or *categories of inquiry* with the model; *Knowledge about what?*, *How is Sociology Acquired?*, and *Who Benefits from Social Knowledge?*

3.1 KNOWLEDGE ABOUT WHAT?

All social researchers share a similar aim in their investigations: they seek accurate knowledge of society. *Knowledge of society* is obviously not an adequate answer to the question *knowledge about what?* Because societies are complex phenomena, spreading across boundaries of time and space - constituted by means of dynamic processes, and influenced by innumerable variables - no body of social knowledge is definitive or

complete: anthropological and historical limits always make social knowledge partial. No one can have *complete* social knowledge. Social researchers are subject to the very same *psychical* and *physical* limitations as are other human beings. To answer questions about *what*, we need to shift from general (abstract) to particular (concrete) questions.

Social researchers must inevitably choose between many possibilities when deciding what to research. Knowledge about what? A certain city; a certain group; a certain issue; all these choices (and many others) help to determine the content and limits of a given body of social knowledge. Uncovering the social determinants and psychological factors which influence how we decide these boundaries is the first step in the process of evaluating the merits of sociological research and the knowledge claims contained therein.

3.2 HOW IS SOCIAL KNOWLEDGE ACQUIRED?

Various determinants define the limits of social knowledge. After the determinants regarding what is being studied are identified and uncovered (i.e., time-frame, geography, etc.,) the next step in a value assessment of sociological knowledge is to investigate the particular methods and techniques which are employed to obtain the sought-after knowledge. Did the sociologist or social researcher do field studies? Were surveys taken? If so, how significant were the sample sizes? How fair were the selection procedures? What theories or models were used to select and then interpret social data? Was the knowledge based on the interpretation of historical texts? If so, how reliable is the knowledge contained in the texts? What hermeneutical method(s) or heuristic model(s) were used to record and to interpret the information? Were important texts relevant to the research subject matter overlooked or purposely ignored? All such questions (and many others) test the integrity of social knowledge claims.

Obtaining social knowledge is not simply a technical task having to do with interpretive methods. Knowledge *about* something (or someone, or some process) is categorically distinct from knowledge *of* something, as it exists in itself. Obtaining

knowledge is first and foremost a subjective enterprise, dependent in part on the potentialities and limits of the human mind. The most that can be hoped for is that social knowledge claims *approximate* the truth about *things in themselves*.

Some argue that the capacity to love and feel compassion are prerequisites for a truthful understanding of reality. Such was the understanding of historical truth held by theologian and sociologist Ernst Troeltsch.¹⁴ Troeltsch argued that theological and philosophical questions about the subjective process of knowing cannot be excluded from an evaluation of knowledge claims made by sociologists. Philosopher Mary Rogers expresses a similar conviction, stating that, ". . . the philosophy likely to benefit sociology must. . . address the relationships between experience and knowledge."¹⁵

3.3 WHO BENEFITS FROM SOCIAL KNOWLEDGE?

Why does the sociologist seek knowledge of a certain city; a certain group; a certain issue? What are the ends for which such knowledge is intended? Who benefits from social knowledge? Does social knowledge serve the interests of certain individuals or groups and not others? Is the research project being funded by a large petro-chemical corporation dedicated to maximizing corporate profits? Or, perhaps a non-profit organization concerned with the growing problem of homelessness? These questions (and many others) serve to uncover the fundamental beliefs, values, intentions and aims of the sociologist.

Social research is never simply an arbitrary project: the individual or group exerting time, effort and money to obtain information about society invariably must decide the boundaries of particular research endeavours, and the methods adopted to obtain social knowledge. Asking questions which help to answer the three general questions

¹⁴ For a summary presentation of the writings of Ernst Troeltsch on the subjective dimension of historical truth and social knowledge read, Gregory Baum, "Science and Commitment: Historical Truth According to Ernst Troeltsch," found in *The Social Imperative* (Toronto: Paulist Press, 1979), pp. 231-254.

¹⁵ Mary F. Rogers, *Sociology, Ethnomethodology, and Experience: A Phenomenological Critique* (Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 13.

knowledge about what? how is knowledge obtained? and, knowledge for what? offers a framework within which the perspectives and interests of sociological theory and research can be systematically laid out on the table to be assessed, criticized, modified, or if need be, rejected as ineffective.

4. Social Engagement and Methods of Inquiry

Of the factors determining the limits of social knowledge, one of the most significant is *social location*. Where do we stand when we look at the social world? With whom do we stand? These fundamental questions lead us into an investigation of how the *value orientation* within particular methods of social inquiry connects with the *social engagement* and moral praxis of the researcher. This is not a new observation. Indeed there are long-standing traditions within religious and secular ethics that incorporate into their systems the same fundamental insight: that ethics and the search for social knowledge fuse together in the integration of the value orientation (moral thinking) and praxis (moral activity) of the researcher. A growing body of contemporary critical research, both secular and theological, has taken a decidedly emancipatory and liberating turn.

4.1 The Importance of Location in Critical and Liberation Ethics

A central insight popularized by critical¹⁶ and liberation theologians and ethicists is that the social knowledge we attain is largely determined by social location and the particular character and dynamics of social praxis. With a prior commitment to justice and

¹⁶ Those who refer to themselves as *critical* theologians or ethicists usually originate in Europe or North America; those who refer to themselves as *liberation* theologians or ethicists usually write from the perspective of Latin America, Asia or Africa. *Political* theology and ethics usually refer to a particular development in Europe. Critical, political and liberation theologians and ethicists all rely on critical methods of inquiry, and aspire to foster social emancipation and personal liberation/redemption.

equality, the value orientation must necessarily be to aid the poor and oppressed.¹⁷ We cannot understand the structures and dynamics of poverty and oppression without first looking at the social world from the point of view of the *poor and oppressed*. It is by gazing at reality from the perspective, experience and social location of those who suffer from injustice and exploitation that emancipatory insights are gained. These insights are usually only attained by those individuals who are engaged in a collective emancipatory struggle to transform society and improve the quality of all life. Before clarifying this critical theological method further, it is worth exploring how this new teaching came gradually out of virtual obscurity¹⁸ to become the official teaching of the Canadian Christian Churches over the last two decades.

Following the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) many Latin American Christians struggling to cope with (and overcome) extreme poverty and exploitation, came together

¹⁷ Who are the poor and oppressed? The attempt to give a refined definition to this phrase is self-defeating. Those who suffer the afflictions of social injustice will bear the unique marks of oppression particular to their time and social context. The phrase is most fruitfully used in a metaphorical way, as an umbrella concept, much as the Hebrew phrase 'widows and orphans' is used throughout the Old and New Testament Scriptures. Just as a commitment 'to come to the aid of those who are poor and oppressed' forms the basis of a radical reading of the Gospel by many contemporary Christians, so too did the New Testament community define 'true religion' in terms of one's response to 'widows and orphans': *Pure and undefiled religion before God the father is this; to visit orphans and widows in their afflictions, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.* (James: 1:27, King James II Version). For a more detailed discussion of how different theologians have interpreted the phrase 'poor and oppressed' within the context of their respective societies, see Kevin J. Arsenault, *Liberation from Oppression in the Writings of Johann Baptist-Metz and Gregory Baum* (Masters Thesis: University of Windsor, Ontario, 1985).

¹⁸ Recent research into the historical origins of Canadian emancipatory Christian teaching and social theory by Roger Hutchinson has retrieved a little known tradition of radical Christian social teaching, which differed considerably from both the early Canadian Social Gospel Movement and the social theology of protestant theologians, such as Reinhold Niebuhr. [For a summation and critique of the Social Gospel Movement read, Richard Allen, *The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada, 1914-1928*, 1971, and; Richard Allen, ed., *The Social Gospel in Canada* (Ottawa: National Museum of Canada, 1975)].

A book containing the core teaching of this radical theological movement within Canada, *Towards the Christian Revolution*, was first published in 1936 by members of the Fellowship for a Christian Social Order (FCSO), (a group on which Roger Hutchinson wrote his doctoral dissertation) and has just recently been republished (Kingston, Ontario: Ronald Frye & Company, 1989). This reprint is accompanied by another book containing 16 critical commentaries of this Canadian Theological classic titled, *A Long and Faithful March*, Harold Wells and Roger Hutchinson, eds., (Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 1989). For a brief review of *Towards the Christian Revolution*, see, Gregory Baum, "Radical Theology Fifty Years Ago," *Ecumenist*, (Winter, 1991), pp. 5-7, where Baum discusses how this early radical teaching anticipates the liberation theology worked out in Latin America in the 1960's & 1970's.

in thousands of small *base* communities. In these communities they experienced a renewal of Christian life by praying and reading the Bible, and by involving themselves in joint social action aimed at bettering the social situation in which they lived and died. A number of trained theologians, who often joined or helped establish these base communities, collected and systematized the simple but revealing interpretations of the Gospel message that emerged in grassroots reflection. These written works (especially Gustavo Gutiérrez's now famous *A Theology of Liberation*) continue to have an enormous impact on the Church's official teaching. The shift in method occurred primarily as a call for a shift in *location*, a shift that reconciled the abstract-concrete split, or dualistic mind-set, Latin American theologians refer to as *Christendom*. As Robert McAfee Brown writes in his biographical work on Gustavo Gutiérrez,

To 'do' theology in this way means to appropriate some new tools, particularly the social sciences, in order to understand what forces are at work perpetuating injustice, and how those forces can be challenged. We have already seen why Marx is important in this undertaking. But just as important, methodologically, is a new way of relating reflection and action. Gustavo [Gutiérrez] describes it as a recognition that knowledge is linked to transformation. True knowledge of reality leads us to change that reality.¹⁹

In 1968, the Latin American Catholic Bishops held a conference in Medellín, Columbia, where they incorporated the principal elements of liberation theology. For the first time, an official conference of bishops accepted the analysis of Latin American poverty and dependency, and endorsed the struggle for economic and political liberation. They acknowledged that socio-economic liberation is part of the wider redemptive process promised in the Scriptures, and that the personal decision to follow Jesus Christ must entail a commitment to a process of social emancipation.

The 1971 World Synod of Bishops held in Rome followed the lead of the Latin American Bishops by declaring that: "The salvation which Jesus Christ has brought includes the liberation of people from oppression," and that "action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world is a *constitutive* dimension of the preaching of the gospel or, in other words, of the Church's mission for the redemption of

¹⁹ Robert McAfee Brown, *Gustavo Gutiérrez* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1980), p. 46.

the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation."

The radical commitment to look upon the world from the viewpoint of the victims of social injustice was formally adopted by the Latin American Bishop's Conference convened in Puebla, Mexico in 1979. This teaching was termed *the preferential option for the poor*. This option has two dimensions - as Gregory Baum and others have clarified.²⁰ The first dimension has to do with *action*, and refers to a commitment to act in solidarity with the poor and join in their struggle for justice; the second dimension has to do with the method for attaining *knowledge*, and asks that Christians interpret both society and the bible from the perspective of the people at the bottom and in the margin.

This approach acknowledges what a number of sociologists have been saying for some time; namely, that social location necessarily restricts our experience of reality and has, therefore, an *ideological* dimension. Where we stand in society - and who we stand with - conditions both our analysis and our response; or, in other words our moral awareness and *praxis*. This fundamental insight has subsequently altered the way in which the Canadian Churches have sought to gain insight and knowledge of society prior to making ethical pronouncements or teachings.

The 1976 Labour Day Message of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops outlined this new orientation in detail. The bishops present a method of social investigation which follows a series of steps, essentially the same as those practised by many Latin Americans, and endorsed formally by the Latin American Bishops and the Vatican. After discovering the call to justice in a re-reading of Scripture from the point of view of social victims, Canadian Christians are called to engage in praxis which aims at the liberation of society's victims through solidarity and transformative social action. The steps in this process as spelled out by the Bishops are:

²⁰ Baum speaks of the two dimensions of the *option for the poor* as 'epistemological bias and commitment of solidarity' in "Political Theology in Conflict," *The Ecumenist*, 22:6, 1984, p. 85; and as a praxis which 'affects how reality is perceived,' in Baum and Cameron, *Ethics and Economics* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1984), p. 41-42.

- a) *be present with and listen to the experiences of the poor, the marginalized and oppressed within Canada;*
- b) *develop a critical analysis of the economic, political and social structures that cause human suffering;*
- c) *make judgments in the light of the Gospel principles concerning social values and priorities;*
- d) *stimulate creative thought and action regarding alternative models for social and economic development; and finally;*
- e) *act in solidarity with popular groups in their struggles to transform society.*

This method marks a significant departure from simply attempting to promote the personal moral conversion of each individual. This formerly dominant view mistakenly believed that a significant degree of personal moral transformation would automatically overcome structural injustice and social evil. The official teaching of the Churches now proclaims that the social order will not be gradually reformed through the cumulative effects of personal virtue, now that the Children of God have become aware that evil can take a structural form, wherein moral individuals can contribute to social evil through ideological blindness and social ignorance. The Churches now insist that *social analysis* must precede *value analysis*.

As a result, the focus of the social teaching of the Canadian Churches has recently been on providing a structural analysis of the injustice and inequality produced by the institutional structures within society. A similar trend has occurred in all the major churches, and has given rise to interchurch committees and official church involvement in broad-based social coalitions aimed at identifying, understanding and overcoming social injustices of all kinds.

4.2 The Importance of Social Location in Critical Sociology

There is a strong tradition *within* sociology which recognizes the importance of choosing an appropriate social location from which to obtain social knowledge. Like

critical and liberation theologians, critical sociologists reject the idea that a value-free reading of society is possible. They rely on emancipatory goals to guide their social analysis. Not all sociologists define these emancipatory goals in exactly the same way. It is possible to detect different underlying metaphysics or political philosophies in the particular goals which different sociologists chose. All agree on the central importance of *social location* for sociology and sociological methods.

A number of prominent sociologists have - for different reasons - struggled with the function of *social location* and *ideology* in research methods. They recognize that a degree of ideological distortion (due to psychical and geographical limits) is inevitable, some sociologists seek to counteract these restrictions, and foster a more credible reading of society, less tainted with ideological bias. They seek a *preferred* social location that would justify the knowledge claims of sociological research. A leading proponent of the sociology of knowledge stream was Karl Mannheim.

Mannheim sought to deal systematically with the problems of social location and methods of inquiry within sociological research. As Derek L. Phillips puts it, Mannheim was, "... sensitive to the influence of people's social positions on what they can perceive, what they define and accept as knowledge and truth, as well as their views, opinions, goals, and values."²¹ He fully acknowledged that the social location of sociologists affected the knowledge claims they put forth. For Mannheim, all knowledge (except knowledge obtained through logic, mathematics and natural science) is knowledge only in relation to some observer standpoint. He believed that the natural sciences were immune from the influence of social factors, however, being "... largely detached from the historical-social perspective of the investigator."²²

How did Mannheim justify his own knowledge claims while holding that all knowledge claims were ideologically-distorted from historical and social location

²¹ Derek L. Phillips, *Epistemology and the Sociology of Knowledge: The Contributions of Mannheim, Mills, and Merton*, p. 67.

²² Thomas Kuhn's work, *The structure of Scientific Revolutions* shows the extent to which the natural and biological sciences are fully social activities and, therefore, are also always subject to the influence of ideological factors and dominant cultural paradigms which are biased and restricting.

determinants? As Mary Hesse states in *Theory and Value in the Social Sciences*:

*He (Mannheim) then asks: Which standpoint is optimum for establishing truth? and goes on to reject the two classical Marxist answers - the Proletariat, and the class-self-conscious Party subsection of the Proletariat - and to put forward the intelligentsia, who, he claims, are powerless and interest-free, and understand the sociology of knowledge.*²³

Not everyone would agree with Hesse that Mannheim made the claim that the so-called *free-floating intelligentsia* were powerless and interest-free; however, it is true that he did perceive the intelligentsia working within academic institutions as the group best disposed to recognize and *neutralize* the ideological distortions resulting from situational determinants.

Thomas Kuhn's contribution to the debate over the influence of values and world views on natural and social science calls into question Mannheim's choice of the university as the preferred social location for testing social knowledge claims. The university can restrict and seriously hamper social engagement, encouraging a division between public and private, concrete and abstract, and usually, urban and rural. Alvin Gouldner explains why a sociologist is not simply *doing a job* in some professional sense, but is also a citizen of society responsible for what he or she thinks and does as a sociologist. Resisting any strict *role* differentiation, Gouldner makes the following claim:

*The sociologist must be "reflexive-self-aware" of his [her] own place and his [her] own standpoint - and must accept his [her] involvement in it in a manner that requires a new praxis - a new lifestyle in which there is no ultimate division as sociologist from himself [herself] as citizen.*²⁴

It is important to extend the notion of *sociological praxis* (here meaning the *praxis* of the sociologist) to include a more detailed examination of the methods used to obtain knowledge, keeping in mind that some type of *praxis* is inevitable, due to the dialectical process between the sociologist and social reality under investigation.

C. Wright Mills is a sociologist sensitive to the need for appropriate research methods relative to social location. His description of the techniques he employed to

²³ Mary Hesse, "Theory and Value in the Social Sciences," found in *Action and Interpretation*, Christopher Hookway and Philip Pettit, eds., (London: England: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 11.

²⁴ Mary Hesse, "Theory and Value in the Social Sciences," p. 12.

obtain reliable social knowledge of the American elite is insightful:

I also began to use my observations and daily experiences. I thought first of experiences I had had which bore upon elite problems, and then I went and talked with those who, I thought, might have experienced or considered the issues. As a matter of fact, I now began to alter the character of my routine so as to include in it 1) people who were among those whom I wanted to study, 2) people in close contact with them, and 3) people interested in them in some professional way.²⁵

This business of altering one's daily routine to include some degree of identification with the people who are the subject of concern and study would seem to force the sociologist out of the university setting. This prevalent trend towards some form of *participant observation* is well established in current sociological research.

Some argue that sociologists must participate in social life in order to obtain knowledge because of a growing distrust of *professionals* among citizens. Sociologists can not be sure that information they solicit from citizens in surveys and questionnaires is accurate. To compensate for the possible dishonesty of the *subjects*, sociologists sometimes disguise their true identity as professional researchers while *out in the field*:

In covert inquiry the scientist disguises himself [herself] as a citizen and interacts with others as if he [she] were merely one like themselves. They do not know at the time, and indeed may never know that he [she] is studying them. This technique has been used where the scientist seeks information which he [she] believes the citizens would wish to keep secret from an outsider but which they may be willing to impart to a new comer who identifies himself [herself] with them.²⁶

Others deliberately deceive individuals in order to either protect their identity as researchers, or to convince the *subject* of something which is simply not true, in order to gauge the person's response.²⁷ Other sociologists believe there is a way to overcome this

²⁵ C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*, (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 201.

²⁶ J. A. Barnes, *The Ethics of Inquiry in Social Science*, (Delhi, India: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 11.

²⁷ Social Psychologists are notorious for using this technique in controlled laboratory experiments. Solomon Asch's famous experiment to determine the strength of pressures towards conformity is a good case in point. College students were told to judge the length of lines appearing on a card. In fact only one student was free to choose; the others were confederates in the experiment, and had been instructed to give wrong answers. Stanley Milgram conducted experiments to determine what circumstances would lead individuals to excuse themselves for acting cruelly, by saying that they had only *acted under orders*. To investigate this topic humanely, Milgram had to mislead volunteers into thinking that their actions were cruel, when in fact they were harmless. These studies will be examined more carefully in a study of conformity in chapter six.

dilemma preferable to that of covert research - which, they argue, invariably leads to a growing distrust of sociologists among citizens. Citizens, they suggest, need to be convinced that their honest cooperation will be in some way rewarded. This should not be difficult if it can be shown that the research aims to address legitimate human needs and overcome injustices.

Another response to the problem of professional sociologists obtaining honest and correct knowledge from social citizens can be found in the tradition of *Ethnomethodology*, best represented by Harold Garfinkel and Erving Goffman. What is Ethnomethodology? Ethnomethodology is primarily a reaction against the *professional* imposition of rationality upon individuals to serve as an interpretive device; that is, setting up controls and studying people within predefined parameters and objectives. Ethnomethodologists believe that sociologists should accept the individual's construction of reality as legitimate in its own right. Graham Kinloch contrasts Garfinkel's view with the approach of ethnomethodology:

Social scientists in particular make human beings out to be "judgmental dopes," attempt to "remedy" their behaviour through empirical and theoretical devices, and search for the "invariant" and "calculable" in their research. In contrast, ethnomethodology takes the individual's "practical reasoning" seriously, viewing him or her as a competent methodologist/practitioner to begin with, refusing to evaluate or attempt to correct the person's "common sense" interpretation of everyday life.²⁸

Kinloch believes that a major problem for ethnomethodologists is the manner in which sociologists interfere with everyday common sense by evaluating it subjectively, and transforming it into objective constructs for their own use to legitimate their theories. Ethnomethodologists believe that by ignoring the interpretive processes of groups within society, and by imposing formal evaluative structures on social reality, sociologists are effectively prevented from gaining insight into those very processes. One can appreciate the efforts of ethnomethodologists to overcome certain problems inherent in professional interpretive methods, with their broadened understanding of the dynamics and depth of human action and lived experience.

²⁸ Graham C. Kinloch, *Ideology and Contemporary Sociological Theory*, p. 139.

Criticisms have also been launched against mainstream sociology by a school of thought in American sociology known as *radical sociology*. This critical view focusses on the discipline, practice, and social location of professional sociologists. In the preface to the book *Radical Sociology: An Introduction*, editor David Horowitz notes,

*... the indictment of the sociological establishment began with the charge that its models, which pictured modern American society as basically harmonious, pluralist, and post-"ideological" were hopelessly distant from the American reality and were irrelevant to America's tensions and conflicts. This indictment was quickly extended by the realization that the models and techniques which sociologists were developing (often on lucrative government and corporation contracts) were being placed in the service of the ruling powers of the social status quo, and that they were themselves integral parts of the system of social oppression and institutional aggression which the radicals condemned.*²⁹

The need to obtain funding to do research can pose serious living and moral problems for sociologists committed to social emancipation. Sociologists must make a living from their trade, and with skill and university degrees largely for sale in the marketplace, the old adage, *he who pays the piper calls the tune*, is a fundamental influence to be reckoned with. Hired social researchers may find that the boundaries and goals assigned to them for their research will make an emancipatory approach nearly impossible. Foss reports that in the United States, in 1966, \$3.2 billion were spent on basic research, while \$18.9 billion were spent on applied research and development, adding that. "... there seems even now to be an increase in the number of research grants that are requested or solicited by granting agencies (as opposed to those submitted unsolicited by sociologists)."³⁰ This suggests that sociologists may not have much say about the type of research they do because of where they obtain funding to do research.

The extent to which sociologists must compromise their own values and research interests in order to obtain funding, or a salary, depends, according to J. A. Barnes, on the extent to which financial and political power is concentrated within society, which, in most societies in today's world, is extreme:

²⁹ David Horowitz, ed., *Radical Sociology: An Introduction* (New York, N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 1.

³⁰ Foss, *The Value Controversy in Sociology*, p. 25.

The social scientist is no longer the elite gentleman of private means but is a propertyless professional dependent on support from a sponsor. If a private foundation or independent minded University can support him [her], he [she] may be able to negotiate terms so that he [she] can fulfil his [her] obligations to the citizens he [she] studies as well as to his [her] sponsor. The less pluralist the society he [she] works in, the harder it is for him [her] to protect the interests of the citizens as well as to defend his [her] own interests.³¹

The danger of impotence and co-optation is, however, only one aspect of the radical sociologist's critique of professional sociology. Radical sociologists have also identified a limited *field of vision* and restricted *social location* to be the primary causes for the most serious ideological biases and distortions in sociology. As Robert Snyder notes in his article, *Knowledge, Power and the University*, ". . . it is the structure of the academic system and its dependence upon the economic-political system that locks the academic into his narrow field of specialty and prevents any venturing into the area of social criticism."³²

Radical sociologist, Martin Nicolaus, believes sociologists must break their ties with the status quo and serve the interests of social underdogs. According to Nicolaus, this requires more than a shift in one's *allegiance*. Unless sociologists shift their *location*, they will be unable to see the truth about society, on account of their lack of concrete engagement in the social world of which they speak, write, theorize, and teach. Nicolaus had this to say to a gathering of American sociologists:

It all depends on where you look from, where you stand. . . . If you will look at the social world through the eyes of your subject population (and if you will endow those eyes with the same degree of clearheadedness you profess to encourage among yourselves), then you will get a different conception of the social science to which you are devoted.³³

The old saying, *out of sight, out of mind*, is an appropriate way to describe this view. Such blindness results in part from the restrictive social location of sociologists. As

³¹ J. A. Barnes, *The Ethics of Inquiry in Social Science*, p. 55.

³² Robert G. Snyder, "Knowledge, Power and the University," Gunter W. Remmling ed., *Towards the Sociology of Knowledge: Origin and Development of a Sociological Thought Style* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 344.

³³ Horowitz, David, ed., *Radical Sociology: An Introduction*, p. 1-2. Emphasis mine.

Nicolaus puts it, *it all depends on where you look from, where you stand*. This is more than a caution against the well-documented tendency among professional American sociologists to endorse Parsonian functionalism, and to focus their research efforts on *micro*-level issues; more importantly, it is a call to become aware of the sociological and psychological factors which impact on moral awareness and action. It is also an invitation to fellow sociologists to do responsible social research aimed at portraying the needs of people honestly. Radical sociologists acknowledge that the possibility of doing good sociology is not tied irrevocably to contemporary academic institutions, which is a startling enough conclusion given the fact that, ". . . in a national survey of sociological doctorates (received from 1934 to 1976), Wilkinson (1979) found that 85.7% of sociologists were in academic settings."³⁴

Perhaps the greatest danger from doing sociological research solely within the confines of a restricted social setting lies not so much with the conscious act of serving *group* or *status quo* interests, but rather, of falling prey to the unwanted consequences of pure unadulterated ignorance. Howard Becker believes this more aptly describes the modern situation: "Many failures in sociological research result from simple ignorance, having little to do with either ideological bias or utopian fantasy."³⁵ The basis for much ignorance seems explainable as many seemingly incidental consequences of a person's associations and daily routine as much as from the force of personal belief and values.

Critical sociologists agree that an ongoing critical analysis of sociological research undertaken in restricted locations is absolutely essential. Such an analysis ". . . entails exposing the myths by which the professor who makes the analysis supports his [her] own privileged position of tenure and income,"³⁶ and examines the limitations in the methods of the sociologist.

³⁴ Janet Bokermeier and Keith Carter, "Ethics in Sociological Practice: A survey of Sociologists," *Sociological Practice*, Vol. 3, no. 2, Spring, 1980), p. 137.

³⁵ Howard Becker and I. L. Horowitz, "Radical Politics in Sociological Research: Observations on Methodology and Ideology," *American Journal of Sociology*, (Vol. 78, July, 1972), p. 51.

³⁶ Becker, "Radical Politics in Sociological Research," p. 55.

There is a recent and interesting development in social science research which signals efforts to initiate a dialogue between two major *antithetical* trends within sociology. Along with an increased interest in policy analysis, with a focus on *applied* social science research and social intervention, there is also a growing interest among many social scientists in *interpretative* social science, drawing on such diverse sources as phenomenology, analytic philosophy of action, historiography, and literary criticism.

The interpretive approach has been criticized for its failure to provide explanations of social change with hard social data obtained from an analysis of structural forces. Its focus has been on the *experiences* of people within society, and tries " . . . to enable us to see events through the eyes of those who lived in and through them."³⁷ Many see only the *conservative* political implications of the interpretative approach, and fail to appreciate the serious attempt the interpretive approach makes to find a replacement for positivistic methods and rigid, analytical research techniques.

Sociologists using *interpretative* methods struggle with epistemological problems related to the task of *obtaining* reliable social knowledge, while sociologists who follow the *policy analysis* approach tend to focus attention on *structural* analysis, and the *use* of social knowledge. Policy analysts recognize the importance of using social knowledge to address *macro* problems in society, and in this respect, accept that values inevitably enter into the decisions affecting the application of social science research; however, vast numbers of social scientists engaged in research with problem-solving applications in mind continue to cling to mainstream sociological methods in the tradition of Positivism, which displaces or corrupts an emancipatory intention by blinding the researcher to the distortions and unexamined aspects of the people, structures and themes under investigation.

Sociologists from both the *interpretative* and *policy* perspectives have much to gain from mutual dialogue. In the words of Daniel Callahan and Bruce Jennings,

³⁷ Daniel Callahan and Bruce Jennings, *Ethics, The Social Sciences, and Policy Analysis*, p. 11.

There is nothing inherent in the potential uses and purposes of policy analysis that makes only social scientific inquiry in the positivist mode pertinent to it; in fact, there are good reasons for thinking that the interpretative approach is better suited to the goals of policy analysis than are the more mainstream, positivistic approaches. . . and there is nothing inherent in the type of knowledge offered by interpretive social science that limits it to purely academic or pedagogical settings or undermines its relevance to the broader political arena in which public policy is formulated, debated, and assessed.³⁸

An exciting and very promising dialogue appears underway. Perhaps a synthesis of the best within these two traditions will be the fruit of the growing awareness of their interdependence. Such a merger would aim to integrate experiential knowledge-of-acquaintance with practical theoretical theories and models for alternative social change.

The fact that obtaining and using social knowledge is essentially the task of ethics, the overlap between these disciplines is transforming the work of sociologists from that of a professional public *profession*, more or less separated from one's personal and private social life, to a life *praxis* engaging the sociologist in the dynamic of social change, aligned with the interests of those needing their political rights and economic needs fulfilled. The political consequences of these developments and discussions regarding social research methods are sure to be significant, with repercussions for the lifestyle and praxis of sociologists and various movements within society. The quality of outcome will - as Janet Bokermeier concludes from her survey of sociologists with Ph.D's in the field - depend on the ethical choices made by individuals:

If sociologists are to make a lasting, beneficial contribution to social action and social policy and, at the same time, gain secure employment, the discipline of sociology should confront the issues of what is applied sociology, what are the educational and employment needs of applied sociologists and what ethical problems are they facing.³⁹

With the massive technology transfer from public institutions to the private sector now underway in many industrialized nations, the need to *gain secure employment* will continue to exert increasing pressure on social scientists to sell their research labour to transnational corporations, rapidly expanding their control over technologies and being

³⁸ Daniel Callahan and Bruce Jennings, *Ethics, The Social Sciences, and Policy Analysis*, p. 10.

³⁹ Janet Bokermeier and Keith Carter, "Ethics in Sociological Practice: A Survey of Sociologists," p. 130.

assisted by national legislation, and international patent agreements extending corporate control over research techniques and new discoveries.⁴⁰

What new forms will the work and social engagement of sociologists committed to social emancipation take in the future? Will universities continue to be the preferred social location? Will current public-funding cutbacks to research and development (coupled with privatization and technology transfers) transform sociologists into a class of hired *technocrats*, collecting information for business? Will sociologists find themselves commuting between social situations, university settings, and government policy boards? Will others simply attach themselves to research institutes on the political left? Or identify with emancipatory movements committed to religious and/or social values and goals which they share? These speculations recognize the many options open to trained sociologists. Sociologists must make responsible decisions based on the values and principles they cherish, and the social pressures and coercive conditions they face as they examine the present social situation and praxis of their life and work.

An identification with the poor and the oppressed in an engaged and committed lifestyle enhances and gives substantive value to social research. Investigating and documenting injustices to create support for positive social change can be deeply rewarding, and greatly appreciated by those who benefit from the rewards of effective social knowledge and positive social change. The shared conclusion of both the Canadian Churches and secular emancipatory social analysts is that some form of participation and/or engaged identification with disadvantaged citizens and groups within society is a moral imperative.

⁴⁰ For a critical assessment of recent (and proposed) changes to national patent legislation and patent provisions of various trade agreements, including an assessment of the social and economic costs of legislation extending patent protection to Pharmaceuticals in Canada, read "Intellectual Property Rights in NAFTA: Implications for Health Care and Industrial Policy in Ontario, by the Ecumenical Coalition for Economic Justice, Toronto, Ontario, 1993.

5. Social Ignorance and the Structural Dynamics of Education

Having examined the central roles that values and investigative techniques and methods play in the *acquisition* of social knowledge - pointing out how blindness to the suffering of victims of social injustice can result from a reading of society which excludes victims from one's field of vision - the focus now shifts to the *dissemination* of social knowledge within society. How do value considerations enter into an analysis of both the *content* and *structures* of public education?⁴¹

An examination of the social psychological dynamics generated by the *structures* of institutionalized education reveals how formal education may increase the degree of social information, while discouraging human agency, and stifling the development of moral and political awareness. No treatment of the dynamics of social ignorance as ideology would be adequate which failed to point out how established teaching *methods* and the *structures* of public education can teach students to become and remain socially ignorant.

5.1 Learning Ignorance: Paulo Freire and the Critique of Education

Paulo Freire has clarified the essential aspects of the social psychological dynamics of educational institutions in his now famous *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.⁴² He explains how the reproduction of ideology in society is precipitated by structures of public education which promote the *banking concept of education*:

⁴¹ Canadian textbooks are riddled with distortions and stereotypes, partial and misleading social explanations, or falsehoods. Numerous recent works have examined these distortions and falsehoods (especially those which promote racism and sexism) and are immensely illuminating: See for example, Jane Gaskell et al., *Claiming an Education: Feminism and Canadian Schools* (Toronto: Our Schools/Our Selves, 1989); Susan Wismer, *Women's Education and Training in Canada* (Toronto: Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women, 1988); G.S. Tomkins, *A Common Countenance: Stability and Change in the Canadian Curriculum* (Toronto: Prentice-Hall, 1986).

⁴² Freire has published numerous works since *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* including *Education for Critical Consciousness* (New York: Seabury Press, 1973), and *The Politics of Education* (South Hadley, Mass.: Bergin and Garvey, 1985).

In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable, upon those whom they consider to know nothing. Projecting an absolute ignorance onto others, a characteristic of the ideology of oppression, negates education and knowledge as a process of inquiry.⁴³

Freire's critique of the banking style of education makes the distinction between learning as a process of *receiving information*, and learning as a process of *critical inquiry*. The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness needed for an active engagement in the world as transformers and builders of a better world. The more completely students accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is, and conform to the fragmented view of reality deposited in them, the very same view mirrored in the dependent and conformist structures of unjust society.

An institutionalized educational process usually promotes a politically-conservative social philosophy by presenting the world as a *static* rather than *dynamic* reality. Such a *reification* of reality tends to quash human agency, distancing children from reality and encouraging them to *objectify* reality, which is then expressed as a fragmented and dualistic view of the world in adult life:

Implicit in the banking concept is the assumption of a dichotomy between man and the world: man is merely "in" the world, not "with" the world or with others; man is spectator, not re-creator. In this view, man is not a conscious being; he [she] is rather the possessor of "a" consciousness: an empty "mind" passively open to the reception of deposits of reality from the world outside.⁴⁴

The educator essentially plays a regulating role, conditioning the way the world enters the minds of students within an operating - although often neither conscious nor explicit - understanding of the human mind as a passive *receptor of information*. Teachers may not realize that they are teaching students to reinforce the dominant cultural beliefs and values by the very techniques, gestures and structural methods of communication and teaching that they use. As Freire points out, many teachers are blind to *falsehoods* in education

⁴³ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 58.

⁴⁴ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 62.

curricula, as well as *distortions* in the structures of the system which produce ignorance: "Those who use the banking approach, knowingly or unknowingly (for there are innumerable well-intentioned bank-clerk teachers who do not realize that they are serving only to dehumanize), fail to perceive that the deposits themselves contain contradictions about reality."⁴⁵ Contradictions about reality which are deposited in students remain hidden within consciousness to the extent that students accept what they are told, without assessing the validity of what is taught. The world is the world. History is history. If nothing is questioned, information mistakingly viewed as knowledge becomes the foundation for social ignorance. With the banking approach to education (Freire has more recently used a slightly different analogy, *the nutrition approach* [eat this. . . it's good for you]) students are implicitly taught that relating to the world means *adjusting to the world*, not *acting upon and transforming* the world. Years of passive experience in the education system deforms the naturally inquisitive human mind. Educational methods which elicit a critical awareness of the world, and a creative response to social reality, do not hide from social contradictions. . . they seek them out:

Whereas banking education anaesthetizes and inhibits creative power, problem-posing education involves a constant unveiling of reality. The former attempts to maintain the "submersion" of consciousness; the latter strives for the "emergence" of consciousness and "critical intervention" in reality.⁴⁶

In several of his more recent works, Freire speaks of reading the *world*, and reading the *word*, in a discussion of critical interpretation and engaged activity. The important insight he offers is that reading the *world* precedes a reading of the *word*. As Bernard Lonergan would express it, experiential knowledge *precedes* fully human knowing in the dialectic of knowing. In the banking approach to education, this dialogue between *world* and *word* is absent. Students are not encouraged to question, but to accept.

⁴⁵ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 61.

⁴⁶ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 68.

In his critique, *Educating Citizens: A Democratic Socialist Agenda for Canadian Education*, Ken Osborne believes that passive education (in the sense defined by Freire) defines both the *content* of curricula, and the *methods* whereby curricula are communicated to students within Canadian schools. The particular emphasis has been on imbuing students with a sense of patriotism and civic duty by presenting a favourable and largely *static* image of Canadian society. Osborne calls for an approach which recognizes the dynamic nature of individuals and society:

In the first place, the schools must make it possible for students to gain the knowledge, skills and dispositions that will make it possible to exercise their rights of participation and to acquire them when they are withheld or denied. This means treating citizenship not as something static but as a contested, dynamic and ever-changing right which must be struggled for and exercised if it is to be realized.⁴⁷

Without entering into a discussion of the suggestions and curricula changes proposed by Osborne, it is possible to obtain a clear sense of what those changes entail by reflecting on his important observation that:

. . . the curriculum must be organized to show students the world as it is, not a sanitized or ideologically bound view of it; to show them also how it might be, by giving them a sense of alternatives; and to give them the skills that will help to change it.⁴⁸

The banking method of educating is a major impediment to the transformation of individuals and society. It presents the world as an already completed entity, rather than a project in the works. Students are encouraged to find their *niche* in life (and niche market) and fill a functional role in the economy. They are told in a thousand different messages that things will go much better for them if they do not raise too many troublesome questions, or not to challenge authority. Social-ills and injustices are accepted as permanent facts of life in an imperfect world, or worse still, the unfortunate consequences of *immoral*, *lazy*, or *stupid* individuals. Structures are given undue respect, viewed as contributing only to harmony and order. If something is wrong with society, someone - or some group - often gets the blame.

⁴⁷ Ken Osborne, *Educating Citizens: A Democratic Socialist Agenda for Canadian Education* (Toronto: Our Schools/Our Selves Education Foundation, 1988) p. 4.

⁴⁸ Ken Osborne, *Educating Citizens*, p. 5.

5.2 Education for Creative Transformation

Democratic governments have traditionally ensured that policy protected public schools from undue influence from outside interests or financial pressure. More recently, public schools are having to adapt themselves to market influences and the withdrawal of government support. The private sector has been willing to compensate for government's diminished role, but at a price. In their book, *Class Conflict: The Assault on Canada's Schools*, Maude Barlow and Heather-Jane Robertson provide countless examples of how schools in the United States and Canada are undergoing change under these new conditions. They offer as one example of the impact of alliances between schools and corporations the example of schools using teaching materials with a coloured photograph of a *Big Mac* hamburger to explain to children the four basic food groups required for healthy living.⁴⁹ The transformation of education under such circumstances prompts consideration of the underlying patterns of negative dependency which corrupt democracy.

Authentic liberation through educational institutions seems less likely with the current drive to restructure education and curricula to meet the highly technological needs of an advanced, deregulated, and very competitive capitalist economy. The thrust is now on developing *technical skills* in students, not to teach them how to think critically. *Valuable* knowledge is being defined as knowledge that helps corporations increase their profitability; the task of the educational system is becoming transformed into one of equipping individuals with those specialized skills marketable in a deregulated global economy. Despite the fact that critical inquiry is still evident within the educational institutions in society, avenues within the dominant institutions for acquiring and maintaining transformative knowledge are diminishing. In such a situation, even critical pedagogy gets swallowed up in theory, failing to lead people to realize those ideas and plans in the real world.

⁴⁹ Maude Barlow and Heather Jane-Robertson, *Class Conflict: The Assault on Canada's Schools*, (Toronto, On; Key-Porter, 1994).

Summary

The concepts and insights of critical thinkers like Freire and Osborne may seem to be widely-shared. Some believe such critical ideas actually serve to undermine their own stated aims by presenting liberating options in a purely theoretical mode, disconnected from the cultural and economic reality. In their article, *Popular Educational Politics*, Philip Wexler, Rebecca Martusewicz, and June Kern write that: "At certain historical times, theories which oppose a prevailing social regime unwittingly work on its behalf. The discourse of Critical Pedagogy displays a tendency toward such incorporation."⁵⁰ They hold that, "Critical consciousness in our own historical time can be seen to rise from deep levels of personal and social struggle unique to the conditions and situations within which we live. To be authentic, demands for change must be heard in voices emanating from subjective life, and from collective action and movements."⁵¹ Critical pedagogy seldom carries such a voice: "However much social critics have envisioned and desired a socially emancipatory pedagogy, the cultural forms in which that desire has been expressed reveal that its fearsome character is lodged safely in abstract language and esoteric knowledge."⁵² The banking concept must be rejected, adopting in its place a concept of human beings as self-reflexive and morally responsible citizens capable of forging a new and better society for the future: "Authentic liberation - the process of humanization - is not another deposit to be made in human beings. Liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of human beings upon their world in order to transform it."⁵³ This task of transformation appears more formidable than ever. Political and social institutions are now adapting rapidly to the global economy. This calls for an investigation into the structural patterns of negative dependency which deaden awareness and subvert the logical order of society, including control over schools and curricula.

⁵⁰ Philip Wexler, Rebecca Martusewicz and June Kern, "Popular Education Politics," in David W. Livingstone & Contributors, *Critical Pedagogy and Cultural Power* (Toronto, On.; Garamond Press, 1987) p. 227.

⁵¹ Philip Wexler et. al. "Popular Educational Politics," p. 228-9.

⁵² Philip Wexler et. al. "Popular Educational Politics," p. 229.

⁵³ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 66.

Chapter Five

Moral Awareness and the Dynamics Of Dependency

The social psychological dynamics of *negative* dependency prevent the dynamic construction of moral awareness, or deaden moral awareness present in human consciousness. It is important to qualify the concept *negative* dependency; not all situations of dependency are morally reprehensible or even undesirable, although such an understanding of the word seems dominant in Western culture. An imbalance of power in human relationships is often unavoidable, and can be quite healthy and mutually beneficial. In cases of *legitimate* authority (i.e., a parent and a new born baby), dependency is a natural and meaningful way for human beings to express love and care for one another in the dynamic context of family and community life. Those individuals who hold positions of authority within relationships and social arrangements in social democracies are morally obligated to use their power to serve others and grow in selfless love and compassion for those under their influence and care. Obviously, the moral ideal can be very distant from the political, community and family realities. The social psychological language describing negative dependency speaks of similar structures and dynamics in social relations and relationships characterized by unequal power sharing, when power should be shared equally.

Unequal relationships which foster dehumanization and social deformation are a pervasive fact of contemporary social life. Battered individuals in relationships, child abuse, crime, exploitation of workers, the relationship between poor nations and the World Bank; one could fill pages with frightening statistics and trends of social relations which foster inequity, human deformation, abuse, injustice, and economic exclusion.

Pleas for help from the poor majority are heard in government committee, after committee, after task force. Meanwhile, thanks to the political deceit in the so-called new openness of the government (what is euphemistically called *political inclusion*), the Canadian federal government has thrown a bureaucratic and legislative shroud of secrecy

around itself, taking unilateral action expressly against the will of the majority in clear attacks on cooperative social institutions established as a result of populist movements of organization in campaigns against economic exploitation.¹

With the existence of so many types of human arrangements where there is not an equal sharing of power between the parties, with some being predominantly positive and healthy, and others negative and destructive, how are we to discern *illegitimate* from *legitimate* authority in dependency relationships?

A lifestyle marked by the psychological, physical, emotional and spiritual consequences of negative dependencies is a life scarred with suffering, anxiety and loneliness. These sufferings are inflicted on people by forces that can be named. The practical ethical task is to discover ways and means whereby the debilitating patterns of personal, interpersonal and economic and political dependency can be defined, concretely identified, and overcome, leaving individuals free to pursue a just and enriching way of life

A theoretical study can only point to the possibilities for action in the concrete world. But theories themselves must rely on a concrete social analysis of the world to inspire the creation of a new awareness capable of grasping the essential aspects and dynamics in society. From that analysis it is possible to glimpse the basic social psychological make-up of negative dependency. This awareness, in turn, empowers us to evaluate other situations, by providing a particular framework for understanding the basic rules and principles which define negative patterns of dependency. Only with such a

¹ A recent example was the decision by the 1993 Conservative government to take away unilaterally grain farmer's right to single-desk sell barley into the United States through the Canadian Wheat Board (CWB), while at the same time opening the border to American barley, even though there was with no obligation to do so under terms of the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement. The Saskatchewan Wheat Pool and Prairie Pools Inc. launched a court challenge against the attack on the CWB, arguing that to make such a fundamental change through an Order in Council while denying farmers a vote on the change is illegal. Members of the National Farmers Union organized information pickets in defence of the Canadian Wheat Board July 7, 8, 9, 1993, as well as demonstrations at four Canada-U.S. border locations in the three Western grain provinces with farmers and farm organization leaders from the United States. The federal decision not only represented an attack on farmers' right to orderly marketing (a right long-protected by successive governments) it was also an attack on democracy. Although the newly-elected Liberal Prime Minister has committed himself to giving farmers a plebiscite to decide such fundamental questions, the Alberta provincial government has launched a court challenge to the "constitutionality" of single-desk selling on the basis that it denies individual marketing freedom.

theoretical model is it possible to acquire sufficient insight into the phenomenon to make ethical judgments upon which to base further action. This work requires that a central aspect of one's master life story be to guide thinking and action to foster positive human and social development thereby encouraging a collective project of community building.

An ethical investigation of the negative dynamics of dependency must discern the factors which distinguish morally *valid* and morally *reprehensible* situations of dependency. The normative moral keys with which to base a theoretical moral judgment of negative dependency are the particular tell-tale signs of inequality and injustice which can always be found in different forms of negative social relations, and interpersonal relationships, where the reciprocating parties do not: (a) derive equal enjoyment and benefits from the relationship; (b) recognize and respect the political and human rights and freedoms of each other; (c) share equally the material goods commonly produced; and (d) make decisions democratically in a process of mutual dialogue and consensual agreement. Wherever these conditions are absent in interpersonal or economic and political relationships, there will be corresponding distortions in the social psychological dynamics, with those distortions forming the essential structure of negative dependency. The foundation of a theory of dependency can be found in how prominent theories of the self have defined dependency.²

1. Negative Dependency in Prominent Theories of the Self

What may be an injustice to one person may be regarded as a moral and reasonable thing to do by others - depending on whether one regards human beings as creatures either born to *compete* or *cooperate* with one another - moral perspective always depends on a prior understanding or view of the human condition. The ability to discern the negative

² Hegel and Freud are being examined here only indirectly; that is, through the eyes of interpreters. My interest is, in fact, with the interpreters, and their interpretations, to garner the important insights those comments often reveal. These insights often come in the form of claims against both Hegel and Freud, pointing out something which, it is felt, these intellectual giants ignored or misunderstood. The integrity of such claims against Freud and Hegel is not assumed, however, I leave matters regarding the accuracy of such interpretations of Hegel and Freud to the experts to decide.

dynamics of dependency will likewise depend on what theory of the self we are using as a guide. It will be helpful to examine what theorists have said concerning the psychology and politics of human development - in terms of the fundamental conflict within humans both *to differentiate themselves from others*, and *to be dependent on others* - and to note what they have said concerning the consequences of negative dependency on consciousness and moral awareness .

1.1 G.W.F. Hegel: A Phenomenological Reading of Dependency

Virtually every author from any discipline in the human sciences who discusses dependency cites Hegel's now-famous *master and slave* dialectic. Most people have never read Hegel, but they know what the words *master and slave* essentially mean: the phrase has become entrenched in Western culture as *symbolic* of negative dependency. What exactly Hegel intended others to understand from his discussions may not be what people see in his work. Few regard the *master and slave* dialectic as a theory for the development of *Geist* (human spirit); the tendency is to politicize the dialectic. Richard Bernstein notes ,

We must be careful, however, not to read this passage [Lordship and Bondage] from an exclusively social point of view, for the phenomenology is a study of the stages of the development of 'Geist'[spirit], and "Lordship and Bondage" is only one brief moment in the realization of 'Geist'. As the subsequent sections in the Phenomenology ("Stoicism," "Scepticism," and "Unhappy Consciousness") show, the dialect of master and slave is not exclusively a dialect that takes place between different individual self-consciousness or even between classes of men; it repeats itself within a single "Unhappy Consciousness".³

The dialectic of master and slave that takes place in human consciousness reflects where the *self* situates itself, in the act of self-reflection, when considering where it fits on the continuum of *self and other*. The collective images evoked by the phrase master and slave can be viewed as a narrative understanding a person carries around in the mind to help make sense of the world; a *real* social world which may, in fact, be structured by the dynamics of dependency. A person with *unhappy consciousness* - which is the entrapment

³ Richard Bernstein, *Praxis and Action: Contemporary Philosophies of Human Activity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), p. 28.

of the self-reflexive attention in the repetition of the master/slave dialectic in consciousness - sees him or herself within the abstract representation as identifying with either the *master* or the *slave*. So what defines a master and slave relationship?

The master perpetuates the relationship by continually consuming the things that the slave produces. The slave exists for the master; everything the slave is and has is for the master. Controlling the slave gives the master a feeling of being affirmed as an *independent* and politically-autonomous self-consciousness. The master above all needs to be recognized by the slave; humans need to love and to be loved, and to dialogue with others and to be recognized by them. The master may succeed in subjecting the other to the status of slave; however, in the act of subjugation, there is actually a transfer of power from the master to the slave. The master becomes more and more dependent on the slave for survival; although, on the surface, the master looks to be completely in control.

As it turns out, the slave is not unessential at all, but constitutes the essential being of the master. The *master* becomes dependent on the *slave* for recognition, and affirmation, and suffers an increasing degree of personal deformation. The master's dependence on the slave can extend beyond the need for mere *recognition* to an economic dependence on the material goods which the slave produces. Judith Shklar, in her political reading of Hegel, thinks the structure of dependency eventually leaves the master in a state of arrested development:

The master is also deluded in thinking this toiling part of himself inferior because it works. The belief that producing is a less than human activity is wholly erroneous. It condemns the master to arrested development. Contemplation without creation, thought without learning, is pure passivity. As a pure consumer it is the master who becomes an idle 'thing'.⁴

But just as the master comes to realize his dependence on the slave, the slave can suddenly - by reflection on his or her activity of work - become aware of his or her capacity for independence: "... the bondsman feels self-existence to be something external, an objective fact; in fear, self-existence is present within himself; in fashioning the

⁴ Judith N. Shklar, *Freedom and Independence: A Study of the Political Ideas of Hegel's Phenomenology of Mind* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 61.

thing, self-existence comes to be felt explicitly as his own proper being, and he attains the consciousness that he himself exists in its own right and on its own account."⁵

What are we to make of this theoretical dialectic? Caroline Whitbeck believes that Hegel's dialectical philosophy fails to take into account human reciprocity; that the master and slave dialectic portrays a distorted view of human development as excessively *conflictual*, neglecting to talk about the nicer side of human nature and life experience. She accuses Hegel of distorting what *normal* healthy human development entails. She believes his philosophy errs, ". . . by taking the self-other relation to be a master-slave relation,"⁶ founded on the erroneous belief that ". . . the relation of the two self-conscious individuals is such that they prove themselves and each other through a life and death struggle."⁷

1.2 Sigmund Freud: A Psychoanalytic Reading of Dependency

Freud seems to have held the view that dependency is both a *sign* and a *symptom* of infantilism. He apparently believed that the helplessness of the newborn infant provided the initial impetus for lifelong dependencies. Much of his therapeutic work was geared to helping people overcome feelings of helplessness and passivity. Jay and Julian Gurian believe, "He [Freud] perceived the human condition as a continual struggle to break the psychological bonds of parents, repressed fear and subconscious hostilities. In short, a person's neuroses result from the ego's attempt to cope with helplessness."⁸

Here Freud is being interpreted as portraying a theory of human development

⁵ Hegel, G. W. F. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Translated by A. V. Miller. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977 edition) p. 149.

⁶ Caroline Whitbeck, "A Different Reality: Feminist Ontology," found in Carol C. Gould, ed., *Beyond Domination* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman & Allanheld, 1984) p. 69.

⁷ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 113-114.

⁸ Jay P. & Julian M. Gurian, *The Dependency Tendency: Returning to Each Other in America* (New York: University Press of America, 1983).

which entails breaking free from all human ties which restrict personal autonomy. Normal development is seen to occur when the individual avoids negative dependencies, thereby achieving a clearer differentiation from others. This theory, and the models it contains, can easily distort what normal human development should also entail, e.g., mutual support and obligations to one another in family and community.

The implication of the oversimplified view is that if the insect, bird, fish, mammal or human infant at the moment of birth could obtain its own food and protect itself, the infant would not express dependency. Thus, the argument runs, there is no instinct for mutual support and obligation that extends beyond primal survival (and perhaps) sexual needs.⁹

Those writing in this vein insist that in the relational dynamic with family members, the desire for autonomy is accompanied by a corresponding increase in discontinuity and separation. They believe that Freud's excessively *intrapsychic* focus led him to embrace a theoretical explanation for the development of the self which tended to ignore the *intersubjective* dynamics happening in the relationship *between* the mother or father and baby: "The element in dependency which Freud does not conceptualize is reciprocity. . . dependency should function as reciprocal bonding from the moment of conception onward."¹⁰

John Martin Rich believes that by making the overriding human motivator the *wish to fulfil human desires* (the *pleasure principle*) Freud made *repression* and *control* of basic desires a positive mark of human development. In Freud's opinion, the autonomous ideal self - toward which the individual moves to attain maturity - requires the repression of basic human desires. "Freud. . . contends that a substantial measure of repression is necessary to balance man's psychic apparatus, especially id impulses, with the demands of culture. Freud thus employs the concept of 'repression' to regulate the seemingly irreconcilable conflict between individual autonomy and cultural restraint."¹¹

⁹ Gurian, *The Dependency Tendency*, p. 28.

¹⁰ Gurian, *The Dependency Tendency*, p. 17.

¹¹ John Martin Rich et al. *Theories of Moral Development* (Springfield, Illinois: Charles C Thomas, Publisher, 1985), p. 19.

Freud viewed culture as the product of the sublimation or redirection of repressed desire. But such a theory does not encourage a dynamic praxis aimed at personal and social change to bring about the healthy *realization* or *fulfilment* of those same desires. Freud appears to have overlooked that human beings long for equality and freedom, experienced as voluntary exchange between people on the basis of kindness and respect. Mutual recognition cannot be achieved through blind obedience, through constant identification with, and subservience to, other's power, or through repression. It requires direct contact with others; an experience of presence and spirituality. Jessica Benjamin believes that in the search for a balance between *differentiating* from others by asserting one's autonomy and *depending* on others to achieve reciprocal human relationships, Hegel and Freud's bias for *differentiation* produced a distorted conception of self:

... the overvaluing of separation is a strong bias in the theory. This is the result of a conception of the individual as a closed system. Within this closed system, the ego invests objects with his [her] desire and takes in these objects to further his [her] autonomy from them. This conception of the individual cannot explain the confrontation with an independent other as a real condition of development and change. It does not comprehend the simultaneous process of transforming and being transformed by the other.¹²

Many philosophical and psychoanalytic theories of human development tend to emphasize the goal of human *autonomy* over human *relationships*, leaving unexplored the area of inquiry where human beings meet. Writers believe Hegel and Freud wrongly viewed the human condition as too one-sidedly based on the confrontation with an independent *other*; that alone does not constitute the central problem for the development of the self. Benjamin sees a liberal ideology of the autonomous and separate self at the source of this dominant orientation:

Now we can see how Hegel's notion of the conflict between independence and dependence meshes with the psychoanalytic view. Hegel posits a self that has no intrinsic need for the other, but uses the other only as a vehicle for self-certainty. This monadic, self-interested ego is essentially the one posited in classical psychoanalytic theory.¹³

¹² Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988) p. 49.

¹³ Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love*, p. 33.

Freud provided valuable insights into the human condition; there is no need to adopt his entire theory.¹⁴ It is possible to be selective in reading Freud. This is what neo-Freudian's Bruno Bettelheim and Eric Erikson have done. Neither individual embraces the entire Freudian system; however both address important questions raised by Freud, and rely heavily on his techniques of observation.

While imprisoned in Nazi concentration camps at Dachau and Buchenwald, Bettelheim came to question Freud's psychoanalytic system. He later cited his observations of the altruistic behaviour of the prisoners as the reason why he rejected Freud's central theoretical explanations for human motivation and behaviour:

*It just would not do under conditions prevailing in the camps to view courageous, life-endangering actions as an outgrowth of the death instinct, aggression turned against the self, testing the indestructibility of the body, megalomaniac denial of danger, histrionic feeding of one's narcissism or whatever other category the action would have to be viewed from in psychoanalysis.*¹⁵

Bettelheim came to the conclusion from his experience in the camps that Freud gave too little attention to the *normal* and the altruistic in his approach. Freud was almost always concerned with the pathological, with behaviour disorders, negative instincts, pain and suffering. Many of Freud's critics argue that it was his constant association with abnormal human conditions which may explain why his theory of the self made little provision for the dynamics of interdependence and human reciprocity.

¹⁴ Alasdair MacIntyre points to three distinct levels in Freud's psychoanalytic theory: "First of all, Freud drew our attention to hitherto unnoticed types of episodes. He reclassified and redescribed our behaviour. He made us aware of what needed to be explained. Secondly, he suggested a correlation between adult episodes and traits and the passions and actions of the world of early childhood. Thirdly, he produced a theory to explain that correlation; or rather he produced a range of theoretical notions, of which the earlier account of the distribution and transformations of libido and the later trinity of id, superego, and ego are the most important." Alasdair MacIntyre, *Against the Self-Images of the Age* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), p. 28.

¹⁵ Bruno Bettelheim, *The Informed Heart* (New York: Free Press, 1961).

1.3 Jessica Benjamin: An Intersubjective Reading of Dependency

There has been a recent development within the psychoanalytic school of thinking known as *intersubjective psychology*. The *intersubjective* view of the self has emerged in part as a corrective to Freud. The insights came from both empirical data obtained from studies of individuals *who have suffered deformation from a lack of human recognition*, as well as observation studies of infants *who actively respond to, and differentiate themselves from others*.

Jessica Benjamin is an articulate spokesperson for this dynamic relational approach. She discusses the dynamics of human development in her book *The Bonds of Love*. Her point of departure for a study of domination and dependency differs markedly from the theories of both Hegel and Freud, which, she argues, rely too exclusively on an *intrapsychic* model for human development:

*The intrapsychic model thus missed what I consider the essence of differentiation: the paradoxical balance between recognition of the other and assertion of self. It also missed the fact that we have to get beyond internalization theory if we are to break out of the solipsistic omnipotence of the single psyche.*¹⁶

Whereas some theorists view the paramount problem in the development of self to be the struggle to *differentiate self* from *other*, Benjamin explains how the struggle for independence is not the *only* challenge facing the newborn child. The effort to achieve autonomy through differentiation is but one dimension of the dialectical and dialogical process healthy human development requires:

*Once we accept the idea that infants do not begin life as part of an undifferentiated unity, the issue is not only how we separate from oneness, but also how we connect to and recognize others; the issue is not how we become free of the other, but how we actively engage and make ourselves known in relationship to the other.*¹⁷

The newborn begins a journey which takes him or her through continuous stages of *differentiation* and *independence* from others; which is also a process of *relating with others*, which *deepens* an initial positive bond with parents and siblings through means of

¹⁶ Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love*, p. 46.

¹⁷ Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love*, p. 18.

active engagements characterized by dialogue and love: "What we see in early infancy is not symbiosis, or complete undifferentiation, but, rather, an interest in externality alternating with absorption in internal rhythms; later, there is alternation between the oneness of harmonious attunement and the 'two-ness' of disengagement."¹⁸

This movement from an interest in *externality* alternating with absorption in *internal rhythms* represents another way of speaking about the basic dynamic process of knowing discussed in chapter one. This fluctuating internal/external shifting of attention constitutes the essential structure of human experience. This dynamic is expressed by theologian Wolhart Pannenberg as a distinction between the *exocentric* and *egocentric* movement of the human spirit. Pannenberg - adopting philosophical anthropological concepts from Max Sheler, Helmuth Plessner, J.G. Herder and Arnold Gehlen - speaks of *exocentricity* as *openness to the world*, and *egocentricity* as *narcissistic regression*, where individuals close themselves off and withdraw into their ego.¹⁹ The intersubjective psychoanalytic theory of the self adopts a similar approach.

*The intersubjective view maintains that the individual grows in and through the relationship to other subjects. Most important, this perspective observes that the other whom the self meets is also a self, a subject in his or her own right. . . . Thus the idea of intersubjectivity reorients the conception of the psychic world from a subject's relations to its object toward a subject meeting another subject.*²⁰

By recognizing the alternating egocentric-exocentric movement within the dynamic of human consciousness, the intersubjective view of the self offers a valuable corrective to excessively *intrapsychic* development theories. The intersubjective view validates the observations of social psychologists who have clarified how identity is socially constructed, who always view the self *in relationship*, even when describing the *intrapsychic* activity of individuals. *Aloneness* is never viewed as the original *natural* state of the individual. The *self* and *other* is the essential structure for all discussions on

¹⁸ Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love*, p. 50.

¹⁹ Wolhart Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985). The egocentric-exocentric theme is central to Pannenberg's entire theological study of anthropology.

²⁰ Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love*, p. 20.

distinct but always *interrelated* human beings. It is in this sense that we can understand how *intrapsychic* theory and *intersubjective* theory are not at all mutually exclusive. They are simply different ways of looking at human development and existence. Intersubjective theory attributes all agency neither to the subject with his or her innate capacities or impulses, nor to the object which impresses its influence upon the psyche. It argues that other people play an active part in the struggle of the individual to discover and accept the reality of the self and wider society.

The concept that unifies intersubjective theories of self development is the essential human need for recognition. As was argued in the discussion of the relational character of narrative master life stories in chapter one, the intersubjective theory of the self holds that the development of self-awareness is not possible outside the context and interpersonal dynamics of human relationship. Self-assertion through agency, and recognition of the independent agency of others, defines the essential dynamic of human experience as well as the process of human development:

A person comes to feel that "I am the doer who does, I am the author of my acts," by being with another person who recognizes her acts, her feelings, her intentions, her existence, her independence. Recognition is the essential response, the constant companion of assertion. The subject declares, "I am, I do," and then waits for the response, "you are, you have done." Recognition is, thus, reflexive; it includes not only the other's confirming response, but also how we find ourselves in that response.²¹

The dynamics of reciprocal relationship involve an immediate experience of the presence of another human being whom we recognize as independent and separate from ourselves. Because human beings have the capacity to correlate and compare their personal experience with the experience of another human being, it is thus possible to share human experience through direct *knowledge of acquaintance* and the experience of human presence:

This conscious pleasure in sharing a feeling introduces a new level of mutuality - a sense that inner experience can be joined, that two minds can cooperate in one intention. This conception of emerging intersubjectivity emphasizes how the awareness of the separate other enhances the felt connection with him: this 'other' mind can share my feeling.²²

²¹ Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love*, p. 21.

²² Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love*, p. 30.

1.4 The Cognitive Structure of Dependency: A Distorted View of Self

The development of the self requires an ongoing process of self-affirmation and mutual recognition, always operating within the context of interpersonal relationships. To discover the origin and dynamic structure of negative dependency, we need to analyze how this normal human give-and-take can be flawed. This can occur in one of two ways: an individual can either *underestimate* or *overestimate* his or her degree of power in relationships. If an individual *underestimates* his or her power, the cognitive tendency will be to *submit* to another; if an individual *exaggerates* his or her degree of power, the tendency will be to *dominate* the other. Being unable or unwilling to acknowledge or accept our need for recognition and encouragement can lead to manipulative and subjugating tactics designed to force another person to give recognition, possibly without our having to recognize that person in return. An inability or unwillingness to reconcile the fact of dependence with a desire for independence is the transformation of one's *need* for the other, into *domination* of the other: "Domination begins with the attempt to deny dependency. No one can truly extricate himself from dependency on others, from the need for recognition."²³

As a corollary to this argument, we can also say that negative dependency begins with the attempt to deny or forfeit a sense of *responsibility for self* and *autonomous power*. Here the need to be recognized as independent and unique is transformed into submission and an *other-directed* consciousness. A breakdown in the fundamental tension between *assertion* of the self and *recognition* of the other is the best point of entry for an understanding of the psychology of domination and negative dependency. Dominant and submissive roles in unequal relationships need not be the result of conscious reflection and choice of individuals. Family and social context is crucial. A good example of how these negative dynamics can be the result of *circumstance* as well as *choice* is that of the child-adult relationship. This is where the adoption of a subordinate or dominant identity usually begins. If either the child or parent suffers from a lack of recognition by the other,

²³ Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love*, p. 52.

either can engage in aggressive tactics in a desperate attempt to gain the recognition they naturally need:

The mother who jiggles, pokes, looms, and shouts "look at me" to her unresponsive baby creates a negative cycle of recognition out of her own despair at not being recognized. Here in the earliest social interaction we see how the search for recognition can become a power struggle: how assertion becomes aggression.²⁴

When the natural search for recognition and affirmation becomes a power struggle, the essential interpersonal dynamics take on a decisively different character. A normal and healthy situation exists when recognition is given freely, out of a sense of human care and love. A destructive situation exists when recognition is given as a response to manipulation or force. In language reminiscent of Hegel, Benjamin clarifies the intersubjective dynamics of domination and negative dependency:

We might call this the dialectic of control: If I completely control the other, then the other ceases to exist, and if the other completely controls me, then I cease to exist. A condition of our own independent existence is recognizing the other. True independence means sustaining the essential tension of these contradictory impulses; that is, both asserting the self and recognizing the other. Domination is the consequence of refusing this condition.²⁵

Negative dependency can likewise be the consequence of refusing to *assert* the self. It is misleading to understand the parent's recognition of the child's feelings and accomplishments as maternal or paternal *mirroring*. The recognition a child seeks is something a mother or father is able to give only by virtue of their own experience of independent identity. Likewise, the child not only sees him or herself (the mistaken view of *self-psychology*²⁶) the child also sees and recognizes the independently existing other. Obviously, the very young child does not reflect consciously on the distinct existence of the other - but he or she does indeed *know* - in an immediate experience of human presence - that the unpredictable, spontaneous human agency which the child delights in

²⁴ Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love*, p. 28.

²⁵ Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love*, p. 53.

²⁶ In the 1970's, Heinz Kohut founded a new direction in American psychoanalysis called "self psychology." This approach reinterpreted psychic development in terms of the self's need to find *cohesion* and *mirroring* in the other.

does not originate from within, but in a living other.

Negative dependency becomes established where one person relates to the other from a position of *I am independent - I do not need you*, which is a lie, because, to be healthy, everyone needs recognition and affirmation from other people who are significant *others* in his or her life. The person who assumes the subordinate identity role relates to the other from a position of *I am dependent - I desperately need you*, and anxiously focuses his or her consciousness and life decisions on the dominant person, constantly striving to gain approval or security or some other such benefit. In the ideal balance, a person is able to be fully self-absorbed or fully receptive to the other. He or she is able to be alone or together. In a negative cycle of recognition, a person feels that aloneness is only possible by obliterating the intrusive other and that *attunement* is only possible by unquestioning surrender to the other.

With the above philosophical and psychological reflections, the essential psychological structure of dependency can now be delineated more carefully. If the primary deformation happens at the level of human *consciousness*, then situations of one type of negative dependency will negatively affect all the relationships that the individual has with others. Concrete manifestations of negative dependency operating in personal and social life will be easier to detect and name once the meaning of various terms and concepts found in the literature on dependency is clarified.

2. Defining and Discerning Forms of Negative Dependency

The concept *dependency* has been used in numerous contexts with significantly different applications and intended meanings. In its broadest sense, *dependency* - as can be seen from the above discussion - is an invaluable concept for probing the social psychological dynamics of various types of relationships. As Albert Memmi states in his book *Dependence*, "I am thoroughly persuaded that dependence is both a fact of life so common that it is almost a part of the individual and collective psyche and an operational

concept so efficacious that it furnishes an invaluable key to the understanding of people and groups and of their various works, forms of expression, and patterns of behaviour."²⁷

But what does it mean to say that an individual or group is dependent? Memmi distinguishes two kinds of unequal interpersonal relationships: *subjection and domination* on the one hand, and *dependence and providing* on the other. Although both sets of concepts say something about the dynamics within unequal relationships, as Memmi explains, these paired concepts do not share exactly the same meaning:

*... dependence and subjection are not equivalent; although the dependent person and the dominated person are both alienated, they're not alienated in the same way. . . Essentially, the dependent person more or less consents to her [his] alienation; the dominated person does not. The reason is clear: the dependent person gets something out of being alienated; the dominated does not. It's possible, of course, to be simultaneously dependent and dominated, but that is neither automatic nor necessary.*²⁸

Defining these terms in this way draws attention to how it is possible to give *tacit consent* to the status of dependency within relationships. Even where consent is lacking, however, dependent status can exist by virtue of circumstance, as in the case of a new-born baby. Others have defined *domination* in a manner virtually opposite to that of Memmi, suggesting that the *dominated* are not the victims of tyranny, but have their power slowly appropriated through a systemic, structural process of which they are not aware. Such is the culturally-conditioned reading of the term given by Alkis Kontos in his article, *Domination: Metaphor and Political Reality*:

*Domination is not habituation which can be mechanically repeated. Nor is it overpowering others. The dominated are not defeated in the contest for power. The novelty of the concept rests precisely in its psychopolitical connotation, which indicates the oblivious acceptance of the disproportionate accumulation of power and consequent exercise of control in society. Domination is not rooted in the presence of power as such but in the monopolization of power in a context which obscures this fact as well as its purpose. The powerless do not feel their impotence.*²⁹

²⁷ Albert Memmi, *Dependency: A sketch for a Portrait of the Dependent*, (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Hill, 1984), p. 12.

²⁸ Memmi, *Dependence*, p. 5-6.

²⁹ Alkis Kontos, "Domination: Metaphor and Political Reality" found in ed. Alkis Kontos *Domination* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975), p. 219-220.

This attempt to clarify the meaning of these terms is confusing. It is wrong to state that domination is not overpowering others, for often, it is exactly that. It is also misleading to say that the powerless do not feel their impotence. An individual, or entire people, may be - to a greater or lesser degree - unaware of what truly causes their social miseries and personal sufferings, but the inevitable consequences of domination nonetheless form the matrix of their life experience, and give rise to any number of sufferings which they most certainly feel.

Appealing to general definitions is insightful, but efforts to explain concrete situations, using theoretical definitions and/or metaphorical explanations (a contradiction in terms), can easily serve to obscure the actual circumstances in relationships fuelled by the dynamics of negative dependency. Memmi's assumption that the dependent person willingly, and with foreknowledge, pursues a course of action and way of life structured by the core dynamics of negative dependency is dangerous. The dependent status of the descendants of a colonized and brutally-tyrannized people may give the appearance of voluntary participation in unequal relationships, however, their acceptance of inferiority and dependence is often the result of social amnesia caused by the destruction of a people's cultural identity.

The structural relationship Memmi denotes with his use of the word dependency points to the central defining characteristic of the term: the following structural elements are, by descriptive definition, common to all cases of dependency:

Ordinarily there are three elements that come together to establish an equation of dependence: the person who hopes to gain something from it; the object the person covets; and the person who procures the object. It is best to remember that dependence is a trinitarian relationship: two partners and an object. I will call them, respectively, the dependent, the provider, and the object provided. And it will always be instructive to ask three questions: Who is dependent? On whom? and for what?³⁰

The key to understanding the dynamics of negative dependency is to recognize that at the heart of every kind of dependency is an authentic human need. Unravelling the complex dynamics of the various forms which negative dependencies can take in personal,

³⁰ Memmi, *Dependence*, p. 17-18.

interpersonal and political life requires that we identify the underlying needs which are not being met in a life-enhancing manner, and propose alternative ways to meet those needs. Without authentic responses to human needs, we are left with unauthentic pseudo-responses which bring ethically-objectionable human and social consequences.³¹

To have a relationship defined by dependency is simply to say that a particular need (object of desire) experienced by one person (the dependent) is supplied by another (the provider). Such defines in the simplest sense the essential structure of both positive and negative dependency. Memmi's three-fold structural definition of dependency needs to be modified to include experiences of dependency where the object upon which an individual or group is dependent is provided by (a) a thing, (b) a person, or (c) a structural system of relations. This important distinction forms the basis of the following study of the social psychological dynamics of various types of negative dependency.

The remainder of this chapter examines the social psychological dynamics of dependency of three structural forms of negative dependency, beginning with dependency on things (addictions), then moving to an examination of dependency in interpersonal relationships (symbiosis), and finally, a discussion of economic and political dependency (colonialism, neo-colonialism, globalism). Proceeding successively from a method of inquiry with a focus on the *intra-personal* dynamics of consciousness in a study of addiction, to the *interpersonal* dynamics of symbiotic relationships, to the *social psychological* dynamics of geo-political dependency, enables us to see how different disciplinary perspectives (psychology, social psychology, sociology, political science) detect similar patterns in their interpretations of human experience.

(a) Negative Dependency on things: Addiction

An individual may be dependent on a *thing* which serves as both the *object* which addresses a certain need, as well as be the *provider* of that need. Such a pattern of negative dependency can be defined as *addiction*. It is confusing to suggest, as some

³¹ More will be said concerning this in the ethical investigation of the negative dynamics of social conformity found in the following chapter.

authors do, that it is possible to be *addicted* to people. There is a great deal of difference in the social psychological dynamics operating in the case of an addiction (i.e, a relationship between a person and a thing/experience) and those operating in a *relationship* between two people.

(b) Negative Dependence on People: Symbiotic Relationship

This category of dependency involves an analysis of the dynamics of dependency within the structure of an interpersonal relationship. In symbiotic relationships, each individual is, in a sense, *dependent* on the negative dependency structure of their unequal relationship. Still, the structure of this inequality takes a definite political form, where one person becomes the *dependent* (subordinate) while the other becomes the *provider* (dominant). It is a distorted whole, comprised of two unequal parts, where the identity of one person (the dominant provider) serves as the unifying point of reference in defining the relationship.

(c) Economic and Political Dependence: Colonialism and Neo-colonialism

An ethical inquiry into the dynamics of economic and political dependence moves beyond the boundaries of interpersonal relationships to the structural ties between groups and geo-political regions. Assessing the particular *needs* underlying the dynamics of such relationships involves a complex integration of historical, economic, political, cultural and social psychological analysis. Like the other forms of dependency, the dynamic movement of consciousness, and the direction which human activity takes, is towards the more powerful party in the relationship, with damaging social psychological consequences for economically-impooverished and/or politically repressed peoples.

3. The Dynamics of Dependency as Addiction

It is possible to consider the concept *addiction* in a *narrow* or *broad* sense. A narrow use of the concept (i.e., as a way of talking about the addict) reveals little or nothing of the social psychological dynamics of addiction. A broader use views addiction as a useful metaphor for understanding certain types of destructive or self-defeating patterns of thinking and acting. This broader use of the term approaches a study of the underlying dynamics of negative *dependency on things* to illustrate how those dynamics are not confined to *individuals*, but are also about the dynamics of life in a fragmented and abstract *social* world, tied together by the dynamic of international capitalism, certainly the most life-threatening form of modern dependency.

3.1 The Danger in Classifying Addictions as *Diseases*

If a person is dependent on a sense-gratifying *thing*, it is probably fair to say that the individual is *dis-eased* in that he or she lacks *ease* or contentment in life. This is not the same as regarding addictions as *diseases* having a bio-chemical etiology available to medical or psychoanalytical diagnosis.

It is insightful to consider how dependency on alcohol or other mood-altering substances came to be labelled a disease. Alcoholism understood as *disease* currently serves as the dominant cultural model to explain dependency on things (addictions). It makes this determination without necessarily having to probe the social psychological dynamics of the individual's life. When a person regards himself or herself as an *Alcoholic*, it is due to an identification the person makes between aspects of their experience of addiction with aspects of a model defining addiction to alcoholism as a *disease*. Certain tell-tale signs and symptoms are defined as the common marks of the disease, central of which is the inability to control one's drinking. Whenever individuals find themselves having difficulty controlling alcoholic drinking, they may also soon find pressure to begin to see uncontrolled drinking as an amoral symptom of a disease, rather than a central

activity defining the character of social engagement and the dynamic of one's life, a process over which human beings should remain responsible. By remaining in control of one's life, a person can continuously choose to increase his or her awareness and power for positive change.

The disease model can pose a serious impediment to removing obstacles to critical awareness and transformation. If alcoholism (one of the most physically-debilitating forms of addiction) is not a disease, then neither are other forms of addictions. If addictions are not medical diseases, what are they? What are the causes that bring about addictive thinking and patterns of living? What forces and influences perpetuate negative patterns of dependency on things, perhaps even long after the individual becomes aware of his or her condition? These questions establish a point of entry into a contentious debate currently taking place between those either supportive or opposed to the disease concept and model for explaining and treating heavy, debilitating and repeated drinking of alcohol. Those adhering to the disease model rely on a simple explanation for heavy drinking: the individual fits the pattern of the disease. Others (both professionals and addicts) reject this system-approach to interpreting dynamic personal and social life, and embark on an active mental journey into the past, present and future of their life, usually in dialogue with others travelling similar roads, in a search for understanding of and relief from addictive thinking and compulsive behaviour. The A.A. model calls for compliance to the twelve recovery steps; the dynamic approach is guided by critical reflection on human experience which strives to obtain a deeper understanding of all the social psychological dynamics at play in addiction.

The view that alcoholism is a medically diagnosable *disease*, with a *scientific* explanation, is a relatively recent one. It emerged gradually during the middle of the twentieth century with a cultural change in attitude toward heavy drinkers, especially during the late 40's and early 50's, with the advent of the movement Alcoholics Anonymous. A number of prominent A.A. spokespersons won admiration and respect for their rigorous honesty and sincere efforts to live a decent life free from the grip of a progressive addiction to alcohol over which they believed they had, until living in

accordance with the 12 step program of A.A., little or no control. With repeated patterns of destructive heavy drinking by such individuals, it is easy to understand how the public came to view such unfortunates as not responsible for acting immorally because of the disease. A. A. gradually became a catalyst for a cultural shift in thinking from Alcoholism as a state of moral degeneration to Alcoholism as a disease. This view was made available to the North American population through alcoholism research published by an American physician, Dr. Paul Jellinek. A. A. both popularized Jellinek's research, and spread support for a point of view (disease concept) which Jellinek actually never advanced. The historical birth of the myth of alcoholism as a disease is a fascinating study into how political, economic, and cultural factors can generate social myths which shape human attitudes and actions.

A.A. members were the first to develop and popularize the notion that heavy and debilitating alcohol drinking was a disease. As Dr. Ohms, a leading proponent of the *disease concept of alcoholism* states:

*The first thing we noticed was that Alcoholics Anonymous people were saying that alcoholism is a primary disease. It is its own disease. It causes its own symptoms - it is not itself a symptom of some other disease - and AA treated it that way. And medical science finally had to admit that AA was right!*³²

The notion that alcoholism is a *disease*, characterized by uncontrolled drinking, soon became widely established in modern society. The American Medical Association (AMA) accepted the notion in 1956, paving the way for the proliferation of alcoholism treatment centres throughout North America. Why did medical science finally *have to admit* that Alcoholism is a disease? The truth is that medical science never actually did admit that Alcoholism is a disease: in fact, scientific data has seriously challenged the validity of the definition of disease promoted by the disease concept model.

Jellinek published two landmark articles in 1946 and 1952 which proposed a scientific understanding of alcoholism. This research seemed to confirm major elements of the A.A. view. He argued that drinking tended to progress along a certain uniform path, passing through determinable stages, and culminated in chronic pervasive drinking

³² David L. Ohlms, "The Disease Concept of Alcoholism," found in *Models of Dependency*, p. 2.

resulting in increasing deterioration, and finally death. Jellinek systematized his findings in his highly influential *The Disease Concept of Alcoholism*, published in 1960, which remains the basic textbook cited to explain the still prominent classical disease concept. Jellinek cautioned that his findings did not prove a *disease* of alcoholism; however, his research was extensively relied on by members of Alcoholic Anonymous as an explanation for what their members were suffering in their lives from a dependency on alcohol. The successive *phases* outlined in Jellinek's research tended to confirm the A.A. ideology, however this may be due to the fact that the information upon which Jellinek based his structural diagnosis of drinking patterns came exclusively from A.A. members.³³ Clinical studies show that so-called alcoholics, allegedly suffering from a disease characterized in the first instance by *loss of control*, can, and often do, limit or abandon their drinking. Many treatment establishments require that the alcoholic quit drinking before they are granted admission.³⁴ How could they do this if they had a disease manifesting the single symptom of *uncontrolled* drinking? Research has clearly shown that it is often possible to return to moderate and controlled drinking even after long periods where alcohol was consumed in an excessive and debilitating manner.³⁵ Studies also show no significant difference in abstinence success rates in long-term rehabilitation programs and much shorter forms of treatment. In one case, a leading authority on alcoholism conducted an experiment in conjunction with an alcohol-addiction clinic. Half of the group followed the rigorous program of the centre for many months; the other half received a half hour session per week, where a physician talked informally and offered some sensible advice.

³³ Fingarette, *Heavy Drinking*, p. 21. The questionnaire Jellinek used was designed by AA members and appeared in their monthly newsletter *the Grapevine*. Jellinek used data obtained from 98 male members of A.A.; he apparently excluded the responses of women, because, according to Fingarette, their answers did not fit the same pattern as the men's.

³⁴ Fingarette, *Heavy Drinking*, p. 74.

³⁵ Fingarette cites numerous studies which confirm that moderate controlled drinking has been possible for many so-called alcoholics. Indeed, many treatment programs are not abstinence-oriented, but have *controlled drinking* as a goal. For detailed information concerning these research studies read the section in Fingarette's book titled, *Controlled Drinking*, pp. 124-128.

The rates of improvement in the two groups were the same.³⁶

If science has disproved the disease concept of alcoholism, why is the notion still so prevalent, forming the dominant basis for treatment of alcoholism in society?

Unfortunately, the wealth of new and better studies that have soundly refuted the classic disease concept have so far had little influence on the general public. Almost everyone outside the scientific community still takes it for gospel that there is a scientifically proven, uniquely patterned drinking history peculiar to a disease called alcoholism. And despite the scientific evidence, the classic disease concept has been assiduously promoted by a variety of interest groups in the public and private sectors.³⁷

How are we to understand such widespread acceptance of an unsubstantiated theory which prohibits an investigation into the actual social psychological dynamics of addiction, and thereby contributes to the suppression of critical awareness? Why has new empirical research refuting the classic disease concept of alcoholism been largely rejected by the public, and fiercely resisted by addiction counsellors? It is worth taking the time to summarize Herbert Fingarette's response to these questions in order to grasp how the promulgation of the disease-concept ideology can lead to the repression or denial of critical awareness, while at the same time serving certain valued political and social functions for powerful economic and political interests.

Fingarette believes that scientists often mislead the public for what they believe to be the public's own good. They believe that without an alternative explanation to the disease model, the individual is likely to revert back to a moralistic condemnation of him or herself with debilitating consequences: "The essence of this rationale is that if chronic drinkers are told that there is no disease of alcoholism, they will see their drinking as a personal failing; out of guilt and shame, they will tend to hide or deny their problems."³⁸

Others justify reliance on the disease model, and rationalize the deception, because by so doing they are able to access medical help for heavy drinkers by classifying alcohol abuse as a medical disease:

³⁶ Herbert Fingarette, "Alcoholism: Neither Sin Nor Disease," *The Centre magazine*, March, 1986 (The Centre for the Study of Democratic Institutions), p. 184.

³⁷ Fingarette, *Heavy Drinking*, p. 22.

³⁸ Fingarette, *Heavy Drinking*, p. 25.

*Calling alcoholism a disease, rather than a behaviour disorder, is a useful device both to persuade the alcoholic to admit his alcoholism and to provide a ticket for admission into the health care system. I willingly concede, however, that alcohol dependence lies on a continuum and that in scientific terms behaviour disorder will often be a happier semantic choice than disease.*³⁹

People are apt to look to science and technology for a quick and simple *cure* which will solve the complex living problems causing negative patterns of dependency and addiction. The media feeds this trend with periodic reports of research which seems on the verge of *exciting breakthroughs* in medical treatments for alcoholism and other types of addictions viewed as medical diseases. This is a viewpoint which reduces complex human phenomenon to simple explanations, creating the occasion for confusion and ignorance.

What Fingarette and many others confirm in the area of addictions has already been noted in earlier discussions of self-deception and social ignorance: it is far easier to attach labels to individuals than to understand the social psychological dynamics of their daily thinking and acting. A narrative understanding of individual existence and identity formation forces us to ask about the entire situation: past, present, and future. Judging oneself to be a member of a stigmatized social group is to adopt a certain self-understanding and social practice which has ethical and political consequence. Viewing people as permanently diseased and setting them apart from others without grounds for doing so can be unethical and cruel. Erving Goffman's book *Stigma* provides considerable insight into the contradictions and dangers in making such judgments, and the sufferings they can cause others. As Fingarette also points out, labelling some heavy drinkers as *diseased* can easily serve as a rationalization for those with serious drinking problems, who do not fit the established pattern of symptoms suggested by AA and Dr. Jellinek. Fingarette offers an alternative to this tunnel-vision analysis:

³⁹ George Vaillant. *The Natural History of Alcoholism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983) p. 20. To read similar statements by others who claim that alcoholism is not a disease, but a socially *useful* public deception worth promoting, see: Mansell E. Pattison, "The selection of Treatment Modalities for the Alcoholic Patient," in Mendelson, Jack H. and Mello, Nancy K. (eds.) *Alcohol: Use and Abuse in America* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1985) p. 192; Griffith Edwards, "The Status of Alcoholism as a Disease," in R. V. Phillipson, ed., *Modern Trends in Drug Dependence and Alcoholism*, 1:119-163 (London: Butterworths, 1970), p. 161; and Edwards et al., *Alcohol-related Disabilities*, WHO Offset Publication no. 32. (Geneva: World Health Organization, 1977), p. 9.

*... the disease concept mistakenly focuses attention on medical intervention as the key to treatment; evidence about the role of social, psychological, and other nonmedical factors is largely ignored. In turn, this medical approach reduces the drinking behaviour of the chronic drinker to a physical symptom, thereby both encouraging the heavy drinker to evade responsibility for drinking and also encouraging the drinker and others to interpret the drinking as a reflexive symptom imposed by a disease, rather than to understand the drinking as a meaningful though maladaptive activity.*⁴⁰

To attempt to understand addictive behaviour as *meaningful though maladaptive* is to strive for that deeper insight and moral awareness which can open up new roads to healing and transformation within the lives of those suffering from addictions. Any proposed treatment which fails to bring the individual to a deeper and more coherent self-understanding may succeed in interrupting or preventing addictive patterns of behaviour; but such may come at the cost of surrendering critical thinking and independent moral judgment, and thereby throwing away keys needed to unlock other doors to awareness and spiritual transformation.

Stereotypes and labels serve as information and analysis *simplifiers* that also provide a psychological means of maintaining or boosting one's own self-esteem. They are both logically and morally unacceptable in that they interrupt the natural human process of seeking true insight and understanding, and constitute false judgments against others.

The use of labels, unsubstantiated *medical models*, and *theories of mental illness* is now completely rejected by many professionals working in the field of social psychology, although these views remain virtually taboo in popular culture, as noted by Rowan in his book, *The Structured Crowd*:

It is already clear that we have rejected the medical model. In this we are on common ground with most psychologists, and the overwhelming majority of social psychologists. The current edition of the Handbook of Social Psychology describes the medical model as 'entirely irrelevant and handicapping' and as 'unreliable or meaningless'.⁴¹

Rowan also believes that we must reject all judgments based on unsubstantiated *psychological theories*:

⁴⁰ Fingarette, *Heavy Drinking*, p. 92.

⁴¹ Rowan, *The Structured Crowd*, p. 136.

We are also rejecting the psychologizing model, which merely substitutes 'normal and abnormal' for 'well and sick'. This is little more than an attempt to do in psychological terms what the psychiatrists have been doing in medical terms. It still puts all the fault inside the person, and it still labels the person in a way that can easily be damaging.⁴²

Rowan also rejects all forms of social determinism where living conditions are seen to drive people crazy. He claims that this approach seems very enlightened, but offers only a variation on the same old medical model approach which unduly exaggerates the responsibility of the *individual*, and obscures the need for *social* and *political* change:

It [social-determinist view] seems at first to be very enlightened and politically challenging - get rid of bad living conditions and improve the lot of the poor - but in fact it leaves intact the medical model, and merely uses it in a different way. The person still gets labelled just the same as before, only now it is the fault of society, or living conditions, or the class system, or whatever. From the point of view of the individual involved, this doesn't make much difference - next year's political manifesto doesn't get the person out of hospital now.⁴³

But certainly there is some progress toward understanding with an explicit awareness of the possible social sources of personal suffering. This is the essential impetus for a social imagination of emancipatory moral and social alternatives.

3.2 Addiction as a Misguided Search for Love and Power

Contemporary society is marked by stress, noise, anxiety, excessive individualism, fierce economic competition and a culture of entertainment and consumerism. In such a social world, everyone is prone to addictive thinking and acting to one degree or another. Everyone feels the need to cover up pain by using things *outside* themselves to make them feel better. As Charlotte D. Kasl states in her book *Women, Sex and Addiction*: "... the concept of addiction has become increasingly important to me, to the point where I now

⁴² Rowan, *The Structured Crowd*, p. 136-7.

⁴³ Rowan, *The Structured Crowd*, p. 137.

find in it a basic model for understanding human suffering and spirituality."⁴⁴ The essential drive underlying all forms of addiction is part of the struggle of life and familiar to everyone: "If you have ever violated your values and ignored responsibilities to pursue an overpowering desire, then you understand the feeling of addiction."⁴⁵

It is this tendency to *violate values and ignore responsibilities* which constitutes the basic psychological experience and moral dilemma of addiction. What are we searching for when we pursue engagements which conflict with moral values, and lead to feelings of guilt or shame? Underlying addiction compulsions is an authentic but misdirected search for love and power. It is a spiritual quest without a clear awareness of what would in fact constitute a healing and emotionally rewarding experience of human love and power within the context of the individual's life. To view addictive thinking and action as a misguided search for love and spiritual fulfilment underscores a basic anthropological belief in the essential goodness of human beings. Human beings want to be loved and they want to love. Addictions point to the fact that people are either not able to love, or for definite reasons, have become unwilling to love more fully and be more fully loved: natural human desires and basic needs become frustrated.

Regardless of what is preventing the fulfilment of human desire for love and an authentic sense of human power, the result is an experience characterized by pain and anguish; which in turn gives rise to the urge to quell this suffering, which can perpetuate addictive thinking and acting in one's daily-weekly-yearly routine.

The pathetic dimension of this misguided attempt to find meaning and joy in one's life is that addictions tend to progress in a way that transforms and subverts the initial search for authentic love and power by the increased desire and need for the quelling of pain and confusion through immediate sensory gratification. Addiction can bring its own pain and confusion - the initial hope that some substance would fill the inner void and displace negative emotions gives way to despair as core problems remain and intensify,

⁴⁴ Charlotte Kasl, *Women Sex, And Addiction: A Search for Love and Power* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989) p. x.

⁴⁵ Kasl, *Women, Sex, and Addiction*, p. 15.

magnifying human suffering: "On a continuum, the motivation for acting addictively progresses from pleasure, to relief of pain and tension, to maintenance (just getting through the day), to a desire for oblivion."⁴⁶ This is both the irony and tragedy of many addictions: the initial desire to eliminate emotional pain invariably leads the person on a course which magnifies living problems and generates a steadily increasing degree of suffering. Still, addictions do initially provide experiences of pleasure and freedom from anxiety, and can serve functional purposes under threatening or abusive situations.

3.3 Addiction as Central Activity in Identity Formation

Herbert Fingarette describes addiction to alcohol by characterizing heavy drinkers as people for whom drinking has become a *central activity* in their way of life. He interprets the meaning of *central activities* as patterns of thinking and acting which contribute substantially to the formation and maintenance of identity: "By 'central activity' I mean any hub of activity (job, religious practice, serious hobby, family or community role) that in part defines and inspires a person's identity, values, conduct and life choices."⁴⁷ In a manner reminiscent of his study of self-deception, Fingarette explains that while some people catch themselves in the act of dodging their problems and difficulties, and call a halt to their evasive tactics, at other times we all find it easier to avoid a problem than to face it squarely. Addictions emerge with the repeated engagement in avoidance strategies; such strategies become defining characteristics of identity:

*We find ourselves repeating the avoidance activities to maintain the evasion, and slowly the avoidance activities take on a momentum of their own. Eventually the avoidance pattern becomes easier and easier, more and more spontaneously favoured in response to a wide variety of threatening or anxiety-producing situations. Over time, an avoidance response like overeating or gambling or drinking may in itself become a focal activity for a small number of people.*⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Kasl, *Women, Sex, and Addiction*, p. 21.

⁴⁷ Fingarette, *Heavy Drinking*, p. 100.

⁴⁸ Fingarette, *Heavy Drinking*, p. 109.

The repeated use of evasive strategies deaden painful feelings and give short-term gratification. Viewing addictions as *diseases* obscures the motivation in personal strategies whereby individuals chose, on a repeated basis, to evade suffering. Given Fingarette's interpretation of addicted behaviour, the addict's conduct is - at each point in the progression of the addiction - intelligible, and reflects normal cognitive activity:

*But the obstacle is not in truth an alien power. It is our deeply rooted habit-bound self opposing the fragile reed of a new desire to be other than who or what we have been. And the more genuine our desire to change, the more tense and intense the conflict. To others, our difficulty in making the decision to change may seem puzzling, for why would we not want to commit to a change that we say is attractive and that has obvious advantages over our present situation?*⁴⁹

Making a commitment to embark on a new road can involve substantial changes in lifestyle and routine. We are creatures of habit and to simply abandon central activities, no matter how debilitating they may be, calls for a reconstruction of identity, perhaps requiring a radical change in lifestyle. To speak of changing daily and weekly routine, one's leisure activities and living patterns, and most likely one's circle of acquaintances - or lack of acquaintances - connected to the central activity of pursuing an addiction, is to call for a major reconstruction of one's way of life. Such changes may require opportunities or resources which are not readily available. As well, the source of the pain and confusion initially giving rise to repeated patterns of escape through addictive behaviour will likely emerge in consciousness as a force to be reckoned with, and will need to be consciously avowed and addressed by the individual. One cannot, as Fingarette notes, simply, and without consequence, forsake a central activity, abandon a preferred coping strategy, or disable a defense mechanism without some means of understanding and dealing with core problems.

There are also strong psychological bonds established with addiction. Kasl discusses the difficulty women with addictions can have in making radical changes. Having engaged repeatedly in destructive behaviour which conflicts with cherished values and ideals, often the individual has formed an identity based on a core foundation of

⁴⁹ Fingarette, *Heavy Drinking*, p. 105.

shame. Without significant help and affirmation from others, reconstructing identity along more positive lines is virtually impossible. Love and support from others is often not sufficient in itself. Without clearly identifying core problems which operate as the foundational source of negative feelings which lead to addicted behaviour, an individual will tend to feel personally responsible for failures: "The vicious cycle of addictions continues until we throw a monkey wrench into the system and change the patterns. We are jolted into awareness when we get to the source of our pain and recognize our feelings; only then can we satisfy our hungers in a positive, self-affirming way."⁵⁰

Uncovering and acknowledging negative core feelings often reveals the true source of both those feelings and the negative core beliefs to which they often give rise. The genesis of addiction can often be found in failed relationships with others; others who had the responsibility to affirm and love the person, especially as a child, and did not do so.

3.4 Addiction: Escape from Pain - Flight from Self-Awareness

Behind every desire is a legitimate human *need* which must be discovered before one can make sense of addictive thinking and acting. Often, needs exist as a consequence of human deprivation. A root analysis of addiction attempts to answer the fundamental question of how people are damaged or denied the fulfilment of certain basic human needs, which in turn leave the person dissatisfied with life.

The particular character of *dissatisfaction* within the life of an addicted person is actually comprised of two distinct components: one emotional (bad or negative feelings) and one intellectual (mental confusion, or some form of self-condemning awareness). With such a pattern it is appropriate to speak of *compulsive* desiring and *obsessive* thinking. The compulsion is to feel better, the obsession is the mental preoccupation with escaping mental anxiety. With both the emotional experience of loneliness (feelings) and the intellectual experience of anxiety (awareness) it is appropriate that those who escape into *things* would have to do so over and over again, or face the full reality of their

⁵⁰ Kasl, *Women, Sex, and Addiction*, p. 188.

personal and social situation.

Implicit in the compulsion and obsession characterizing addictions is the two-fold desire: to avoid pain and to experience gratification or pleasure. A negative pattern of dependency to mood-altering or mind-changing substances or processes (i.e., an addiction to Harlequin romance novels and escape into mental fantasies) can be viewed as a way of life characterized by successive periods of temporary escape from the experience of pain or a sense of meaninglessness.

The immediate experience of gratification can alter the physical and emotional state of an individual, and thereby temporarily relieve emotional and physical pain. It is the *process* of escaping explicit awareness which is central to the dynamics of addiction. The particular object or addictive agent serving as a vehicle for escape can take virtually any form:

Because addiction is the psyche's way of seeking escape from buried feelings and easing the inner strife, the addictive agent can be most anything - alcohol, sex, cigarettes, religion, caffeine, TV, anger, depression, shopping, cleaning, eating, not eating, work, or an ever-changing combination of these.⁵¹

The intensity of the felt need to escape pain or confusion, or irreconcilable pieces of information, differs from person to person.

The flight from pain and awareness which characterizes addictive thinking and acting is at the same time a flight *toward* something which becomes the positively-perceived object of our attention and desire. This shift in focus does not open up feelings, but is carried out in an attempt to hide them - it is a flight of the spirit into some object in a retreat from self-knowledge. When is it morally wrong to seek gratification? It is not possible to make moral judgments before understanding each situation in the concrete. Those interested in freeing individuals from addictions will want to keep in mind the essential experience of frustrated human needs and the need for love.

As was noted earlier, the individual suffering from an addiction may need the love, care and understanding of others, but also needs an *explanation* of the dynamics which define compulsive thinking, acting and positive identity formation. Without such

⁵¹ Kasl, *Women, Sex, and Addiction*, p. 189.

understanding, they may not discover who they really are. They may end up settling for someone else's explanation based on some abstract and unsubstantiated theory:

You can't do much to stop people from smoking or drinking unless you find out why the smoker smokes and the drinker drinks, that is, why they are dependent in the way they are. That is why most campaigns against smoking or drinking are relatively unsuccessful: they prohibit and dissuade, but they don't explain; they don't give the dependent what she [he] needs; they don't really help her [him] to replace, or even to control and master, her [his] object provided.⁵²

There is growing awareness among addiction researchers that the origin of addictive thinking can often be found in either the socioeconomic experiences of poverty and oppression, or in childhood experiences of physical, emotional and sexual abuse. Obviously these two categories can be overlapping aspects of the same individual's life.

3.5 The Connection between Child Abuse and Dependency on Things

After years of research and counselling, Dr. Kasl came to the conclusion that 95 percent of the people who came to her for help would never have needed an hour of therapy had they been loved and cared for as children.⁵³

. . . childhood abuse, along with poverty and oppression, underlie numerous addictions, addictions which may operate alternately or simultaneously. In many instances, misuse of food, sex, alcohol, work, and money either occur together or interchangeably as an individual desperately tries to quell an inner emptiness created by some form of childhood abuse or neglect.⁵⁴

Children are usually powerless to recognize or escape the dysfunction and victimization caused by oppressive or abusive adults. Abuse interrupts positive identity formation, and the emerging sense of self-understanding which healthy human development requires. Abuse can entail any number of damaging attitudes and actions, but is always marked by the absence of a sensitive and unselfish concern for the child. The

⁵² Memmi, *Dependency*, p. 168.

⁵³ Kasl, *Women, Sex and Addiction*, p. 321.

⁵⁴ Kasl, *Women, Sex, and Addiction*, p.xi.

severity of abuse can range from simple neglect, to a brutal violation of the identity boundaries of the child. When children are denied an attentive caring adult in their daily lives, or suffer dehumanization in some other more tangible form, such as physical or sexual abuse, identity boundaries can be seriously damaged, leaving the child unable to develop a positive sense of self. Abused children feel little joy in life or self worth. They spend their time proving themselves. Robbed of a positive sense of self, they do not come to know themselves:

Like oppressed people, children in dysfunctional families are so busy trying to "dance" in the world of their parents, their oppressors, that they don't have the opportunity to look inside and get to know themselves. When their appeals for love and efforts to be noticed repeatedly fail, they retreat into a secret world to forget, for a moment, the terror and lack of love that permeates their lives. Children find solace in fantasies, sex play, masturbation, food, being cute, or other behaviour that brings release from the harsh realities of life. This is how addictions take root.⁵⁵

One of the most telling consequences of childhood abuse for the development of a self image is the identity confusion which results from an intrusion or violation of identity boundaries: an awareness of where *we* stop and *other* people begin. The other-directed focus of children *dancing to other people's tunes* is usually accompanied by uncertainty concerning ownership and responsibility for oneself. When children are not given recognition and respect as unique and distinct human beings, but are treated as property (things), psychological confusion over boundaries - or even multiple personality disorders - can later become manifest in adult life: "It is characteristic of - and prerequisite for - mental health both that our own ego boundaries should be clear and that we should clearly recognize the boundaries of others."⁵⁶ Concepts such as identity boundaries draw attention to how the normal sense of give-and-take between people can become distorted, and the subordinate party can be so damaged in the relationship to have difficulty differentiating between self and *other*, as a result of some violation of his or her identity boundaries.

⁵⁵ Kasl, *Women, Sex and Addiction*, p. 271.

⁵⁶ Scott Peck, *People of the Lie*: (New York: Simon & Schuster Inc., 1983), p. 137.

Achieving a differentiated self awareness is a challenge and arduous task for all children, given the fact that their status of *subordinate* is a defining characteristic of childhood. This task is made especially difficult where respect for the rights of children, or recognition of their special needs, is absent. Children who grow up in abusive environments are constantly trying *to be loved* and to avoid shame and abuse. As a result, they do not learn to see themselves in a positive and healthy way. As Scott Peck notes: "Whenever there is a major deficit in parental love, the child will, in all likelihood, respond to that deficit by assuming itself [sic] to be the cause of the deficit, thereby developing an unrealistically negative self-image."⁵⁷

The response of the adult is crucial in determining the direction and quality of identity development in the child. Each denial or fulfilment could make a child feel either confirmed or thwarted in his or her sense of agency and self-esteem. When children spend their childhood years seeking, and never getting, the affirmation and love of their parents (or primary care-givers), which they need and rightfully deserve, they are likely to fall victim to various forms of behavioral disorders and addictions, as they succumb to pseudo-solutions to deal with pain to escape anxious thinking and painful emotions, and the condemning notion that they are not *worthy* of affirmation and love. Once they reach the age of adulthood they are predisposed to seek out partners who share similar traits as those adults under whom they suffered abuse, and by doing so, perpetuate patterns of negative dependency in their personal and social life with devastating consequences.⁵⁸ "For people who come from dysfunctional families, the *underlying goal of the psyche in choosing partners is often to address unfinished business left from childhood*. We pick people like our parents and try to change them."⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Peck, *People of the Lie*, p. 40.

⁵⁸ As Gregory Baum notes in his article "Deprivatizing Psychoanalysis," found in *Religion and Alienation: A Theological Reading of Society* (Toronto: Paulist Press, 1975): "It is true, of course, that infants depend on the parent in this unprotected way, but when such a dependency structure is recommended and utilized later in life, after the maturing of the person, it tends to legitimate the structures of authority and suggest that the way to personal and social well-being is found in submission to the right and benevolent authority." p. 234.

⁵⁹ Kasl, *Women, Sex, and Addiction*, p. 117.

A critical inquiry into the dynamics of addiction reveals a direct connection between personal troubles and suffering on the one hand, and social and political problems on the other. The dominant cultural ideology providing a theory of addictions attempts to explain addiction with little or no reference to politics or social ethics. This approach disproportionately shifts the focus from the cultural and economic situation onto individuals, thereby creating impediments to liberating awareness.

3.6 The Politics of Addiction: A Socio-Cultural Perspective

Understanding addiction as a misguided search for authentic love and power helps to make sense of addictive behaviour as a meaningful, but *maladaptive*, course of action pursued by individuals. Abuse and neglect of children can cause much emotional pain and joylessness, as was mentioned above; but this alone can not explain why so many adults, even those who suffered abuse as children, neglect and abuse children. The social and cultural context in which adults strive to find meaning and joy in their own lives needs examination. Considering addiction as an escape from painful emotional and psychic pain gives insight into the essential meaning of addiction. Socio-economic and cultural determinants also cause pain and joylessness, and can thereby create a predisposition to addiction among a disadvantaged sector of the population. Demographic sociological studies have raised important questions for ethics about the politics and economics of addiction.

If the desire for authentic love and power explains the initial inclination in addictive thinking and acting, we can easily understand how economic principles and cultural values which undermine a legitimate search for authentic love and power may help to explain the genesis of addiction for many citizens. The parallels between the structures of addiction manifested in human experience, and the structures of institutional relationships in society, are far too striking to dismiss as coincidental:

Such basic aspects of capitalism as free enterprise, consumerism, competition, imperialism, individualism, and militarism have some essential parallels with addiction and codependency. Some of the concepts that go hand in hand are dualistic thinking, encouraging people to crave possessions and status, to believe that bigger is better, and using external measures for self-worth and self-gratification at the expense of others.⁶⁰

The failure of home and social life to meet the basic needs which all human beings have for nurture and love seems to be at the root of many addictions. When individuals have not been given the ingredients necessary for the development of a healthy identity, when they have not been encouraged to develop skills that would make life meaningful and worth living, and when they are forced to function in a harsh social world where competition and distrust of others are basic tools of survival, then the tendency to escape suffering and the painful awareness of meaninglessness is far from perplexing, it is predictable. Such psychological tendencies and coping techniques describe the social psychology of oppression and alter-dependency.

The language and diagnostic techniques of psychoanalysis and *dynamic psychiatry* have tended to focus on the individual, which has had the effect of obscuring and disguising social problems by identifying them with *symptom effects*, as merely personal problems. In as much as psychoanalysis and popular addiction therapies have emerged from a branch of psychology especially concerned with the *intrapersonal* dimensions of human problems, it has fallen to other branches of the human and social sciences to consider the *sociohistorical* background in which the personal phenomena studied are embedded. Given that the consequences of addictions are made manifest through personally-experienced human suffering, it has been relatively easy for medical and political professionals to rest comfortably with a superficial analysis of addiction as a purely *private* problem, requiring *private* and *professional* treatment. Those suffering from addictions become the *problem*, rather than a collective social *symptom* exposing disparity, inequality, and abuse perpetuated by the structures of social institutions.

Identifying what needs to be changed within society requires a critical social analysis which makes explicit the connections between personal sufferings, (i.e.,

⁶⁰ Kasl, *Women, Sex, and Addiction*, p. 256.

addictions), and social contradictions and deficiencies. In his article, *Managing Social Contradictions through Drugs*, Jim Harding argues that ". . . as a country we are largely ignorant of the social foundations of the drug-related problems growing in our midst,"⁶¹ and undertakes a class analysis of the rates of incidence of alcoholism among different sectors of the population in Saskatchewan as a model experiment to see what demographic addiction studies reveal. He believes such a comprehensive approach is required because, as he puts it, ". . . a different pattern of drug-related problems exists from working-class people, people of Native ancestry, women working in the home, and senior citizens."⁶² This correlates directly with a lack of security and well-being caused by damaging social conditions. Gathering concrete information to test for *correlations* between the personal experience of suffering, sociological data on rates, types and expressions of addiction, to uncover possible social determinants explaining unfulfilled human needs underlying individual addictions:

*The specific findings actually challenge many stereotypes. The average age of those arrested was thirty-one, which is ten to fifteen years lower than in past Canadian studies. This downward shift in age parallels the changing trends in "skid rows." It interrelates in particular, with rising rates of unemployment among the young.*⁶³

Kasl also incorporates sociological and cultural factors into her analysis of addiction. She abhors the implication of those treatment or therapeutic strategies which place the full responsibility for healing from sex addictions on the shoulders of individuals. As she puts it: "To heal from addiction in an addictive society is a little like an alcoholic trying to recover in a bar. To heal from sex addiction in a culture that routinely sees bodies without seeing souls is just as difficult."⁶⁴

⁶¹ Jim Cheney, "Managing Social Contradictions through Drugs," in John A. Fry (ed.) *Contradictions in Canadian Society* (Toronto: John Wiley & Sons, 1984) p. 176.

⁶² Harding, "Managing Social Contradictions through Drugs," p. 176.

⁶³ Harding, "Managing Social Contradictions Through Drugs," p. 177.

⁶⁴ Kasl, *Women, Sex, and Addiction*, p. 322.

According to Christopher Lasch, Kasl's phrase, *the culture that routinely sees*, actually signifies the experience of modern human consciousness. Lasch believes that human beings have evolved - largely due to the systemic evolution of capitalism and liberalism in Western pluralist societies - into the final product of bourgeois individualism; what he terms *psychological human beings*. Here the orientation of the individual is still very much an expression of privatized consciousness and a philosophy of liberalism or individualism, but not rugged, authoritarian and dogmatic individualism; it is, rather, being forced to decide for oneself, feeling cut-off and alone, unsure of oneself, easily intimidated and made to feel shame (Richard Sennett), uncertain and fearful for the future, caught in a largely private, bureaucratic, impersonal world, constantly searching for a resting place or home (Peter Berger) and, of course, constantly asking questions and looking for some ultimate meaning to life (Victor Frankl, Eric Fromm).

According to Lasch, individualism and privacy are no longer what they once were for modern *psychologized* human beings:

Acquisitive in the sense that his [her] cravings have no limits, he [she] does not accumulate goods and provisions against the future, in the manner of the acquisitive individualist of the nineteenth-century political economy, but demands immediate gratification and lives in a state of restless, perpetually unsatisfied desire.⁶⁵

What is the source of this unsatisfied desire? There are many analyses and accompanying theoretical explanations for human dissatisfaction in modern society. Many theologians point to the lack of spirituality evident in a secular society; ethicists and sociologists draw our attention to the absence of any homogeneous moral authority for social norms within fragmented and pluralist culture (what Emile Durkheim called *anomie*, representing the psychology of the breakdown of *Gemeinschaft* which occurs when the glue of social and moral norms comes undone).⁶⁶ Other theorists appeal to Marx's theory of alienation which blames capitalism for the pervasive feeling of aloneness underlying addictions. All these theories offer valid routes for social psychological inquiry, but without analyzing and

⁶⁵ Christopher Lasch, *Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: Warner Books, 1979), p. 23.

⁶⁶ The meaning of *Gemeinschaft* will be explored in conjunction with a study of social conformity in chapter six.

discovering all the factors concerning widely shared experiences of dissatisfaction, the most that general theories can offer are possible explanations, or perhaps, partial explanations.

It is also possible to tie an analysis of the social psychological dynamics of addiction into the sociological analysis of modern society (developed in chapter three) where the focus was the effects of fragmented and socially classified categorizations and levels of experience within both social institutions and human consciousness. Abstract consciousness and fragmented lifestyle foster personal patterns of living which are functional and beneficial to a fragmented capitalist society, yet have devastating results on personal health and happiness. As Philip Wexler suggests, the challenge to experience joy in life has been made far more difficult by the logic and structures of modern society. The pervasiveness of addictions of all kinds points to the spiritual and humanitarian void created by fragmented social life:

As abstracted accumulation becomes the preoccupation and standard of self-organization, the capacity to be gratified by the intense specificity of the immediate situation declines. It is replaced by an addictive obsession which aims to capture the gratification of specific sensuousness by pursuing those products of commodified social relations which are the very source of the deprivation. Addiction, not desire, becomes the mode or organism-environment relation when connection to the immediate environment is replaced by pursuit of a decontextualized abstraction.⁶⁷

This explanation makes a fundamental connection between the dynamics of addictive *thinking and acting* and contemporary characteristics of human *knowing and doing* within society. In other words, this theoretical explanation points to the separation between human consciousness and the world of immediate knowing. In a fragmented social and psychological world, people are not free to be truly present to what is happening, but must constantly (a) *adopt* what they have no time to understand critically, so they can (b) *adapt* themselves to social life in a functionally acceptable manner. Such adaption may take two decisive forms - not entirely unlike those forms characteristic of symbiotic interpersonal relationships - with both forms quashing the dynamics of critical thinking by adopting a polarized conceptualization (others say *reification* or *abstraction*), within which the

⁶⁷ Philip Wexler, *Critical Social Psychology* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), p. 123.

individual defines him or herself by assuming either a lifestyle based on knowing and experiencing the world *concretely* (without critical thinking) or *abstractly* (without knowledge of acquaintance). The outcome in either instance is a lack of critical awareness and transformative praxis.

Making the important connections between the deadening of moral awareness which can easily accompany addictions - and the promulgation of ignorance concerning the social factors which contribute to addiction - suggests that a truly responsible approach to the social problem of excessive consumerism and social systems which deny and frustrate legitimate human needs will rely on a unified personal-social praxis which aims at both the transformation of self and society. Many who overcome addictions do so through intentional transformation, involving the discovery of power through commitment to a new or renewed master story and engagement in community.

4. The Dynamics of Dependency in Symbiotic Relationship

Psychologists and family therapists define the concept of *symbiotic* relationship as a way of describing a specific pattern of negative dependency within a relationship of two people:

"Symbiosis" - as we use the term in psychiatry - is not a mutually beneficial state of interdependency. Instead it refers to a mutually parasitic and destructive coupling. In the symbiotic relationship neither partner will separate from the other even though it would obviously be beneficial to each if they could.⁶⁸

Separation is, of course, only one positive response to symbiotic relationship. A transformation of the structure of the relationship following mutual awareness of its negative dynamics is also a viable - and perhaps healthier - approach if both individuals together work at changing the dynamics of the relationship.

Whereas Peck uses the phrase *mutually parasitic* to define symbiotic relationship, Memmi makes a distinction between *parasitic* dependence and *symbiotic* dependence, suggesting that it is possible to have a relationship defined by dependency where only one

⁶⁸ Peck, *People of the Lie*, p. 137.

person *feeds* of the other person: ". . . let us distinguish between parasitic dependence, which is all to the advantage of the dependent, and symbiotic dependence, in which there is some advantage for the provider as well."⁶⁹ The understanding of negative dependency in relationships adopted in this research is that of symbiotic relationships understood as a *mutually parasitic and distorted relationship characterized by an unequal sharing of power between two people*. Within a symbiotic relationship the consciousness of one individual is essentially that of *dependent* (regardless of whether the individual suffers from an active addiction to a particular *thing*) and *alter-dependent*. It may seem confusing to characterize the person with more power as *dependent*, and the subordinate person as *alter-dependent*, but as we come to a deeper understanding of the dynamics at play in symbiotic relationships we see that the person with more political power has, to some extent, removed him or herself from the production and maintenance processes which are necessary for a more independent lifestyle - both in a material and spiritual manner. The alter-dependent, on the other hand, usually has more options and power than he or she realizes, as a result of the repressed consciousness which accompanies subordinate status in symbiotic relationships; the key to effecting transformation and liberation from debilitating patterns of dependency is by gaining awareness of the possibilities, as well as costs, of pursuing freedom.

4.1 The Distinction between Dependent and Alter-Dependent

Researchers and therapists working in the field of addictions make a basic distinction between *addict* and *codependent*. The term *codependent*, although it signifies accurately how two people can *together* become dependent on the same negative and unequal dynamics within a single relationship, suggests a greater degree of cooperation in the joint-project than is usually the case. Dependency often involves exploitation, force, threat of force, as well as more subtle social psychological manipulations and tactics. The fundamental structural nature of the *other-directed* consciousness of the subordinate is

⁶⁹ Memmi, *Dependency*, p. 65-66.

better grasped using the term *alter-dependent*, although the term *codependent* is the term now widely used.

The alter-dependent person adjusts to dysfunction by accommodating the person with addiction. The example which best typifies this analysis is the classic case of the wife who lies to her alcoholic husband's friends and boss to protect his job and good standing in the community. Sometimes willingly, other times more reluctantly, and many more times without any explicit awareness at all, alter-dependent parties in relationships will modify their thinking and acting to accommodate or adjust to the *other*, rather than investigate their own life and assume their subjectivity as human agents responsible for self-directed thinking and acting.

The term *co-dependency* has emerged in self-help groups and counselling centres which deal with the living problems of those close to other people who suffer from addiction. The addict is the powerful one in the symbiotic relationship, however, the basis of the relationship is defined by the addict's dependency. The other person is a *codependent* because she or he remains with the *dependent* person. But what of situations where both individuals suffer from active addiction? Who is the alter-dependent? What about symbiotic relationships where neither suffer from addictions? Alter-dependent consciousness is not simply a common feature of relationships involving addiction; alter-dependent consciousness is the psychological consequence of oppression of all kinds.

The tension between self-affirmation and mutual recognition operates within each person in the relationship, and must be kept balanced if power is to be distributed equally between the two people. If this does not happen, a sense of identity by both individuals in the relationship will not be grounded in authentic self-awareness and honest mutual disclosure of self-to-other. As with abstract and concrete fixations, individuals can adapt a fixated *dependent* or *dominant* identity role in the relationship which takes the place of a dynamic process of reflection: "When the conflict between dependence and independence becomes too intense, the psyche gives up the paradox in favor of an opposition. Polarity, the conflict of opposites, replaces the balance within the self. This polarity sets the stage

for defining the self in terms of a movement away from dependency."⁷⁰

In symbiotic relationship, fixed and differentiated roles are adopted where one person grounds his or her identity either on *being for the other* (alter-dependent), or on *being for oneself* (dependent) rather than *being for each other*. Both terms *dependent* and *alter-dependent* are ideal types, or models, reflecting the two extremes of *complete unity* and *absolute differentiation* in relationship.

The emotional numbing and illusions of power which tend to accompany active addictions often determine the way in which this tension between self-affirmation and mutual recognition finds resolution within the life of one individual in symbiotic relationship. While the active addict will tend to assume the role of the powerful and independent person, denying his or her emotional need for the *other*, such need not be the case. As Kasl explains, the outcome will depend on the kind of options the individual picks, or has available, to reduce emotional pain and anxiety: "Negative core beliefs create internal devastation and hopelessness along with tremendous fear, anxiety, and depression. . . . The beliefs she [he] adopts to reduce anxiety will be fundamental in whether she [he] moves toward a primary role as codependent or addict." The dependent person responds to negative core beliefs about self by generating an illusory sense of independence and power. This is the response of the *dependent*: I don't need anyone; I'm tough, I can do it myself; I refuse to risk getting hurt again; I don't need to risk disclosing my true feelings and ideas to others. The *alter-dependent* responds to abuse or neglect quite differently: I'm no good; I'm unlovable; if I make myself beautiful, suffer in silence, work tirelessly, accommodate the needs of the other, then he or she will love me, and I will become lovable. Until then I'm not lovable.

The person who separates from others as a security measure against being rejected or hurt, will invariably seek power in *things* to deaden emotions and cope with isolation: the essential dynamics of addiction. The person who seeks constant approval and affirmation from another person will centre his or her sense of power in that other person - the alter-dependent's sense of personal power is conditional upon receiving the recognition

⁷⁰ Benjamin, *The bonds of Love*, p. 50.

and affirmation of a dominant *other*.

In symbiotic relationships both the dependent and alter-dependent deny themselves fulfilment of a basic need: the dependent denies his or her *awareness of dependence on the other* while pursuing autonomous power, the alter-dependent denies *awareness of a core fear of acting independently*, and compensates with a false sense of power obtained from security ties to another person. There can be no liberation as long as these fears are not acknowledged and faced daily in the dependent's and alter-dependent's life praxis.

The mutual construction of identity in the reciprocal relationship of people who truly care for one another - recognizing and affirming each other in mutual dialogue and encounter - is corrupted by the psychosocial dynamics of negative dependency. With dependency, the relationship becomes polarized and unequal. Kasl's definition of codependent identity is instructive:

I describe a codependent person as someone whose core identity is underdeveloped or unknown, and who maintains a false identity built from dependent attachments to external sources - a partner, a spouse, family, appearances, work, or rules. These attachments create both the illusion of a "self" and a form from which to operate. Codependency is a disease [sic] of inequality in that any minority person who has to survive in a world defined by others will know more about those in power than about himself or herself.⁷¹

Despite the suggestion in the title of Robin Norwood's popular book *Women Who Love Too Much*, Kasl believes that, ". . . codependency is not about loving too much, it is about being extremely dependent on another person, about women who control too much, seek their identity through others, and pay for care with self-sacrifice."⁷²

The particular identity traits and defining characteristics of the *alter-dependent* and *dependent* become especially manifest in sexual relations. As Kasl notes: "The addicted woman uses sex to feel in control, to feel attached to someone, and to hide her pain. The codependent woman allows herself to be used sexually to maintain a relationship that

⁷¹ Kasl, *Women, Sex, and Addiction*, p. 31.

⁷² Kasl, *Women, Sex, and Addiction*, p. 40.

brings the illusion of security and provides structure in her life."⁷³ Both dependent and alter-dependent individuals project an image of themselves to others that hides significant parts of themselves. Alter-dependents tend to let their dependent, frightened side show, and deny or submerge their powerful side. The addict or dependent reflects a facade of independence which hides the frightened, tender side. Such relationships can become rigidly entrenched in the routine lifestyle of the two people, remaining stuck in the same essential pattern indefinitely, however, the negative effects on both parties tend to worsen over time, and may eventually become too intolerable to bear for one or both people.

Scott Peck discusses how the negative dynamics within symbiosis are logically self-perpetuating. In one particular case, where a husband had assumed the status of alter-dependent to his more domineering wife, the relationship steadily deteriorated: "Once the relationship was established, it became a vicious circle, naturally intensifying the sickness of each. Her domination further encouraged his submissiveness, and his weakness further nourished her desire for power over someone."⁷⁴ It is interesting that in this particular case it is a man who has assumed the identity and status of *alter-dependent*, and not the woman. Usually it is women. The unequal distribution of power between men and women in interpersonal relationships mirrors the structural inequality and logic of patriarchy in Western democratic societies.

4.2 Patriarchy: The Politics of Symbiotic Relationships

Statistics show that women are far more likely to adopt the identity role of *alter-dependent* than men. If symbiotic relationships are indeed influenced by the dominant cultural ethos of gender inequality, and the dominant political paradigm of patriarchy in virtually all social institutions, it should not be surprising to discover that in capitalist countries such as Canada, women are economically exploited and are relegated to

⁷³ Kasl, *Women, Sex, and Addiction*, p. 99.

⁷⁴ Peck, *People of the Lie*, p. 118.

subordinate social roles and positions more than men. This structural fact of social reality forms the backdrop for the unequal distribution of power and fairness played out within interpersonal relationships: "... traits of codependency are usually associated with those who have less power in the system - women - and have to figure out how to live in someone else's - men's - world."⁷⁵ This is a key insight. Without control over one's immediate environment and daily life, accommodation and adaptation to those who dictate and decide may often be the only available option. When people are not accorded equal status, or given the dignity and respect they deserve, they will tend to explain such treatment as the result of personal unworthiness, until such time as they gain a more truthful and comprehensive analysis of the factors which explain their being treated unequally. Anne Patrick spells out some of the social psychological factors which explain why adopting an alter-dependent role in relationships is the typical response of women:

For given the disparate social experiences of the two sexes, the "temptations of women are different from those of men." Instead of pride being the greatest danger, for women the chief temptation is to fail to have a centered self, to yield up responsibility for one's identity and actions to other persons and environmental factors. Whereas men are tempted to abuse their power, women tend to abdicate their possibilities for using power properly by surrendering it for the sake of approval and security.⁷⁶

Alter-dependency essentially represents an unhealthy fixation and mental preoccupation with things concerning someone other than oneself. The alter-dependent state of consciousness is marked by a deficit in self-knowledge, and an uncritical, passive state of awareness. Because the alter-dependent state of other-directed consciousness reflects a political structure which discourages mutual affirmation and recognition within relationships, how social structures and cultural influence encourage men and women to establish identity within society becomes a key area for investigation. For example, in Western culture, men have traditionally been encouraged to find their life's meaning and identity in the *public* domain. This can have potentially devastating consequences for interpersonal and sexual relationships:

⁷⁵ Kasl, *Women, Sex, and Addiction*, p. 32.

⁷⁶ Anne Patrick, "Narrative and the Social Dynamics of Virtue," *Concilium*, 191-3, 1987, p. 77.

In Western society men are taught to find their life's meaning and identity through work. They are encouraged to be independent, isolated, and goal oriented and to hide their vulnerability, which makes bonding with a woman difficult at best. This carries over into sex, which often becomes performance oriented or a means of control rather than a source of meaningful human contact.⁷⁷

The norms and unspoken mores of our culture have deemed certain behaviour acceptable for men and unacceptable for women. Likewise, other behaviours are acceptable for women but are discouraged in men. A careful analysis of what determines acceptability in such cases reveals that those actions which express power are usually acceptable for men and not for women, and those actions which express the basic human need for tenderness and consolation are acceptable and encouraged in women, while socially taboo for men. Kasl notes how it is quite acceptable and even expected that men playing together on a football team will caress each other in jubilation after a win, but will walk to the dressing room in stoic isolation with a loss: "For the losing team members to hug and stroke one another would mean admitting to neediness, which is like admitting to dependency on others, and that, of course, is something our culture discourages in men."⁷⁸ On the other hand, women are consistently and pervasively portrayed in a subordinate and passive role: "The 'sexy' woman - an image that intimidates women whether or not they strive to conform to it - is sexy, but as object, not as subject. She expresses not so much 'her' desire as her pleasure in being desired; what she enjoys is her capacity to evoke desire in the other, to attract."⁷⁹ It is this basic gender-based role division within our culture which equates masculinity with desire (the one acting and in control), and femininity with the object of desire (the one passive and powerless), which largely explains the prevalence of relationships where women with an *other-directed consciousness* are linked up in symbiotic relationships with *authoritarian and oppressive* partners. "Women's sexual agency is often inhibited and her desire is often expressed by choosing subordination. But this situation is not inevitable; it has come into being through forces that we intend to

⁷⁷ Kasl, *Women, Sex, and Addiction*, p. 227.

⁷⁸ Kasl, *Women, Sex, and Addiction*, p. 229.

⁷⁹ Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love*, p. 89.

understand and counteract."⁸⁰

Kasl explains that it is because culture encourages women to be submissive and sexually available for men that problems of sex addiction are often not perceived as the source of unhappiness: "Gerri knew that something was wrong, but without a label, a diagnosis, she was powerless to embark on a path of recovery. This reflects our blindness to sex addiction and codependency. Because such behaviour is essentially the norm of the culture, few people see it as a problem."⁸¹ Personal problems? Yes; but also reflections of a political and cultural social reality desperately in need of transformation.

There is no simple explanation or solution for the unequal distribution of power within a given relationship. We can identify both personal and social dimensions which make authentic human communication possible. Identifying these factors opens up possible avenues for change. Despite the offensive nature of cultural portrayals of women and men in a stigmatizing role differentiation, there is reason to believe that our increasing awareness of the social psychological dynamics of sexual inequality and arrested human growth will result in these problems being addressed and overcome. With such an analysis we come to see how our culture and the structure of social relations may have brought us to where we are now, but need determine our future no longer. With awareness comes the opportunity to transform personal relationships and the structures and culture of society.

5. The Dynamics of Economic & Political Dependency

What happens between two individuals in a symbiotic relationship can also occur between groups of people living in different countries. Nations have trade agreements, loan agreements, diplomatic ties and other forms of political relations. The economic power and influence of international financial institutions such as the *International Monetary Fund*, the *World Bank*, and various alliances between countries, such as the

⁸⁰ Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love*, p. 90.

⁸¹ Kasl, *Women, Sex, and Addiction*, p. 74.

Group of Seven and the *General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)*, and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) exert a tremendously powerful shaping force on societies throughout the world.

There are also a series of relations operating within countries. In Canada there are political and economic relations within and between provinces, between each province and the federal government, and between regions. What are the structural dynamics which define and characterize such relations? An adequate answer requires that many other more concrete questions are first answered. Who formulates and dictates political policies? Who formulates and implements economic strategies? Who benefits from political and economic policies and programs? Are some countries or regions *dependent* on other countries for their wealth such that they dominate the other and, through one mechanism or another, transform the other country into an *alter-dependent* population? An other-directed (or more accurately, directed-by-another) exploited country or region overwhelmed by social forces the people neither fully understand nor control?

Entire groups, regions, and indeed, whole countries can bear a collectively shared *alter-dependent* self-understanding within a system of socio-economic relations with outside *parasitic* powers which have become internally entrenched in the *host* country or region. Like most parasites, they try to remain disguised and hidden. The dynamics are not at all unlike those which operate between two people in a symbiotic relationship. Just as an alter-dependent person suffers from low self-esteem and a lack of personal power or autonomy, so too can the majority population of countries and regions find themselves under the control and direction of foreign and unfriendly powers. This psychological state lacking critical social awareness or serious self-reflection is often the result of factors which effectively control human life and dictate the direction of both one's attention and physical movement: forced inferiorization and dehumanization which have accompanied political oppression and economic domination offer ample historical testimony to this tragic fact.

Uncovering the social psychological dynamics of political dependency involves an investigation of how the powerful *few*, who control and direct the lives of the powerless

many, establish social and cultural constraints which radically alter the personal and collective identity of people. Overcoming such identify-deformation and material impoverishment requires critical insight into the structures and processes which ensure the continuation of political and economic dependency.

The following two sections examine an increasingly popular sociological theory of dependency, first developed in Latin America, then modified and adapted to Canadian social conditions. The psychology of subordination in political and economic dependency relationships will be discussed from the perspective of the oppressed, exploited, passive and other-directed consciousness of the alter-dependent.

5.1 Latin American Dependency Theory as *Sociology of Oppression*

Social theorists from Latin American have developed critical theories which guide their investigation in their social situations of powerlessness, oppression and poverty to better analyze the structures controlling and perpetuating the system of exploitation. During the last 25 years, these theories have had an increasingly important impact on the formulation of Canadian social theory, as insightful tools for understanding the forces dictating world development and underdevelopment trends. Dependency theory emerged in Latin American in conjunction with literacy campaigns using a critical method, and the formation of thousands of base Christian communities, based on a critical reading of both the bible and society. Dependency theorists sought to explain the reproduction of economic and political oppression happening within their countries.

There is no need to enter into an extensive historical analysis of colonialism, slavery and political domination in this study. There are many excellent historical writings which depict in vivid detail the events which chronicled the colonial period.⁸² We need only reactivate our awareness by calling to mind the graphic and disturbing images which chronicled the brutal uprooting and enslavement of the peoples of Africa portrayed in the

⁸² For an excellent history of the colonization of Latin America read Enrique Dussel, *History and the Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1976).

book and television series *Roots*. The era of colonial expansion resulted in various European countries enslaving, uprooting and displacing, and subjugating entire peoples in African and Latin America.

What causes the continuation of dependence on outside forces and powers? Dependency theorists do not regard dependency as an unfortunate consequence of some other primary process - dependency is itself something which is actively promoted, can be identified, named and defined with access to social information and the acquisition of democratic political power: "The dependency theorists understand development as the active socioeconomic and political process of promoting dependence, which in turn leads to the establishment of structures and institutions that preempt development."⁸³

Dependency theorists see *development* and *underdevelopment* as interrelated in a structured economic and political dependency relationship. On an international scale, the world system of capitalism, with powerful transnationals determining and deciding trade, finance and development matters for the subordinate countries, perpetuate relations between a few developed and dominant countries on the *centre* pole of the geo-political relationship, and the many underdeveloped and subordinate or enslaved countries on the *periphery*. Historically, the centre exploits the resources of the periphery first through coercion and enslavement (colonialism) then by acquiring and/or controlling local resources through debt bondage (neo-colonialism). This active intrusion and manipulation of local political economy by outside power interests succeeds in transforming the character of regions and countries, and establishing permanent dependency ties:

*By tailoring their economies to meeting the needs of the advanced ones, peripheral countries become dependent on the advanced for supplies of capital, credit, technology, expertise, and the very market demand that makes possible continued production. Hence local needs and local markets tend to be neglected, for the better part of all economic activity is directed toward external markets and consumers.*⁸⁴

The actual situation is far more complex than a two-unit analysis, where one country is defined as oppressor and the other as underdeveloped or dependent.

⁸³ Anton L. Allahar, *Sociology and the Periphery: Theories and Issues* (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1989), p. 85.

⁸⁴ Allahar, *Sociology and the Periphery*, p. 90.

Dependency theorists also point to elites which exist within peripheral countries or regions; elites who have the ambivalent status of being both wealthy and powerful, yet are still directed by foreign powers having even more power:

In Latin America, for example, we have oppressors and oppressed. But many elite groups are themselves dominated by foreign powers. So the domestic dominator may in turn be dominated by foreign oppressors. In short, there are different grades and stages of oppression in the whole dialectic of elite and masses.⁸⁵

There is an interconnected hierarchy of political and economic levels which extends from the local region right up to the board of directors of the IMF and World Bank.

Dependency theorists pursue emancipatory goals and view the human person as a thinking agent capable of cooperating with other human beings to bring about social transformation. They believe that human beings have both the power and right to determine their own collective social reality. Dependency theorists view the poverty and oppression of subjugated peoples as an imposed aberration which cripples the natural creative aspirations of people, and ignores legitimate human needs. People were not always politically and economically dependent; they were made dependent. The dynamics of oppression and de-development can be explained and overcome. This requires an understanding of the negative psychological impacts on human consciousness and moral awareness that result from economic and political dependency.

5.2 The Impact of Dependency Theory on Canadian Social Analysis

Just as some countries act as *centres* to other *peripheral* countries suffering perpetual underdevelopment, there also exists within those *centre countries* - such as Canada - an *internal* expression of economically and politically-structured inequality. Here the movement is from peripheral regions to some metropolis centre within the country. The peripheral region experiences a different degree of the very same unequal economic and political relations with a *centre* or *metropolis* city or area, as do third world countries vis-a-vis first world countries.

⁸⁵ Enrique Dussel, *History and the Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1976), p. 146.

Whereas some regions of the world were conquered by means of slavery and subjugation of native peoples, other historical acquisitions of territory established colonies of emigrants from the Old World. Canada is such a country. The native peoples were manipulated and exploited from the time of the first settlers; however they did not stand in the way of white expansionism. Nor did they ever constitute a serious barrier to the motherland's (Great Britain, France) goals of acquiring and controlling virtually the entire land mass we now call Canada. The native population of Canada were - depending on the region of the country - brutalized and murdered, displaced, exploited, and denigrated, as their land was taken from them, either displaced into poverty-stricken isolated communities in the North, or assimilated into the lowest class of citizens in the dominant white society. This represents a markedly different style of expansionism than that of other regions of the world, such as Latin America.

Canada has, nonetheless, from the very beginning been a *secondary* world power, subordinate to, and always serving the economic interests of more powerful outside powers. From the very beginning, the development of infrastructure and resource industries within Canada were decided by outside powers interested in receiving cheap exports of raw materials. Although the most powerful outside controlling influence in Canada has long-since shifted from Great Britain to the United States, the internal design of Canadian economy remains that of a colony upon which outside powers feed. Canadian social theorists have given much attention to the utility of Latin American dependency theory to explain the historical and current workings of Canadian society:

*In recent years a massive literature has grown around the themes of dependency, regionalism, colonialism, and internal colonialism in Canada. Using the basic dependency model of "centre" and "periphery" (Gathung, 1971), "metropolis" and "satellite" (Gunder Frank 1973) and "Metropolis" and "hinterland" (Davis, 1971) Canadian scholars have attempted to explain the pattern of dependent uneven development 'within Canada'. . .*⁸⁶

The rich dialogue among Canadian social theorists concerning the usefulness of third world dependency theory has refined an approach which better recognizes the differences

⁸⁶ Allahar, *Sociology and the Periphery*, p. 97.

in each situation and locale. As Allahar suggests, a move from abstract superstructural social theory to ever more concrete analysis has been the direction the discussion has taken: "... in a country as vast and diverse as Canada with its 25 million inhabitants, it makes little sense to use the entire country as a unit of analysis when investigating the phenomena of development and underdevelopment."⁸⁷ Statistical studies on ownership, trade relations, government policy, and many other factors are indispensable for an analysis of economic and political dependency within Canada. Recent studies in Canadian political economy have traced and documented the movement of capital and the acquisition of resources in great detail.⁸⁸

The Canadian Churches have also provided a wealth of social analysis and ethical commentary during the last number of years. They have investigated and analyzed international issues of justice,⁸⁹ studied economic and political inequalities within Canada,⁹⁰ and they have repeatedly called for a new economic order founded on principles of justice, peace and sustainability.

Anxiety and concern over the Americanization of Canada has sharply increased since the Federal government signed the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement in 1989. On the other hand, the economic elite *within* Canada continue to extend their corporate

⁸⁷ Allahar, *Sociology and the Periphery*, p. 102

⁸⁸ For a somewhat dated, but excellent discussion of the involvement of U.S. Multinational Corporations in Canada read Kari Levitt, *Silent Surrender: The Multinational Corporation in Canada* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1970); For a more recent discussion on this subject read Jorge Niosi, *Canadian Multinationals* (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1985).

⁸⁹ Some examples of Church Documents which have focused on international issues of justice are: *Super-States and Multi-National Corporations in a Developing World Community* (Canadian Catholic Conference To the Third International Synod of Catholic Bishops in Rome, 1971), *Development Demands Justice* (Canadian Church Leaders to Canadians, 1973), *Justice Demands Action* (A Statement of Concern to the Prime Minister and Cabinet by the Canadian Church Leaders, 1976), *Towards a New International Economic Order* (A Message to the Prime Minister, Catholic Episcopal Commission for Social Affairs, 1981).

⁹⁰ Some examples of Canadian Church documents which offer a social analysis and Christian ethical commentary on social inequality and regional dependency are: *The economics of Injustice* (United Church of Canada, 1970); *To Establish a Kingdom of Justice* (Roman Catholic Bishops of the Atlantic Provinces, 1979); *Ethical Reflections on the Economic crisis*, The Episcopal Commission for Social Affairs, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1983); *A Society to be Transformed* (CCCCB, 1977). Ethical Choices and Political Challenges: A Brief to the Royal Commission on the Economic Union and Development prospects for Canada.

interests into third world countries.⁹¹ Also of central concern is Canada's growing indebtedness to sources of wealth outside the country, and the way in which this serious problem is being obscured by the exaggerated concern over the public debt.⁹²

How are we to situate Canada within a dependency theory? From the perspective of Canadian economic interests we see a country which can, as Jorge Niosi notes, be viewed as a major imperialist country whose multinational corporations have extensive control of banking and industry in peripheral countries such as the Caribbean.⁹³

The local Canadian economic and political elite is also allied internationally with other capitalist classes. Together these trans-national capitalists are responsible for much of the underdevelopment that characterizes large regions of Canada and the Third World. Recognition of this modern world fact has served as the basis for solidarity among peoples working for social justice around the world, and has laid the foundation for a global macroanalysis of economic and political dependency. This recent research into the international system of capitalism has resulted in new information of central importance to a social psychological study of impediments to dynamic moral awareness.

5.3 Structural Adjustment Programs and International Dependency

In *Recolonization or Liberation: The Bonds of Structural Adjustment and struggles for Emancipation*, the Ecumenical Coalition for Economic Justice (ECEJ) describes the current trends being encouraged by the International Monetary Fund (IMF),

⁹¹ Read for example Robert Chodos, *The Caribbean Connection* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Co, 1977); or to get a picture of the ruling corporate families within Canada read Peter C. Newman *The Canadian Establishment* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1975).

⁹² There are many excellent research articles and papers which explain the true nature of the debt crisis in Canada, including: WAM [Workers Against Myths], National Union of Provincial Government Employees Public Service Alliance of Canada, January 1992.

In June, 1993, Moody's Investors Service responded bluntly to claims by the Federal Conservative government that Canada was facing a debt crisis: "We do not subscribe to the notion of an impending debt crisis," stated Moody's provincial analyst William Streeter. ["Moddy's says debt 'not out of control'," *Financial Post*, June 10, 1993].

⁹³ Jorge Niosi, *Canadian Multinationals*, Toronto: Garamond Press, 1985.

the World Bank and the international elite. These trends are the result of the imposition of what are called *Structural Adjustment Programs* (SAP's). The primary aims of SAP's are described as follows:

The goals of this new colonialism are, in part, the same as the old. Thanks to SAPs, transnational corporations enjoy greater access to cheap raw materials, cheap labour and foreign markets. But there is an additional element: the contemporary recolonization also involves an annual collection of tribute in the form of interest payments on debts that, under terms presently being imposed by creditors, can never be paid off. Thanks to the 'success' of SAPs, debt bondage is becoming permanent.⁹⁴

The bonds of debt keep people continually working and producing for others who are already very wealthy and hold the reins of economic, and increasingly, *political* power. Who were the originators of Structural Adjustment Programs?

When internationally high interest rates created a crisis for debtor countries in the early 80's, the IMF stepped in to police terms of repayment. When stabilization programs imposed by the IMF failed to deal adequately with the debt crisis, the U.S. Treasury Secretary, James Baker, came up with a new strategy to deal with the unworkable debt situation, called, not surprisingly, the Baker Plan. This plan was introduced at annual meetings of the IMF and World Bank in 1985. The World Bank imposed more severe conditions in the form of adjustments to the structures and operations of debtor countries. Recognizing the blatant unfairness of the terms outlined in the Baker Plan, the new Treasury Secretary Nicolas Brady announced a new debt crisis initiative in March, 1989. More recently (June, 1990) President Bush announced his Enterprise for the Americas Initiative seeking to have a Western Hemisphere Free Trade Zone, which represents a further implementation of the trade liberalizing, privatizing and deregulatory dynamics of structural adjustment programs.

Structural Adjustment Programs release laissez-faire capitalism from national policy constraints which, until recently, enjoyed the status of *sacred trust* in many countries, and were safeguarded by governments as a matter of national security. Public policy and regulatory measures based on ethical and political values help to keep the

⁹⁴ Ecumenical Coalition for Economic Justice, *Recolonization or Liberation*, p. 6.

corporate aim of maximizing profit somewhat restrained, with performance requirements, corporate taxes, anti-combines and anti-collusion legislation, etc. The power more recently granted to transnationals allows them to circumvent nation states in their global economic networks, and pit nation against nation in a competitive search for the cheapest resources and labour.

SAPs give corporations and banks incredible power to dictate and control the direction of social change. The outcome of this social change has been permanent debt bondage for countless countries throughout the world. These adjustments have taken the form of (1) *Currency devaluation*, leading to lower commodity prices as more exporters compete for the same markets which seriously damage import-dependent economies; (2) *High interest rate policies*, which discourage investment in production for the home market, encourages speculation, reduces small business from obtaining credit, and fuels inflation; (3) *Restrictions in money supply*, which depress the local economy, raise unemployment, and lead to the deterioration of infrastructure; (4) *Government spending cuts*, which represent a loss of service in education, health, sanitation, water and irrigation, electric power supply, and roads and transportation; (5) *Lower tariffs and import quotas*, which undermine local industries, discourage food self-reliance and encourage high prices luxury imports, and therefore benefit the wealthy; (6) *Privatization of public corporations and the selling of public resources*, which turns over social control to the competitive law operating in the private sector, which demands that making profits must supersede human welfare to ensure success; and (7) *Promotion of exports*, which replaces food crops with export crops while at the same time as increasing dependence on foreign food imports, creating ecological damage from monoculture farming, over-fishing stocks, and clear-cut forestry practices. These policies collectively work to increase the debt, unemployment, insecurity and poverty of already poor and suffering people.

Reputable International organizations have condemned SAPs as, in the words of a UNICEF document, ". . . an outrage against a large section of humanity."⁹⁵ Structural adjustment programs are not well known or understood. Vast numbers of people feel the

⁹⁵ UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children* 1990, (U.K.: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 8.

effects of SAPs in a very real and oppressive manner, without having an accompanying social explanation for why life is getting so much harder. SAPs have resulted from decisions implemented by faceless members of the international economic and political elites. These decisions are made privately, and usually kept from public scrutiny. The language of GATT, monetary policy and macro-analysis are far too esoteric for untrained minds, and most people don't even bother to try and figure out whether budgetary projections, couched in technical mumbo-jumbo and double-talk, have any basis in fact. Many people vaguely sense that there are particular purposes and interests being served by so-called *belt-tightening* or *tough decisions*. Such policies are no longer, however, temporary measures taken to correct or realign an economic system gone slightly off course. . . they are decisions designed and implemented to benefit the owners of international capital, as a quick glance at the years most profitable world corporations profit margins clearly demonstrates.

Repeated concern in Ottawa over the question of Canada's national deficit seems to suggest that no amount of human suffering should stand in the way of eliminating the deficit. The real problem in Canadian finances is not, however, the Canadian national deficit; it is the very much larger foreign debt. This foreign debt is the debt of colonies. It's the same debt that comes under the SAP programs, in a slightly modified way, as the debt of third world countries. It has been the presence of this debt which is currently allowing outside interests to influence the direction of the political economy within Canada.⁹⁶

Due to Canada's status as a *second order* first world power, a growing number of Canadians are feeling the underdeveloping and oppressive effects of their own form of structural adjustment. Many of the above-stated policies mapped out for third world countries which are unable to service their massive foreign debts are now familiar to

⁹⁶ One example of how extensive this control actually has become occurred January (1990), when former Bank of Canada Governor John Crow lowered the Bank rate from 12.43% to 12.14%, what seemed like a very cautious drop. When Foreign creditors immediately withdrew short-term loans from Canada, they in turn prompted currency traders to lower the value of the Canadian dollar to 84.6 cents, which in turn prompted Governor Crow to change his mind and put the interest rate back up to where it was.

Canadian experience. The most noticeable are government spending cuts (reduced transfer payments and the elimination of subsidy and funding programs); efforts to privatize (Canada Post, Via Rail, Air Canada, etc); and lower tariffs and import quotas (Free Trade with United State and Mexico, the GATT) and export promotion (replacing Federal Sales Tax with the Goods and Service Tax).

When outside forces demand political and economic policies which further impoverish people - and the national government accommodates such demands with major readjustments - then we have a situation of economic and political dependency. The destabilization of national governments throughout the world through debt bondage and imposed structural adjustments is perhaps the best macroanalytical characterization of the *New World Order*. Debt is one side of the international economic and political dependency equation; the other, is the increasing loss of people control over capital investment, the economy, and social change at the local, regional and national levels of democratic government.

5.4 Globalization and the Transfer of Political Power to Transnationals

The long imagined *one world power* variously described in futuristic writings and eschatological teachings of religions appears to be coming closer to realization under the current international dynamics and trends of global capitalism. It is not, however, a political or military process which is bringing this concentrated power into being: it is an economic process. Under the new terms of the global economy, it is the transnationals, not national governments, who now decide where and when economic growth will occur in the world, and what shape that growth will take.

The United Nations *1993 World Investment Report* reports that the biggest transnational companies now control *one-third* of the world's private sector assets, and privatization and deregulation trends in countries throughout the world are rapidly increasing this global consolidation of power. The report clarifies how transnationals are creating global production systems in which individual countries form just one *link* in the

corporate chain. Corporations no longer need to establish branch plants and create jobs in order to obtain cheap resources from the world's nations. National governments throughout the world are complying with the new economic order, delivering heavy ideological messages to their populations that to compete successfully in the unregulated global marketplace is the sole social objective by which all other government policy must be judged and made subservient. Although the tone of the message is "yes, we can out-compete the rest," it actually represents what many call a competitive, international *race to the bottom* as national political power is forfeited to banks, transnational corporations, and non-elected trade dispute panels.

National policy decisions no longer emerge from the population as the articulation, or partial articulation, of pragmatic steps toward the realization of a positive social vision; they represent reluctant compliance to the dictates of those holding the directing power of international capital. No country has escaped the effects of the concentration of power and wealth among transnational corporations. According to the UN World Investment Report, "International production has become a central structural characteristic of the world economy," adding that "TNCs. . . encroach on areas over which sovereignty and responsibilities have traditionally been reserved for national governments."⁹⁷ As the UN report states, global concentration of economic power has achieved a stage of development where national governments and workers are easily blackmailed into concessions:

*Virtually every corporate function can be located anywhere and carried out in an integrated manner for a corporate system as a whole. As foreign affiliates become integrated parts of regional and global corporate systems, they may lose autonomy over both managerial and operations aspects.*⁹⁸

The concentration of managerial and operational decisions at the global level renders national governments weaker and far more dependent, powerless, and increasingly

⁹⁷ World Investment Report, 1993: Transnational Corporations and Integrated International Production. United Nations Publications, New York. See also, "Multinationals take lead as world economic force," *Financial Times*, Wednesday, July 21, 1993.

⁹⁸ 1993 World Investment Report, United Nations.

vulnerable to the terms of investment and production dictated by transnational corporations, the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. Local *performance requirements* and other obligations formerly demanded from foreign investors and traders are not required under the North American Free Trade Agreement. Perhaps not surprising, the nature of virtually all foreign investment in recent years has been buy-outs of Canadian companies.⁹⁹ Transnational corporations are not only benefitting from recently passed trade agreements and expanding their holdings in Canada, the same is true for virtually every country in the world. Another 1993 UN report states that transnational corporations now control one-third of the world's privately-owned productive assets, yet the largest 400 TNCs employ only 23.4 million people - 16.6 million fewer than in the 1970s.¹⁰⁰

Such is the shape of the future taking form under the auspices of what has been referred to as the *New World Order*. It is also the paramount social reality which forms the basis of an authentic and revealing analysis of all other forms and manifestations of dependency. These powerful social trends are directing the shape of the present and the future, without the vast majority of people either participating politically in directing social change, or even being aware of who is planning the future, and what that future will look like. Without awareness among the populations and alternative social initiatives, individuals continue to fuel these transforming and often destructive trends - while never consciously deciding to do so - with their very own labour (like subordinates in all dependent relationships).

We need to increase our awareness of how particular economic forces and trends represent the single greatest threat to global survival, and constitute, without question, the greatest dependency with which all citizens must somehow contend. We need to develop an awareness of the *illusion of unlimited power* which creates a psychology of submission,

⁹⁹ According to *Investment Canada* statistics, as of Fall, 1992, over 93% of all foreign investment in Canada since 1986 has been for take-over of 4,515 companies. Only 6.8% of the \$155.817 billion total was for new business investment.

¹⁰⁰ Multinationals and Employment. United Nations International Labour Office, Geneva, Switzerland, 1993.

unquestioning obedience and compliance to transnational corporations. The reality is that these economic giants are completely dependent on the labour, natural resources, and political cooperation of governments, none of which they have a right to exploit without concern for the common good. Alternative economic models to overcome the economic dependency currently gripping masses of peoples throughout the world remain possible. The consolidation of wealth in private hands at a global level represents a powerful new form of economic and political slavery based on international trade agreements and monetary and bank lending policies which favour the wealthy. This process of international wealth consolidation through non-democratic commercial structures can only be arrested, and gradually displaced, through alternative economic systems which are based on sustainable development strategies, managed trade agreements with other countries, disaffiliation from petro-chemical based economies, and domestic social policies which ensure national food security, health and shelter for all people.

5.5 Inferiorization: The Psychology of Political & Economic Dependency

Describing the inferiorization of subjugated peoples requires substantial *knowledge of acquaintance* or experiential knowledge: one has to discover the dynamic workings of human psychology (knowing and consciousness) under oppressive social conditions; conditions which may include (a) long and burdensome work routines, (b) extreme poverty and deprivation of needs, (c) the virtual annihilation of indigenous culture, and (d) the superimposition of an alien cultural ethos which redefines history and social reality. The inferiorization of people happens from their being transformed, deformed and scarred by dehumanizing political and economic forces. This dependency process causing human deformation begins from the very first moment of enslavement, the first brutal act establishing quiescence and reluctant cooperation in a conquered people.

What happens at the political, economic and territorial level also happens at the level of human consciousness and group dynamics. It is impossible to overlook the very same excessive *other-directed* orientation - and the accompanying denial of one's own

needs - between the underdeveloped country and the developed country on the one hand, and between the alter-dependent and dependent in symbiotic relationships on the other. In *Toward a New Psychology of Women*, Jean Baker Miller gives an insightful analysis of these initial unfolding dynamics defining some groups as subordinate, which are also insightful for political and economic cases of subjugation:

Once a group is defined as inferior, the superiors tend to label it as defective or substandard in various ways. . . . It follows that subordinates are described in terms of, and encouraged to develop, personal psychological characteristics that are pleasing to the dominant group. . . . submissiveness, passivity, docility, dependency, lack of initiative, inability to act, to decide, to think, and the like. . . . qualities more characteristic of children. . . . If subordinates adopt these characteristics they are considered well-adjusted. . . . It is perhaps unnecessary to add that the dominant group usually holds all of the open power and authority and determines the ways in which power may be acceptably used.¹⁰¹

Franz Fanon speaks of the systematic derogation of native culture which accompanies enforced economic dependence in his book, *Wretched of the Earth*. He believes the primary derogation of a people by an oppressive system changes people's self-understanding and leads native peoples to derogate themselves, leading to repression of negative feelings and wasted energy. Repressed negative energy is eventually expressed irrationally either in the form of frustrations directed at themselves (masochism) or at their native brothers and sisters (sadism), rather than at the social source of their problems - the colonialist powers and structures. Recalling how lifestyle and daily routine affect identity makes it easier to understand how dependent consciousness comes *after the fact*, as a direct consequence of forceful domination. Barry Adam explores this phenomenon in, *The Survival of Domination*:

Inferiorized people discover themselves as symbols manipulated in the transmission of the dominant culture. Their "objective" identity lives beyond their control; the image of self, institutionalized by cultural agents, exists alien to their own experience and self-expression. The ongoing, emergent lives of a people are confronted by a "representation" which exists only as an object for the other.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Found in Kasl, *Women Sex and Addiction*, pp. 248-249.

¹⁰² Barry Adam, *The Survival of Domination: Inferiorization and Everyday Life* (New York, N.Y.: Elsevier North-Holland, Inc, 1978), p. 31.

With the reproduction of such negative representations through generations, Adam tells us that each inferiorized individual will at some point see him or herself as a *devalued* other. Seeing oneself as *without value* can result from internalizing a negative stereotypical characterisation or image presented within the media and culture; it can also be, more concretely, a reflection of the accommodations which are made to adjust to the actual reality of oppression in daily life. As Adam correctly points out, giving attention to the daily thinking and acting of those exploited or oppressed has often escaped the attention of social theorists: "Behaviour which is mundane, routine, and taken for granted tends to escape the notice of the more dramatic macrohistories. . . . To understand the production and maintenance of social order necessitates focus upon the social accomplishment of inferiority in everyday life."¹⁰³

Probing the social accomplishment of inferiority in everyday life involves a complex study. Adam suggests adopting a language and method to detect the way in which domination is accomplished as a received structure of access to social goods. This manner of speaking of domination helps to unite, within the same theory, daily routine and the boundaries and conditions imposed by social structures and cultural forces. It also illustrates how domination operates psychologically in the daily lives of those who are directed by alien forces and illegitimate authorities. Uniting the *political* with everyday life is critical for an understanding of the dynamics of negative political and economic dependency. From this connection comes the awareness that, as subjugated people, the majority has much more power than they tend to realize due to the ideological social constructs of the dominant cultural ethos generated by elites. This is the juncture between psychology, ethics and politics, where Hegel's master and slave dialectic serves as an insightful reflection.

Paulo Freire cites Hegel's model to explain the function of master and slave consciousness within negative dependency. "If what characterizes the oppressed is their subordination to the consciousness of the master, as Hegel affirms, true solidarity with the oppressed means fighting at their side to transform the objective reality which has made

¹⁰³ Adam, *The Survival of Domination*, p. 1-2.

these 'beings for another'.¹⁰⁴ In the stifling world of political and economic subjugation, the oppressor consciousness tends to transform everything into an object of its domination. Nothing escapes being defined as an object to manipulate and control. It is the control exercised by the established economic and political power elites *who are dependent* on the resources and labour of those without control over their own attention or praxis, which makes it extremely difficult for people's participation in society to be guided by critical thinking and transformative practice.

Freire uses the expression *the culture of silence of the dispossessed* to convey the notion that oppressed people's ignorance and lethargy are the direct product of a situation of economic, social and political domination - and of paternalism - of which they are victims. Rather than being equipped to know and respond to the concrete realities of their world, they are kept *submerged* in a situation where attaining critical awareness and is practically impossible. Freire believed - as was discussed in chapter four - that one of the major instruments for the maintenance of this culture of silence was through educational social institutions which foster unauthentic views of reality, and discourage critical reflection. With the banking approach, the world is static and permanent:

*The activity of the subject turns upon itself as it turns away from the constraint structure accepted as given. The dialectic between the subject and the quasiobjective environment is, in this mode, frozen: the social constraint structure is reified into a fixed, inevitable system. The subject falls into the masochistic orientation, turning upon himself or herself to cope with domination.*¹⁰⁵

Submerged consciousness, a lack of critical awareness, inferiorized or alter-dependent identity; these are but a few of the concepts which help to explain a particular form of social ignorance caused primarily by economic and political dependency. When individuals do not gain awareness of the central reality of unequal sharing of economic wealth and political power, neither they nor the system can undergo fundamental positive change. Unable to answer the question *why*, people are also unable to answer the question *how*: "As long as the oppressed remain unaware of the causes of their condition, they

¹⁰⁴ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Seabury Press, 1970), p. 34.

¹⁰⁵ Adam, *The Survival of Domination*, p. 77.

fatalistically 'accept' their exploitation."¹⁰⁶

What happens when the oppressed begin to gain an awareness of the causes of their condition? This is the critical juncture for all cases of moral transformation: to pursue justice and liberation, or to adapt to inequality and oppression? This question comes on the heels of the first inkling of awareness, and can easily constitute an anxiety-ridden identity crisis, where the consequences of allowing critical awareness to shape one's future are viewed as too severe to bear.

5.6 The Political Culture of Dependency

In the previous chapter, one of the theories proposed the *absence of viable alternatives* as an explanation for why subordinate members of society perpetuate unjust structures within the existing social order. With our preceding discussion of how inferiorization accompanies economic and political dependency, we gain additional insight into why those living in the peripheral rural regions of a country are likely to have a decreased sense of political power and social autonomy. Research into this area of Canadian Social Studies seems to confirm what dependency theory suggests. As Elisabeth Gidengil notes in her article *Centres and Peripheries: the Political Culture of Dependency*: "In Canada's peripheral regions, the lack of autonomy that is the hallmark of dependency is reflected in residents' perceptions that little can be done to influence the political process."¹⁰⁷ Not surprisingly, those enjoying a better way of life while living in those regions which are the major beneficiaries of the centre-periphery system were found to be the most likely to have favourable perceptions of government responsiveness.

What these studies define as a lack of faith in existing political strategies may look like political apathy, or passive compliance, when in fact, just below the cautious and reserved surface, seeds of social change are germinating, waiting for the right opportunity

¹⁰⁶ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 51.

¹⁰⁷ Elisabeth Gidengil, "Centres and Peripheries: The Political Culture of Dependency," *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 27 (1), 1990, p. 23.

to spring forth in organized political action. It is important to keep in mind how coercive political structures produce conditions which make the transition to alternatives enormously difficult.

Dependency refers, fundamentally, to inequalities in the capacities for autonomous growth while centre regions are capable of autonomous expansion, peripheral regions can grow only as a consequence of that expansion. The distortions that result when the peripheral economy is structured to meet the needs of the centre are integral components of the dependency syndrome.¹⁰⁸

People suffering from regional disparity do not own the land, control the markets, or necessarily have their will expressed in political decisions, notwithstanding the appearances of participatory democracy. When both economic and political processes are controlled and directed by foreign and virtually untouchable powers, then apathy may simply be the reflection of concrete powerlessness, rather than a definitive statement about the lack of interest in change. . . people are being kept functionally incomplete:

"Functional incompleteness is not simply a matter of having to rely on others for the provision of goods. More fundamentally, it entails a reliance on external actors for the completion of basic economic processes."¹⁰⁹ Overcoming the injustice and damaging effects of political and economic dependency, in their manifold manifestations, requires collective organized action aimed at regaining control of the economic decision-making levers and processes needed for social development.

6. From Negative Dependency to Faith and Justice

The forms of human consciousness common to symbiotic relationships have a number of similar elements with the forms of human consciousness in colonial or neo-colonial economic and political relations of negative dependency: an unequal sharing of power; the submergence or displacement of autonomous identity, and the subsequent

¹⁰⁸ Gidengil, "Centres and Peripheries," p. 29

¹⁰⁹ Gidengil, "Centres and Peripheries," p. 29.

psychological insecurity of the alter-dependent; a basic lack of awareness of the fundamental inequality of the relationship; a tendency to avoid an explicit awareness of the real situation; a failure to engage in critical self-searching, and; the internalization of the inferior sense of self, perpetuated by the *other* or *provider*.

How are these debilitating conditions to be identified and overcome by the oppressed, abused, or otherwise subjugated person affected by negative patterns of dependency? Discovering insights from social analysis can create critical awareness. Acting on this awareness, however, requires that individuals first overcome their fear of freedom.

6.1 The Joys and Sorrows of Liberating Awareness

Just as the alter-dependent person (symbiosis) or people (economic and political dependency) share debilitating characteristics which go together to define the state of dependency, they also share the same fears and doubts concerning the possibility of restructuring identity in a more truthful and positive fashion, and engaging in a liberation process with the aim of escaping or overcoming dependency. "Fear of freedom, of which its possessor is not necessarily aware, makes him see ghosts. Such an individual is actually taking refuge in an attempt to achieve security, which he prefers to risks of liberty."¹¹⁰ The reluctance to give up security is a common theme among theorists who have analyzed dependency. Whether it is Freire speaking of oppressed peoples living with a submerged consciousness under the ruling powers of dominant others, or Kasl speaking of a woman living under the abusive rule of an authoritarian man, the psychological phenomenon remains virtually the same. What differs from situation to situation is the degree to which the person (people) are trapped (due to a lack of practical and material means) or are kept trapped (through manipulation, coercion or deception) or engage in escapist strategies which deaden or prevent the development of critical awareness and liberating praxis (self-deception).

¹¹⁰ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 20.

Critical awareness is necessary for transformative praxis, but awareness without imaginable alternatives, or the practical means to embark on a new road, can lead to a tormented life. Social psychological research has tended to overlook the *structural* impediments to change, perhaps because researchers into the psychology of colonization and dependency have focused on the self-defeating psychological strategies which keep people in subordinate and oppressive relationships.

Those suffering the debilitating and distorting effects of alter-dependent identity status have usually sought to find someone who they can in turn dominate or oppress as a basic denial of their own experience of dependency. As Paulo Freire explains, this fear of freedom can legitimate oppression and negative dependence, as well as encourage new forms of unequal relationships: "The 'fear of freedom' which afflicts the oppressed, a fear which may equally well lead them to desire the role of oppressor or bind them to the role of oppressed, should be examined."¹¹¹ Philip Wexler and Barry Adam have examined this fear, and have made interesting connections in their analysis of different *levels* of oppression. The same individual can act at different times, under different circumstances, as both the *victim*, and the *perpetrator*, of oppression and abuse to a foundational hierarchical world view, and the hierarchical structure of social institutions: "Hierarchy as we have seen, provides a self-perpetuating dynamic. The unequal distribution of status allows the dominated to 'console' themselves through comparison with yet more degraded people. Domination constructs its own underpinning with this 'poor man's snobbery'."¹¹² Those who have observed manifestations of the fear of freedom describe concrete examples from the daily experience of, for example, blue-collar working men who allow themselves to be insulted or treated badly at work, then upon arriving home, suddenly shift rules and roles and begin to view themselves as *lord and master*. In turn, a woman may be made to feel *inferior* to her apparently more powerful and domineering husband, while at the same time, rule over and subdue her children with undue force and insensitivity.

¹¹¹ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 31.

¹¹² Adam, *The Survival of Domination*, p. 106.

It is very difficult to give what is not first received. If a person can not, or does not, receive the affirmation, love, or respect they need and deserve, it is not likely that those who look to that person for affirmation, love, or respect will receive it. There is nothing mechanical or absolute about this chain reaction effect. Being abused or oppressed doesn't automatically or inevitably lead to transformation into an abusing person. Still, it is a commonly observed human relations phenomenon with the dynamics of dependency.¹¹³

This breakdown in the chain of social relationships explains how oppression can lead to a transformation of human consciousness; a radical change of both *self-understanding* and *world view*. The world experienced as unjust and oppressive becomes the *only* world of consciousness. In the words of Freire:

*But almost always, during the initial stage of the struggle, the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors, or 'sub-oppressors'. The very structure of their thought has been conditioned by the contradictions of the concrete, existential situation by which they were shaped.*¹¹⁴

We hear an echo of this reciprocal transmission of negativity in the abused child-become-adult. If those who suffer from alter-dependent status (with all its accompanying psycho-social aberrations) actually live with a self-understanding that legitimates and supports such an identity construction, then we can understand how difficult it is to change the concrete, existential conditions which perpetuate negative dependency. If the dependent person, or people, have indeed internalized the self-condemning image of themselves which legitimizes their concrete situation, then to emerge from such a situation requires both a liberating awareness of the actual conditions of their society, and a sense of dignified and positive identity. As Enrique Dussel puts it,

¹¹³ For a series of revealing examples of how negative feelings and distorted patterns of thinking often result from inferiorization or experiences of powerlessness in the workplace, read Richard Sennett & Jonathan Cobb, *The Hidden Injuries of Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973).

¹¹⁴ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 29-30.

If we want to use the term 'liberation' in a meaningful way, we must be cognizant of the concrete oppression that weighs down upon us. We must realize that sin and its power is oppressing us and forcing us to live in a situation of injustice. Starting from that awareness, we can begin the process - the concrete process - of liberation.¹¹⁵

The process or praxis of identity reconstruction and social emancipation is never an easy task. Especially with major reconstructions. Embarking on a road based on transformative praxis is made even more difficult when those upon whom we depend for our sense of worth have convinced us that we are unable to *make it on our own*, or that the only worth we have comes from fulfilling some role or function.

The risks involved with a transformation process seem so great to the alter-dependent that the initial awareness of negative dependency often tends to be repressed, redirected or denied so that the anxiety and fear of change which invariably accompany the first seeds of liberating awareness need not be endured. Freire speaks of the apprehensions of oppressed people to embark on such a road requiring major changes in thinking and acting: "However the oppressed, who have adapted to the structure of domination in which they are immersed, and have become resigned to it, are inhibited from waging the struggle for freedom so long as they feel incapable of running the risks it requires."¹¹⁶ These risks are often many and great. Some risks are undertaken with often fatal results, as in those countries where oppressive military regimes stand in the way of freedom. But even where brutal oppression is absent, it is often possible to detect a collective reluctance to attain independence and a greater degree of self-reliance. Albert Memmi cites repeated examples of colonized people who were more than a little reluctant to give up the security of not having to be responsible for monumental social change:

We encounter again the distinction between subjection and dependence: the former slaves in Barbados, like the former colonial subjects, regretted the termination of their dependence, which brought them peace and whatever they needed to live, even if they had to pay for it with their subjection.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Dussel, *History and the Theology of Liberation*, p. 144.

¹¹⁶ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 32.

¹¹⁷ Memmi, *Dependence*, p. 98.

As Memmi suggests, "If the end of colonization is the end of subjection, it is not always the end of dependence."¹¹⁸ In his study, *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization*, O. Mannoni bases his entire theoretical focus on the psychological passivity of the colonized people, citing examples from his personal experience with the people of Madagascar. Jay and Julian Gurian cite Mannoni's observations and conclusions. They found support for his conclusions with their observations of certain groups of American native peoples. The problem with Mannoni and Memmi's approach is that it draws conclusions from observation of psychological phenomena too quickly. They see the reluctance of people to embrace freedom as originating too exclusively in psychology.

Why should the reluctance of exploited and dispossessed people to embrace freedom surprise us when the exploitation, poverty and oppression of third world peoples continues to this day, thereby testifying to the fact that far more is responsible for this situation than a childish fear of becoming an adult psychologically, as Mannoni and Memmi's discourse frequently suggest. This is not to say that Memmi's observation concerning a fear of change is mistaken.

Jessica Benjamin and Richard Sennett both refer to Dostoevsky's classic discussion of authority, *The Grand Inquisitor*, as a dramatic expression of the psychological force of domination. What is intriguing about the position of the Inquisitor is his belief that the people did not want freedom and truth - which only cause deprivation and suffering - they wanted miracle, mystery, and authority. As Benjamin puts it, ". . . the pain that accompanies compliance is preferable to the pain that attends freedom."¹¹⁹ This idea brings us very close to the theme of the following chapter on social conformity. With the first inklings of critical awareness come doubts and uncertainties. There can be either a retreat from such threatening awareness or a further exploration of the situation to uncover a greater degree of truth. This is a moral decision upon which rests the question of whether the individual will experience shame or positive self-esteem - when we turn away from what we believe to be true as a result of fear, we will almost always feel a loss of self-esteem: "Yet, although they desire authentic existence, they fear it. They are at

¹¹⁸ Memmi, *Dependency*, p. 10.

¹¹⁹ Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love*, p. 5.

one and the same time themselves and the oppressor whose consciousness they have internalized."¹²⁰ In his book, *Authority*, Richard Sennett has explored the social psychological dynamics of this process whereby consciousness of the oppressor is internalized. Because *negative bonds* are established between workers and individuals in the context of a group or *class*, I have chosen to consider Sennett's analysis of dependency in the following chapter on social conformity. What is important to note here is that the internalization of the oppressor can occur even - and perhaps especially - where resentments or other injuries caused by oppression continue to dominate the consciousness of the subordinate person *even after the original source of oppression no longer exercises actual power over the individual*.

Summary

Being the subordinate participant in a relationship characterized by inequality can easily lead to the submergence of critical consciousness, or a flight from self-awareness. Subordinate consciousness is essentially an *other-directed consciousness* and a *directed-by-another* lifestyle and daily routine. The consciousness of the subordinate party is limited in awareness by virtue of the identity-forming habits of thinking and acting associated with the subordinate role and daily life under the shadow of some *other* in a dominant position. Such *core* distortions in thinking and doing constitute aspects of a life lacking critical awareness and a dynamic of creative transformation. Where such distortions exist, the dynamics of negative conformity can usually be found as well. Achieving transforming awareness involves discovering the truth about one's personal and social situation, which means finding out about who and/or what controls the levers of the social system which direct our lives:

*It is only when the oppressed find the oppressor out and become involved in the organized struggle for their liberation that they begin to believe in themselves. This discovery cannot be purely intellectual but must involve action; nor can it be limited to mere activism, but must include serious reflection: only then will it be a praxis.*¹²¹

Like economic oppression, an absence of critical moral awareness and an insightful knowledge of self and society *is not a normal or healthy state for human*

¹²⁰ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 32.

¹²¹ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 52.

beings. Humans have a natural inclination to be creative and participate in the transformation of the world. Human beings are meant to be the subjects of their lives, not to have their lives controlled by forces they can barely detect or comprehend. To direct one's life, correct information and equitable and supportive human relationships are needed. The dynamics of all forms of dependency captivate and stifle human beings.

Having obligations toward oneself and toward others defines an ethics of *awareness* as an ethic of *human relationships*. Our responsibilities towards other people (and their responsibilities towards us) always constitute a foundational and defining characteristic of moral reflection and activity. As Enrique Dussell explains in his book *Ethics and the Theology of Liberation*, all moral wrongdoing or *sin* can be interpreted as sin against an *other*.¹²² To experience liberation from negative patterns of dependency we need to be summoned to a new lifestyle determined in part by a liberating and redeeming process which creates and sustains moral awareness. Canadian churches have adopted the approach expressed in the following statement by the Catholic Bishops:

*It is increasingly evident that changes in style of living depend on a change of attitudes. Such an awakening of conscience, "conscientization," demands a renewed emphasis on social education, adapted to the particular time and place. . . There is corresponding need for more social research. . . into the ways in which society's structures shape our thinking and acting.*¹²³

Whether the invitation summoning people to seek liberation from debilitating patterns of dependency comes as a divine *summons* or felt moral *imperative*, the challenge in either case to meet the fear of freedom head-on and to embark on a dynamic journey of faith and solidarity with others remains the same.

¹²² Enrique Dussell, *Ethics and the Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1974).

¹²³ Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Social Justice in the Church," April 21, 1972, found in, *Do Justice!: The Social Teaching of the Canadian Catholic Bishops*, ed., E.F. Sheridan, S.J., (Toronto, ON: Jesuit Centre for Social Faith and Justice), 1987, pp. 227-228.

Chapter Six

Moral Awareness and the Dynamics of Social Conformity

The preceding analysis of negative dependency considered three structural types of human relationships or social relations all characterized by inequitable power sharing and distorted identity construction: addictions, symbiotic relationship, and economic and political dependency. At the centre of all these dynamic human phenomena are individuals struggling to find worth and understanding in their daily lives through *meaningful* personal relationships and *just* social organizations. With a shift in focus from reciprocal relationship involving two parties, to the dynamics operating between individuals and larger groups of people, the language describing the negative social psychological dynamics of human relationships also shifts from *dependency* to *conformity*. These concepts are obviously interrelated and often represent two perspectives on the same human and social experiences.

An ethical investigation of negative patterns of social conformity is also an extension of earlier discussions of how negative social psychological dynamics represent a distortion of the basic tension found within individuals to achieve both autonomy (power) and communion with others (love). The *intrapersonal* distortion manifests itself in various ways in daily life in the person's *interpersonal* relationships as either an excessive fixation on oneself (dependent) or others (alter-dependent). The task for an ethics of awareness is to examine the distinctively political and sociological structure of human and social arrangements based on conformity, and the attending deformation of critical awareness and moral living caused by *negative* conformity.

This inquiry is interested in examining: (a) the dynamics of negative group conformity and unquestioning submission to authority which give rise to atrocious collective human acts of cruelty against other human beings; (b) social psychological phenomena and group dynamics characterized by a lack of critical awareness, (c) factors relating to the abdication of moral responsibility and/or the corruption of consciousness,

and (d) the inescapable fact of human conformity, and the need to become aware of patterns of conformity operating in one's life.

The moral task is first to raise awareness about the powerful and *subtle* dynamics of social conformity by defining the term, and then to explain how negative social conformity operates. To reflect on the psychosocial factors explaining social conformity challenges us to re-evaluate what motivates us to make decisions concerning our social engagements, group associations, political alignments, and the degree of support we either throw or don't throw behind different social movements. The aim is to identify, and make explicit, the moral choices still available to us in contemporary society with respect to where we turn our attention, energy and life praxis; i.e., in supporting social movements and trends which further our personal moral objectives for a good life.

Like the concept of dependency, social conformity can take both *negative* and *positive* forms. As Walker and Heyns note in their book *An Anatomy for Conformity*: "Thus no particular degree of conformity is inherently bad. How much is good and how much is bad is a value judgment which will depend on the time, the place, the culture, the behaviour and the person who is making the judgment."¹

The appropriate alternative to negative dependency is a balance of power in personal relationships based on mutual love and trust, where each person or party respects the rights and needs of the other, and strives to foster a dynamic of authentic communication and *interdependence*. The same tension between *striving for autonomous power and control*, and the felt need *to belong and exist in communion with others*, can be found operating at the centre of the dynamics of social conformity. It is often not nearly as clear what form a balance of power would look like beyond the relationship of two people. With social conformity, we enter into a discussion of foundational world views, social ethics, group and cultural ethos, and the impact of economic and political ideology on human consciousness, alliances and social organization. Social conformity points to the essentially *political choices* individuals make, and the *social actions* they take, as they pursue a way of life based on particular ethical values, social ideals and political goals. A

¹ Walker and Heyns, *An Anatomy For Conformity*, p. 3.

discussion of social conformity and awareness situates the person in society and community by attending to the social aspects of individual life.

One ethical task for sociological, political and social psychological analysis is to determine what human beings do *voluntarily*, or do as a result of manipulative *influence* or coercive *force*. There are many things we do voluntarily, but without full awareness, sometimes as a result of unreflective routine or force of habit. There are also things we do voluntarily with explicit awareness and purpose. In many life experiences there is a degree of awareness, a degree of coercive influence and a degree of social ignorance caused by either a lack of access to correct information, self-deception or deception. Social conformity is morally ambiguous under these dynamics, and can only be assessed concretely. Still, a theoretical study will detect and uncover the attractive and/or coercive forces which underlie the dynamic structures and forces of negative patterns of social conformity.

What motivates an individual to change foundational beliefs or an established course of action? Obviously, answers to this question are as varied as the particular individuals and situations which exist. Beyond the particulars of each instance of a person conforming, many dynamic factors are operating which motivate, prompt, attract, tempt or in some way engage human beings in negative patterns of social conformity. Consistent with the previous discussions of the negative dynamics of self-deception, social ignorance, and dependency, the purpose in examining these relational dynamics is to come to understand the circumstances and factors that give rise to negative patterns of social conformity. How exactly does social conformity cause individuals to abandon critical moral awareness and forfeit opportunities for transformative praxis, perhaps unwittingly helping to perpetuate social evils? Analyzing the social psychological dynamics of negative conformity will sharpen awareness of what is required to prevent or overcome such entrapments.

1. The Language and Anatomy of Social Conformity

What is social conformity? The following five sections provide a meaningful definition of the concept by describing the common features of the dynamics of social conformity.

1.1 Defining the Concept of Social Conformity

Social psychologists who have studied the dynamics of conformity in small groups have given the term a broad technical meaning. Charles and Sara Kiesler, for example, offer the following definition in their book *Conformity*: "Whether we are discussing the 'true believer,' ourselves, or the man [woman] in the street, conformity is defined in the same way: a change in behavior or belief toward a group as a result of real or imagined group pressure."² Conformity involves changes in belief (ideology, world view) and changes in behaviour (central activities, lifestyle) that individuals undergo as a result of the influence of group pressure.

Pressures to conform can have their source in a wider cultural ethos mediated to individuals through social institutions over generations. Still, groups with an organized existence in society tend to exert the most powerful influence to conform. There is often a strong affinity between pressures to conform coming from a dominant cultural ethos, which does not originate with any particular organization or group, and the pressures exerted by particular groups. More will be said concerning these two primary forms of conformity in contemporary society in a later section of this chapter.

Social psychologists make a further distinction between conformity involving a change in both belief and behavior (*private acceptance*), and simply a change in behaviour

² Charles A. and Sara B. Kiesler, *Conformity* (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co., 1970), p. 2.

(*compliance*).³ Compliance refers to *overt activity* which becomes more like that which the group wishes its members to follow; conformity in this case is defined by outward actions, without consideration of the private convictions of the individual. Private acceptance, on the other hand, means a *change in attitude or belief* in the direction of group attitudes and beliefs. Here the person not only acts as the group wishes, but comes to believe as the group believes.

This distinction is virtually identical to the distinction Michael Mann makes between the *normative* and *pragmatic* acceptance of ideology discussed in chapter three. Both *conformity as compliance* and the *pragmatic acceptance of ideology* suggest that an individual can *go along* with or *conform* to the actions and ideology of some group or class simply because he or she sees no alternative but to do so, or perhaps because some vested personal interest is being served by complying.

It is only with *conformity as private acceptance*, or with the *normative acceptance of ideology*, that the values and beliefs of the group (*Kiesler*), or dominant ideology (*Mann*), are adopted, internalized, and viewed by the individual as a constituent part of his or her self-understanding and identity.

The difference between the *conscious acceptance* of an ideology and *reluctant compliance* to an ideology is an important distinction for ethics. It points to the political significance of what people chose to believe and do in their daily lives in society. The groups we join or refuse to join, our daily work, what we do in our spare time, what we say or chose not to say to a news reporter at a public meeting; all such activities tell others a great deal about what interests we represent and who we are. They express elements of our social vision, our alliances, our political philosophy, moral values and beliefs, and even the force of our convictions and moral courage.

3. Most Social Psychologists recognize essentially the same distinction, each using their own terms. Hans Toch, for example makes a distinction between *instrumental* believer and *fully committed* and *dedicated* believer, in *The Social Psychology of Social Movements*, p. 194; while Kelman and Hamilton contrast the concepts of *Compliance* and *Internalization* in their social psychological study of authority, *Crimes of Obedience*, p. 104-105.

Like all ethical investigations, concrete knowledge is essential to assess the dynamics of social conformity in modern society. We also need an adequate theoretical understanding of the structures and dynamics of conformity if we are to know the right questions to ask when undertaking concrete analysis. It is possible to establish a theory of social conformity simply because we can speak generally about certain aspects of conformity which are, by definition, common to all particular cases.

1.2 Social Conformity and the Fulfilment of Human Needs

Driving the dynamics of social conformity are legitimate human needs. The key to understanding social conformity lies within a common anthropological understanding delineating legitimate human instincts, needs and drives. The power of attractive influences or pressures to conform comes from the promise of satisfied needs which the act of succumbing to the influence (by conforming to a particular way of thinking and acting) promises to fulfil. As Walker and Heyns suggest, "Conformity and non-conformity are instrumental acts, means to ends, ways of achieving goals to satisfy needs."⁴

Human beings manifest a wide range of *needs*, any one of which can serve as a primary motivating force to conform. Obviously, meeting physical needs for food, water, shelter, meaningful work and social engagement are significant motivating factors for all human beings. Conformity - at least in the form of compliance - is likely to occur with little resistance or deliberation whenever receiving basic necessities of life demands compliance with the lived norms, expressed values, or desired actions of a particular group or political authority. With a social norm such as, *if you don't work you don't eat*, conformity is pretty much assured if food cannot be easily found elsewhere.

There are, of course, other human needs besides those of the body; such as the need to construct identity and experience trustworthy relationships with others. The basic desires to belong, to be liked, appreciated and accepted by others are very strong. The manipulation of these psychological and spiritual human needs can exert powerful

⁴ Walker and Heyns, *An Anatomy For Conformity*, p. 5.

influences on individuals to succumb to negative patterns of conformity. When a group offers a person the opportunity to establish a clearer sense of identity (perhaps not readily found elsewhere) the tendency to conform to the beliefs and desired course of action demanded by a group may be hard to resist.⁵

Central to the quest for self-knowledge and knowledge of the world is the search for answers to difficult questions concerning the meaning of life. Human beings strive for a comprehensive and intelligible understanding of the world. When we are confused, or unsure of ourselves, answers offered by a particular *group* or *ideology* can seem more attractive, and will tend to exert greater influence on the direction of our thinking and action. Unfulfilled needs preoccupy the mind, restrict the scope and control of attention, and generally increase susceptibility to being strongly influenced or manipulated by pressures to conform. The susceptibility factor, although always detectible in the dynamics of conformity, varies greatly in magnitude from one person in a given situation to someone else in another situation. It is directly linked to the intensity of the unfilled needs and the ways and means of fulfilling those needs which are available.

1.3 Conformity as the Resolution of Ambiguity over Felt Needs

Basic human needs often conflict with one another. The need to make choices over what to think and do leaves individuals with an unending series of conflicts to resolve. An endless stream of decisions causing constant anxiety about what to do or think is avoided by conforming to a daily and weekly routine. Ambiguity over conflicting needs - as well as the decisions we need to make in establishing a *meaningful*, and not simply *mundane* routine - make us especially vulnerable to influences to conform to the thinking and will of others through obedience, compliance, or imitation, without questioning the moral legitimacy of what we do and say. The source of the problem? Uncertainty about preferences and conflict over priorities: "More often than not the

⁵ The link between identity formation and social conformity will be explored in subsequent sections of this chapter, in a review of sociological and cultural analyses of modern capitalist society.

individual can be characterized as possessing a variety of needs, as having available to him [her] a variety of instrumental acts which might satisfy a number of goals in various combinations and in various degrees. Most real life situations are characterized by conflict."⁶

Studies have verified what seems a matter of common sense: the more ambiguous a situation, the more intense the conflict between felt needs, the more likely individuals are to conform under social pressure. Depending on the capacity of the individual to answer puzzling questions, solve problems, or meet the demands of felt needs, conformity will appear at different times to be either an attractive or unattractive option. With the strength of the felt pressure to conform being primarily determined by the degree of ambiguity and uncertainty, it is obvious that the education and the development of a capacity to become critically aware of subtle influences and pressures to conform constitutes the principal solution to the problem. As Walker and Heyns note, ". . . the better the education, the more independent and self-determined the behavior, the less the conformity under social pressure."⁷

Given the basic needs of human beings to belong and to achieve a greater degree of autonomy and a stronger sense of independence, the unavoidable tension in daily life becomes whether to think and act on the basis of one's own values and beliefs, or follow the values, norms and beliefs of some group or dominant cultural ethos. Critical awareness empowers the individual to discern whether conformity and belonging is life-giving (based on legitimate beliefs and values), or whether it is death-dealing, (based on negative emotions, and fears over not being able to fulfil one's needs).

Ambiguity would seem to increase proportionately with the number of available options open to the individual. Imagine, for example, that an individual likes all flavours of icecream equally. He or she enters a store which sells just two flavours; the decision is an either-or, and is usually made in short order. But what if there are thirty flavours?

⁶ Walker and Heyns, *An Anatomy For Conformity*, p. 8.

⁷ Walker and Heyns, *An Anatomy For Conformity*, p. 94.

Clinical experiments have demonstrated that individuals will be more apt to conform to influencing factors in ambiguous situations; perhaps, to use the previous example, an overheard comment from a total stranger that *the rum and butter flavour tastes good*:

Conformity behaviour can be expected to vary as a function of the degree of stimulus ambiguity in a social situation as it is seen by a given person. If he [she] sees the situation as one in which the alternative behaviors open to him [her] are few in number and well-defined, social pressure is unlikely to produce much change in his [her] attitudes. If however, he [she] sees the situation as permitting many alternative behaviors, and if he [she] is uncertain about the appropriateness of the alternatives, social pressure can be expected to produce considerable conformity.⁸

This explanation seems straightforward and reasonable. The greater the confusion about what to think or do, the greater the tendency to succumb to pressures to conform. This points to the central significance of an alternative social vision for critical awareness. If a feeling of pessimism dominates consciousness, a state Joe Bailey describes as the "pathology of cynicism,"⁹ long-term positive options may be perceived as non-existent, and the individual may become predisposed to conform to any number of existing social influences which offer the promise of some immediate gratification, or at least to deaden awareness of unfulfilled needs. These are the dynamics and factors which can give birth to fascism or violent anarchy. When social contradictions and ideological subterfuges within social culture begin to reveal themselves, such sudden insights can be very threatening. In the absence of sufficiently powerful countervailing social movements which make social alternatives possible, anxiety and negative emotional energy can find a positive channel only with great difficulty. . . people instinctively sense that the situation of social decay and destruction represents an urgent call for a people's social movement of restoration and reclamation, the absence of which is deeply disconcerting.

By way of a general definition, we can view conformity as the movement of an individual toward either compliance or full acceptance of the norms, values, beliefs and actions of a class, group or ideological point of view, in the interest of fulfilling felt needs.

⁸ Walker and Heyns, *An Anatomy For Conformity*, p. 23.

⁹ Joe Bailey, *Pessimism* (New York: Routledge, 1988). Bailey discusses this concept in his fourth chapter: "The End of Progress."

When will conformity occur? This cannot be answered definitively. Conflicts between needs increases the power of influences to conform; however, it is not possible to construct a theory which explains the dynamics of social conformity in the realm of the concrete and particular.

1.4 The Dynamics of Conformity and Situational Context

Much of the social psychological literature on conformity reveals an unmistakable bias towards small group dynamics and sociological role theory. It was earlier noted that such distorted theories can ignore - and effectively obscure - the dynamics of social productive relations and cause social ignorance. There is an unmistakable tendency in most social psychological research to promote a static, dualistic and politically-conservative world view. There is likewise a tendency to view the person as a fixed and permanent entity. Given the fact that the conservative world view is itself founded on an organic social vision, it is not surprising that a theme like conformity would be attractive to conservative-minded thinkers.

Rather than adopting a dynamic understanding of social conformity, some social psychologists attempt to explain social conformity as a phenomenon associated with a particular personality type, i.e, a certain class of individuals characteristically prone to conform. "In a given situation it is frequently the case that some individuals will conform and others will not. It is a common belief that some individuals can be characterized as being conformists and others as non-conformists."¹⁰ Although Walkerman and Heyns themselves argue that most cases of conformity can be explained in situational terms, they nonetheless reflect the same bias of their times with the belief that conformity *can be* a defining characteristic of certain personality types.¹¹ This theoretical point of view must be rejected in favour of a dynamic and situational analysis of social conformity. The act of

¹⁰ Walker and Heyns, *An Anatomy for Conformity*, p. 9.

¹¹ Walker and Heyns, *An Anatomy For Conformity*, p. 9.

identifying the negative dynamics of social conformity presupposes the ability to situate present actions within the context of a life story. Conformity must be viewed within the framework of a person's life, as he or she moves from one thing to another to meet needs, and to satisfy desires, by achieving envisioned goals. Those goals should be situated within an imagined life project, containing ultimate and foundational goals. The present behaviour of a particular individual may be *more* or *less* conformist, depending entirely on the prior identity and life situation of the individual. Conformity is, by definition, a dynamic human phenomenon, as Walker and Heyns note,

Conformity and non-conformity always involve movement or change. This is true even when only a single observation is possible and change is not directly observable. To describe a person or a group as conformist on the basis of a single observation implies an earlier state in which the degree of agreement with the norm was not so great.¹²

This echoes Alisdair MacIntyre's foundational maxim that it is not possible to take an isolated act, interpret the meaning of that act, and judge correctly the individual performing the act. Kiesler's statement that, ". . . for the long-range goal of finding out why people conform, labels are not profitable,"¹³ is something of an understatement. As a label, the term *conformist* inflicts the same damage as every other metaphor used to offer a simplified and largely fictional explanation for human behaviour. Metaphors used as labels do not reveal the factors and forces which actually identify and explain the dynamics of change. *Conformist*, used as a character label has no place in the language of critical social psychology or ethics. If certain individuals appear more prone to conformity than others, it is for reasons relating to the basic needs and desires of those individuals, their past and present experience, and the limitations and opportunities which *they believe* their situation either makes or does not make available to them. It is possible, however, to discern occasions where individuals have acquired the habit of conforming; or, where conformity takes the form of submission to authority, the "Habit of unquestioning obedience."¹⁴

¹² Walker and Heyns, *An Anatomy for Conformity*, p. 5.

¹³ Kiesler, *Conformity*, p. 12.

Conforming - like heavy drinking - can lead to a debilitating way of life, but such is not permanently written into the identity of the individual. To assert that central habits are *constituent* components of a person's being is to deny human freedom. With awareness and transformative praxis, individuals can change their negative central activities, distorted core beliefs, and unhealthy living patterns. If anyone is to be labelled a conformer, then all must be so labelled - for we all conform to some degree or another by virtue of our participation in political culture. It is the task of ethics to evaluate the moral foundation of social conformity.

Conformity also has a meaning very similar to the concept of *socialization*. The child learns almost exclusively by conforming and adopting the attitudes, habits, and symbols of his or her social environment. This has been discussed earlier in terms of how identity is initially culturally-based, until the emergence of critical awareness and moral responsibility. Everything from cultural conventions about eating to religious rituals exist prior to the newborn child, and establish the cultural milieu into which the child is born and is engaged. With the emergence of awareness, and a sense of personal responsibility, come new ethical and political choices. These choices can attempt to resolve the tension between the individual and his or her society through involvement in the dynamics of groups and social movements.

1.5 Conformity and the Tension Between Self and Other

The negative dynamics of social conformity are often generated by the experience of ambiguity and confusion over two basic, conflicting desires: the need for human interaction and *belonging*, and the felt need to be *independent*. As with the dynamics of negative dependency, conflict between these two strongly felt needs increases

¹⁴ Kelman and Hamilton refer to the habit of unquestioning obedience in their study, *Crimes of Obedience: Toward a Social Psychology of Authority and Responsibility* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989). As well, Walker and Heyns state the following: "That conformity as an instrumental act might become a habit independent of the need involved is also a possibility. As such it might be specific in a limited class of situations, or if it has proved to be instrumental in a wide variety of situations in the past, it might become a general habit," *An Anatomy For Conformity*, p. 11.

susceptibility to influences to conform. This is especially the case when the dominant cultural ethos of society fosters social contradictions which individuals internalize by participation in the dominant culture. No where is this more obvious than with our self-contradictory understanding and evaluation of individual autonomy: "The private individual in western society, then, is a compound of contradictions. On the one hand, autonomy is positively evaluated as a moral principle, and on the other hand it is equated with 'alienation' and 'possessive individualism'." ¹⁵

Walker and Heyns draw our attention to this essential human tension when they tell us that, "We might distinguish a need for acceptance by others and, in conflict with that, a need to 'achieve' in an abstract sense." ¹⁶ This echoes the intersubjective view of the need for recognition from others, and the desire for personal power and self-sufficiency. How individuals attempt to resolve this basic human tension can result in an excessive movement in one of two directions: as with different forms of dependency, individuals can become more *self-centred*, denying a need for other human beings (dependent); or individuals can become increasingly *other-centred*, denying the self (alter-dependent).

Barry Adam has linked the concepts of *ambiguous identity*, *negative social conformity* and *domination* in his social psychological study of inferiorization, *The Survival of Domination*: "Ambiguous identity appears to be a social location highly amenable to choice of the acquiescent or conforming mode of coping with domination." ¹⁷

Through the dynamics of negative conformity, these same two options of *excessive autonomy* and *excessive dependency* can lead to either social protest or social conformity. Drawing from the writings of Angyal, Martin Rich explains the essential connection between negative dependency and negative conformity:

¹⁵ Brittan, *The Privatized World*, p. 50.

¹⁶ Walker and Heyns, *An Anatomy For Conformity*, p. 9.

¹⁷ Adam, *The Survival of Domination*, p. 61.

Angyal suggests that there can be not only a lack of autonomy (one of the characteristics of neurotic living) but an excess of autonomous striving. A lack of autonomy is manifested in excessive conformism, inability to form independent judgments or disagree with anyone, and dependence upon others far in excess of necessity.¹⁸

The affinity in this descriptive analysis of social conformity with that of dependency is remarkable. The victims of both types of manipulation or oppression become locked in relationships of dependency and conformity with others, with their consciousness focused on what *others* do and say, and what others want *them* to do and say. What is lacking is a sense of personal power and freedom.

Rather than approaching the study of social conformity from the point of view of psychological profiles and personality types, or the degree to which individuals comply with (or deviate from) social norms,¹⁹ a critical analysis of negative social conformity must be situated within a broader ethical and political discussion of community and social relationships. Structures and processes within society affect the manner in which personal attitudes and actions are shaped. The limitations of those structures and processes can stand in the way of more life-enhancing forms of social conformity.

A brief overview of a number of empirical studies of social conformity shows the strength of a shared human tendency to succumb to pressures to conform, both in cases of *covert* influence by members of a group, as well as obedience to the *overt* commands of authority.

¹⁸ Rich, *Theories of Moral Development*, p. 10.

¹⁹ This is a typical approach taken by most sociologists, including Canadian sociologist Vincent F. Sacco in his book, *Deviance: Deviance and Control in Canadian Society* (Scarborough, Ontario: Prentice-Hall Canada Inc., 1988). Such sociological studies of conformity are primarily based on the statistical assessment of compliance or non-compliance with laws, rules of conduct, etc., which are institutionally-established as normative within society. Sacco deals with the following themes in his book: street prostitution, homosexuality, legal and illegal drug use, interpersonal criminal violence, commercial crime, political deviance and youthful deviance.

2. Empirical Studies of the Social Psychology of Conformity

There was a heightened interest in conformity studies among American social psychologists in the post-world war II era, especially during the 50's and 60's. The increasing interest with the dynamics of social conformity was congruent with similar research trends of the same era, such as a fascination with functional sociological theory, a commitment to the ideology of role theory, a preoccupation with behaviour modification and socialization (i.e., Taylorism²⁰), social planning, hypnosis and mind control experiments (especially within the military²¹), and perhaps most pervasive of all, the manipulative advertising strategies developed and employed by the corporate elite. Notwithstanding the many biases and limitations of the research interest and approach taken with conformity experiments, the clinical studies nonetheless offer valuable insights into the structure and dynamics of conformity.

Few social psychologists have written books without referring to a number of now famous experiments analyzing and measuring the psychological dynamics of conformity. What can clinical experiments investigating social conformity teach us about the ethical and political dynamics of individual involvement in contemporary society? The findings of three classic experiments measuring either social conformity or unquestioning obedience to authority are examined below to show how the results of these studies support what common sense and life experience already tell us about the powerful tendency in human beings to conform. The inclination to go along with group or crowd behaviour is familiar: most of us have had some type of experience which has exposed the tension and ambiguity of individual response with the context of group dynamics; for example, everyone in a

²⁰ The behaviourist Frederick Winslow Taylor, attempted to design work 'scientifically'. Richard Sennett argues that the Taylorite movement was responsible for broadening the horizons of American business schools, which previously had only taught such technical subjects as accounting and investment. He views Taylorism as having the goal of creating a new image of the authority of employers. As he states in *Authority*: "This image is not based on threatening the employee but rather on psychologically gratifying the employee. The employer appears as the 'facilitator' of impersonal policy, the 'coordinator' of work tasks, and so on; he influences rather than orders," p. 109.

²¹ The best known cases of such manipulation (known thanks to investigations and inquiries, television documentaries and legal cases by surviving victims) involved LSD mind control experiments which took place in a Montreal hospital in a collaborative research effort between the hospital's research scientists, the Canadian government and the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

classroom or church is *almost* 100 percent certain a particular cue means it is time to sit or stand. Yet, because no one individual moves first, no one moves until the teacher or minister tells the to group to sit or stand. The most astounding conclusion from the clinical studies into group and crowd behaviour is that the tendency to conform *without questioning* is apparently even stronger, and potentially more dangerous to the common good, than most suspect.

2.1 Solomon Asch's Experiment with Lines

Solomon Asch undertook a series of experiments to test levels of social conformity under certain predetermined conditions.²² He showed small groups of individuals a thick eight-inch line drawn on one piece of card and asked each person to say which of three other lines on another piece of card was the same length as the first. The other card showed a line that was obviously *longer* than the first, a line that was unmistakably *shorter*, and a line that was clearly *identical*. With no prior manipulation or influence, subjects consistently guessed the longer, shorter and identical lines correctly.

Asch designed his conformity experiment to involve several individuals at once, but only one person was genuinely being tested. The others were in on the experiment with Asch, all agreeing to give the same wrong answers on cue. Asch observed that the individual being tested would often forego independent judgement and side with the others to avoid being the odd-one-out. He did not penalize the participants for being wrong, so it is possible to infer that in a situation where there might be some form of disapproval shown to a dissenter, incident rates of conformity would be even higher. Conformity was found to occur only if there was more than one confederate giving wrong answers. Similarly, when one of several confederates gave the correct answer, thus dissenting from his or her peers, the subject reverted to his or her own judgement and also gave the

²² Solomon E. Asch, "Effects of group pressure upon the modification and distortion of judgments," found in Guetzkow, ed., *Groups, Leadership, and Men* (Pittsburgh: Carnegie Press, 1951), pp. 177-190; See also, Asch, "Studies of independence and Conformity: A Minority of one Against a Unanimous Majority," *Psychological Monographs*, 70 (9, Whole No. 416, 1956).

correct answer. Having one supporter was sufficient to eliminate the strong pressure to give in to group pressure and conform to the perspective of the majority.

2.2 Maurice Temerlin's Experiment on Mental Diagnosis

Maurice Temerlin conducted an experiment to investigate the degree of ambiguity in the diagnosis of mental illness. Temerlin was curious about how *open* medical professionals were to influence when making mental diagnosis. He studied whether *pressures to conform* would persuade individuals to override their personal judgments in making a diagnosis in favour of the view of another physician.

Temerlin produced a video recording of an individual being interviewed by a psychiatrist. The script was designed to portray a person as normal and average as could possibly be shown. The tape was then played to three experimental groups and four control groups. The three experimental groups were: psychiatrists, practising clinical psychologists and graduate students in clinical psychology. Three of the control groups consisted of similar people, stratified for professional identity, and the fourth consisted of a group of people working as lay *jurors* who were told that they were attending a *sanity hearing*.

Some of the groups were told that a well-known and respected psychiatrist had viewed the video and had drawn a certain diagnosis on the individual's mental condition, the idea being to see whether the influence would affect the other viewer's diagnosis. No matter what they were told was the famed psychiatrist's diagnosis, the influence was equally significant. The second control group, who were told that the candidate was healthy, voted 100 per cent that he was so, no votes for neurosis, and none for psychosis. With the respected psychiatrist giving a negative diagnosis, 60 per cent of the first experimental group (the psychiatrists) voted that he was psychotic; the rest voted him neurotic. The other two subgroups were less affected: the practising clinical psychologists voted 28 per cent for psychosis, 60 per cent for neurosis and 12 percent for sanity; and the graduate students voted 11 percent for psychosis, 78 per cent for neurosis and 11 percent

for sanity. The experiment showed that a single-sentence suggestion from someone thought to be important can - at least with something as ambiguous as psychological diagnosis - powerfully affect the judgement of others. As Temerlin concluded, the unfortunate candidate is liable to be put away even if everything he says is perfectly normal - as long as a person deemed an expert has pronounced him or her a problem.²³

2.3 Latané and Darley's Studies on the Unresponsive Bystander

A series of experiments studying conformity were sparked by media coverage of the murder of Kitty Genovese in New York City. The unfortunate woman was stabbed to death in the doorway to her apartment building. Thirty-eight of her neighbours stood at their windows witnessing the killing. None came to the woman's assistance. No one called for an ambulance or the police, despite the murder taking more than a half hour to occur. In *The Social Animal*, Elliot Aronson tells of a similar incident. Eleanor Bradley was shopping in a well-visited area when she fell and broke her leg. She lay in shock for 40 minutes as hundreds of passersby paused momentarily to gawk a few seconds, then continue on their way.²⁴ Why do people in bystander crowds fail to assist in emergencies? Bibb Latané and John Darley undertook to investigate this question with a series of staged experiments, the results of which they published in a book titled *The Unresponsive Bystander*.

Latané and Darley, after conducting a large number of experiments to measure the influence of others on individual attitudes and behaviour, concluded that individual responses were affected by the number of people involved in the situation. They found that 70 percent of people will respond when alone; only 20% will offer help if other people are present. Being the only option for another person to receive help compelled people to act, simply because there was no one else to take responsibility: "These investigators [John Darley, Bibb Latané, and their colleagues] hypothesized that the very

²³ Rowan, *The Structured Crowd*, p. 131-32.

²⁴ Elliot Aronson, *The Social Animal* (San Francisco: W.H. Freeman and Company, 1960), p. 36.

number of people witnessing these tragedies mitigated against anyone helping - that is, a victim is less likely to get help if there are a large number of people watching his [her] distress. Thus, nonintervention can be viewed as an act of conformity."²⁵ Latané and Darley concluded that onlookers at crimes like that of the murder of Kitty Genovese are neither callous nor indifferent; they are merely caught up in a condition called *crowd behaviour*, where the presence of other people makes moral responsibility seem diffuse, and obligations to respond ambiguous.²⁶

2.4 Summary Comments on Conformity Experiments

There are remarkable similarities in the dynamics of conformity in all three of the above-described experiments; there are also significant differences worth noting. In the first experiment, movement takes the form of conformity to the *group* through imitation of response: fear of dissenting from the majority position appears to be a key motivating factor. In the second experiment, conformity happens as compliance to the viewpoint of a legitimately-perceived *authority*. In the third experiment, conformity takes the form of *no movement* due to ambiguity over moral responsibility.

People conform to the wishes or directives of authorities who are viewed as *legitimate* even when conformity leads to immoral actions and crimes of obedience. People also submit to authorities they view as *illegitimate*, leading to an uncritical state of awareness and arrested moral development. Both types of conformity will be examined below, beginning with legitimately-perceived authorities.

²⁵ Aronson, *The Social Animal*, p. 36-37.

²⁶ A recent incident involving the drowning death of a 14 year old boy, Joseph Ingola, in the St. Lawrence River in Cornwall, Ontario, appears to manifest similar dynamics. Mary Roach, a 13 year old girl who tried to save the boy, reported that there "... were three adults and a teenager who stood on shore watching and laughing." *Star Phoenix*, September 2, 1993.

3. Conforming to Legitimate Authority and Crimes of Obedience

Numerous studies of authority have been undertaken since Theodor Adorno's landmark work, *The Authoritarian Personality*. In the present ethical inquiry into the social psychological dynamics of social conformity, the theme of authority is approached from a limited and clearly-defined perspective. My interest is not with the so-called *authoritarian personality*,²⁷ but rather, with submission to authority as an occasion for engagement in the negative dynamics of social conformity.

In an insightful study, *Crimes of Obedience: Toward a Social Psychology of Authority and Responsibility*, Herbert Kelman and Lee Hamilton define a crime of obedience as, ". . . an illegal or immoral act committed in response to orders or directive from authority." Their research deals with obedience to authorities *perceived* to be legitimate by subordinates. They clarify three levels which establish legitimate authority in the eyes of the subordinates: the legitimacy of the *system*; the legitimacy of the particular *authorities* operating within the system; and the legitimacy of the particular *demands* or *commands*. Obedience can take the form of either *compliance* or *internalization*, the two essential types of social conformity. Obedience to authority can, therefore, be viewed as a specific type of social conformity, given the attendant movement which takes place when individuals concur with and/or act upon the commands or wishes of some authority.

²⁷ Theodor Adorno published *The Authoritarian Personality* in the United States after World War II. His study of personality examined the psychological mechanisms by which childish images of strength persist into adult life. In particular, Adorno tried to clarify the social conditions which encourage or retard the persistence of these infantile patterns. Adorno's theoretical study addressed the question of how *psychological forces* which lead a person to feel desperately in need of strength, and historical and *social forces* which shape how individuals express those needs, come together to form the authoritarian personality. Many authors have found problems with Adorno's study. Such problems have been systematically explored in two books, R. Christie and M. Jahoda, eds., *Studies in the Scope and Method of the Authoritarian Personality* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1954); and J. P. Kirscht & R. C. Dillehay, *Dimensions of Authoritarianism: A Review of Research and Theory* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1967). Richard Sennett has recognized the methodological deficiencies of Adorno's research, but argues that the value of the effort, ". . . lies in the very questions it has provoked. It put in question the assumption that Weber and others had made. What people are willing to believe is not simply a matter of credibility or legitimacy of the ideas, rules, and persons offered them. It is also a matter of their own need to believe. What they want from an authority is as important as what the authority has to offer. And, the point made more strongly in the [subsequent] work by Max Horkheimer, the very need for authority is shaped by history and culture, as well as psychological predisposition," *Authority*, p. 25.

3.1 Investigations of Crimes of Obedience

Kelman's and Hamilton's interest in crimes of obedience stems from personal experience.²⁸ Of particular interest to both men is the military crime of obedience which occurred during the Vietnam war in the Vietnamese village of My Lai. A picture of the My Lai massacre can be sketched by reviewing a few historical facts.

In the early morning hours of March 16, 1968, under the command of Lt. Col. Frank Barker, the troops with Charlie Company landed by helicopter near the subhamlet of My Lai 4. They were expecting to engage the Viet Cong Forty-eighth Battalion. When they entered the village, there were no Viet Cong soldiers. The only people they found were elderly men, women and children - all unarmed. The American soldiers proceeded to massacre the entire village. By the end of the day the soldiers had hacked and brutally murdered hundreds. Final tallies of those killed were as high as five hundred.

Despite the systematic year-long coverup of this incident by the American army, the truth about this horrific event was finally made known to the international community. *Life* magazine put a picture of a stack of at least 20 My Lai victims, mutilated and piled for burial on the cover of their magazine. There were subsequent legal charges, and over thirty soldiers stood trial, but only one individual, Lieutenant Calley, was found guilty of war crimes and was actually punished. Calley originally received a sentence of life imprisonment, which was subsequently reduced to twenty years, then to ten. When all was said and done, he served three years under house arrest, then was released on bond.

Independent studies in the form of a national Gallup telephone poll registered an unbelievable 79% disapproval rate for Calley being judged guilty at all, with only 9% approving. It was this broad consensus of opinion which actually motivated Kelman and Hamilton to undertake their own social psychological study into public views of unquestioning obedience to authorities and the massacre of My Lai.

²⁸ Herbert Kelman spent a year under Nazi rule and another year as a refugee in Antwerp before he escaped with his family to the United States. The atrocities in the Nazi death camps prompted Kelman to become a social psychologist with a particular interest in authority, orders, responsibility and actions resulting from unquestioning obedience versus principled resistance to unjust authority. Lee Hamilton was born in the American South, and became sensitized to the moral dilemmas and social psychological dynamics of social conformity and submission to obedience as a result of his experience of racism in the South, and the Vietnam War.

What they discovered shocked them: given the very same circumstances of My Lai, 67% of those surveyed believed that most people would have done the same as the soldiers when given orders to kill innocent civilians during wartime. When asked what they themselves would have done, 51% said they too would have killed the villagers if ordered to do so.

Although the most telling examples of crimes of obedience are those of massacres sanctioned by military authorities during wartime, there are many other types of crimes of obedience exhibiting similar social psychological dynamics. Kelman and Hamilton explore a number of such crimes including the Watergate scandal, the Iran-Contra scandal and the Chrysler Odometer case.²⁹

Historical examples of crimes of obedience confirm the startling findings from a whole series of social-psychological experiments carried out by Stanley Milgram, the results of which he published in *Obedience to Authority*. Milgram undertook his obedience studies in a laboratory setting while at the Department of Psychology at Yale University from 1960-63. Milgram explains in the opening chapter of his book that, "... the aim of this investigation was to find when and how people would defy authority in the face of clear moral imperative."³⁰

The structural aspects of the experiment were relatively simple. Ads were placed in local newspapers soliciting volunteers for what was described as an experiment in learning and memory. The advertisements noted that each volunteer would be paid \$4 (plus 50 cents bus fare) for one hour of their time, with no subsequent follow-up or commitment.

Volunteers of all ages and professions were told that they were participating in an experiment on the effects of punishment on learning. In actual fact the *learner* was a confederate with Milgram; the experiment had nothing whatsoever to do with the effects

²⁹ The Chrysler Odometer case resulted in the indictment of Chrysler Corporation by a federal grand jury for selling sixty thousand cars and trucks as new even though they had been driven by company executives. Similar cases cited as crimes of obedience are the selling of Ford cars with known defective gas tanks, and the premature launching of the space shuttle challenger (resulting in a tragic explosion and several deaths) despite knowledge of defective O-rings causing the explosion prior to launch.

³⁰ Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 4.

of punishment on learning. Milgram's interest was only with the volunteers who adopted the role of *teacher*. The volunteer-turned-teacher was instructed to shock electrically another individual acting as the learner whenever the person answered wrongly. The learner was instructed to act stupid and be wrong a lot.

In most of the experiments, the learner remained out of eyesight of the teacher in an adjacent room. Each time the learner gave a wrong answer the teacher was instructed to administer an electric shock - or so the teacher believed. In actual fact the person received no shocks, but feigned being in extreme pain by screaming, banging the wall, and, at a certain point, begging the teacher to stop the experiment. Whenever the teacher hesitated to give another shock, he or she was formally instructed to ignore the pleas of the student, and calmly asked to continue with the experiment. The shocks began at 15 volts and increased each time the individual made a mistake, up to a maximum of 450 volts. Each teacher got a sample dose of 15 volts to grasp better the level of pain they would be inflicting. About 300,000 volunteers participated in the experiment.

Psychiatrists were asked to predict how far people would go in shocking the patients. The consensus was that only the *lunatic fringe* would go beyond 150 volts. To the complete amazement of both Milgram and the psychiatrists, no less than 62 per cent of people tested continued to give shocks right up to the lethal dose of 450 volts. Most suffered extreme stress while inflicting the punishment, some remarking afterwards that they could hardly believe themselves capable of doing such a thing, often adding that they certainly would not have done what they did if they had not been told to do so. As Milgram notes: "This is perhaps the most fundamental lesson of our study: ordinary people simply doing their jobs and without any particular hostility on their part can become agents in a terrible destructive process."³¹ In interviews with the *teachers* after the experiment, Milgram found that politeness, a wish to keep their promise to help the experimenter, and embarrassment at backing out were some of the reasons given why they chose to remain obedient and continue administering shocks.

Milgram identified other factors in the dynamic process of the experiment which

³¹ Milgram, *Obedience to Authority*, p. 6.

help to explain the actions of his teacher-subjects. Of particular interest was the effect which the physical proximity to the victim had on the teacher. The teacher would refuse to administer high voltage shocks much sooner when the learner was physically closer. This finding supports Kelman and Hamilton's belief that individuals performing immoral actions under orders from legitimately-perceived authorities tend to dehumanize and neutralize the humanity of victims to lessen anxiety, feelings of guilt and regret, and to block out positive feelings of sympathy and compassion for their victims.³² This deadening process is more difficult to engage in when the designated victim is physically proximate.

Beyond the excuses and superficial attempts to explain the actions of the individuals doing the shocking, the bottom line was that individuals were able to perform sadistic acts on innocent participants only because *they did not feel morally responsible for their actions*. Milgram tells us that the studies convinced him of one unescapable fact:

*The most common adjustment of thought in the obedient subject is for him [her] to see himself [herself] as not responsible for his [her] own actions. He divests himself [herself] of responsibility by attributing all initiative to the experimenter, a legitimate authority. . . . The disappearance of a sense of responsibility is the most far-reaching consequence of submission to authority.*³³

Milgram's findings on how individuals participate in social evils by unquestioning obedience to authority echo observations recorded by Hannah Arendt on Eichmann's role in the Nazi atrocities under Hitler, in *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. Arendt argues that the prosecution's attempt to characterize Eichmann as a hideous monster was wrong. She believed it was more accurate to view Eichmann as a talented technocrat who simply focused his energies and attention on doing a good job. He

³² Kelman and Hamilton, *Crimes of Obedience*, p. 19-20. In his post-world war studies on international economics and the reality of global inequity, Gunnar Myrdal discusses the impact of physical proximity of the suffering others on moral consciousness: "It would be worth while to analyse in some detail how they [people in the richer countries] succeeded in training themselves to take abstract cognisance of the occasional starvation of many million of human beings somewhere in Asia without really making it a part of their perception of reality. Protected by this heavy fog of opportune ignorance, which I referred to as forming the emotional or moral basis for the equality ideal as an ideological force in society - ust be thought of as rapidly losing intensity as the distance from the object increases. In relation to peoples outside national boundaries and, in particular, peoples of other races, religions and cultures, living far away, the intensity easily falls to practically zero." *Economic Theory and Underdeveloped Regions*, p. 135-136.

³³ Milgram, *Obedience to Authority*, p. 8.

obviously sensed that something was wrong with his approach, but his obsession to excel as an architect led him to engage in self-deceptive strategies to avoid exploring and taking responsibility for the consequences of his participation in the bureaucratic machinery of human destruction. Eichmann had neither the explicit awareness nor malevolent intention of a monster. The evil outcome of his actions was not the result of aggression and hatred; his significant contribution to evil was *banal and mundane*.

Milgram was obviously disturbed with the findings from his experiments. He sought some explanation why such a large proportion of the people tested behaved in such a sadistic manner with so little incentive to do so, beyond being paid a few dollars and *given orders*. Milgram expresses pessimism about the future prospects for humanity:

The capacity for man to abandon his [her] humanity, indeed, the inevitability that he [she] does so, as he [she] merges his [her] unique personality into larger institutional structures. This is a fatal flaw nature has designed into us, and which in the long run gives our species only a modest chance of survival.³⁴

On the last page of his book, Milgram seems to attribute crimes of obedience to the *social environment*, rather than to human *nature*, thereby holding out some hope that social transformation may yet eliminate the conditions and forces which lead to atrocities such as the Holocaust, My Lai, or, more recently, the unnecessary elimination of 100,000 already-defeated Iraqi soldiers in the deserts of Southern Iraq with self-targeting *Smartbombs*:

The results, as seen and felt in the laboratory, are to this author disturbing. They raise the possibility that human nature, or - more specifically - the kind of character produced in American democratic society, cannot be counted on to insulate its citizens from brutality and inhumane treatment at the direction of malevolent authority.³⁵

What kind of society produces citizens with a moral consciousness formed to commit crimes of obedience?

³⁴ Milgram, *Obedience to Authority*, p. 188.

³⁵ Milgram, *Obedience to Authority*, p. 189.

3.2 Probing the Psychosocial Dynamics of Crimes of Obedience

How are we to fathom the social psychological dynamics of submission to authority leading to crimes of obedience? Kelman and Hamilton explain how legitimate authority creates the obligation to follow rules, regardless of personal preferences or interests. Crimes of obedience occur, they tell us, when ". . . individuals abandon personal responsibility for actions taken under superior orders,"³⁶ a definition identical to the conclusion drawn by Milgram. Although Kelman and Hamilton are aware that the concept of legitimate authority is redundant, speaking *technically*, since authority itself implies the right to make demands and give orders, they also recognize that no established human authority is without limits:

*Subordinates, on their part, have a duty to obey, but a corresponding right to expect that the authorities will take responsibility for any untoward outcomes of actions performed under superior orders. But neither the subordinates' right to be absolved of responsibility nor the authorities' right to make demands or give commands is unlimited.*³⁷

Treating authority - and submission to authority - as social psychological concepts which give cognitive expression to the dynamic perceptions and relations between subordinates and superiors, gives additional significance to the concept of *illegitimate* authority:

*From our point of view, however, the lack of legitimacy as perceived by group members is of primary importance, since we treat legitimacy as a social psychological concept referring to members' acceptance of the authority's right to make demands upon them. . . We can speak of authority when officeholders claim the right to give orders by virtue of their positions; this authority is legitimate insofar as members accept that claim.*³⁸

From a social-psychological perspective, the use of authority is one form of social influence. The greater the perceived legitimacy of the authority, the higher the probability that group members will obey.

³⁶ Kelman and Hamilton, *Crimes of Obedience*, p. 20.

³⁷ Kelman and Hamilton, *Crimes of Obedience*, p. 55.

³⁸ Kelman and Hamilton, *Crimes of Obedience*, p. 56.

3.3 Denying or Asserting Responsibility for Obedience Crimes

Milgram argues that the dynamics operating in crimes of obedience differ considerably from the dynamics of group conformity, as explored by Solomon Asch. With group conformity, individuals tend to *deny* that they succumb to pressures to conform, and *assert* that they act voluntarily and responsibly. With obedience to legitimately-perceived authority exactly the opposite is the case: individuals *assert* that they are indeed succumbing to pressures to conform, and *deny* personal responsibility. Why is this so? Milgram offers the following answer:

Because conformity is a response to pressures that are implicit, the subject interprets his [her] own behavior as voluntary. He [she] cannot pinpoint a legitimate reason for yielding to his [her] peers, so he [she] denies that he [she] has done so, not only to the experimenter but to himself [herself] as well. In obedience the opposite is true. The situation is publicly defined as one devoid of voluntarism, for there is an explicit command that he [she] is expected to obey. The subject falls back on this public definition of the situation as the full explanation of his [her] action.³⁹

Kelman and Hamilton argue that subordinates do not *always* assert responsibility for their participation in immoral acts or political crimes under orders from authorities: different individuals may react by either *denying* or *asserting* responsibility for the crimes. Some protest that they had no choice but to obey; others argue that they did in fact have a choice, but felt constrained to obey, given that the authority was perceived as legitimate. Usually there is a conflict between some religious and moral authority cherished by the individual, and the nature of the act commanded to be done by the authority giving orders.

With the support of statistical evidence, Kelman and Hamilton offer a class analysis concerning the denial of responsibility in crimes of obedience. They make an important distinction between denial of responsibility on the basis of either a *rule* or *role* orientation. They argue that denial on the basis of rule orientation is most evident with *subordinates* in a hierarchy - among those who are powerless:

³⁹ Milgram, *Obedience to Authority*, p. 115.

We continue to assign a central place in our analysis to powerlessness; we view it as a key element in rule orientation, one of the two bases of responsibility denial. Overcoming the effects of powerlessness - through empowerment and the redistribution of power - is therefore one of the important features of our recommendations below for counteracting the habit of unquestioning obedience.⁴⁰

In other cases, where individuals derive a sense of power from their role in the system, the denial of responsibility in crimes of obedience often stems from a sense of loyalty or citizen-duty. This recognition of a second potential cause for the denial of responsibility corrects the common tendency to view wrongly the abdication of moral responsibility as a *lower-class phenomenon*, and calls for a quite different set of recommendations:

Responsibility denial based on role orientation, therefore, suggests a different set of recommendations for counteracting the habit of unquestioning obedience than does responsibility based on rule orientation: recommendations that focus on how to deglamorize power, rather than how to overcome powerlessness, and that are directed at all levels of the organizational hierarchy and the social structure.⁴¹

The concept of legitimate authority has its origin in the threefold typology of authority offered by sociologist Max Weber. The first category of authority, *Charismatic authority* rests upon the extraordinary character and message of some exemplary individual such as Jesus or the Buddha. Here power is glamorized in a personified way. The second type of authority Weber calls *Traditional authority*. This form typically finds expression in social organizations or institutions where authority is transmitted through definite rules of inheritance. Traditional authority invested in religious and civil authority figures represents an attempt by those who follow the teachings of some past charismatic individual authority to keep that authority alive; a historical and social process Weber described as the *routinization of charisma*. The final category of authority discussed by Weber is *legal-rational authority*, a form of authority based on the legal interpretation of rules of law, and on the right of those who occupy social positions of power to issue commands. Legal or rational-bureaucratic authority is the type exemplified by modern political states and economic entities, and is founded on a set of abstract normative social

⁴⁰ Kelman and Hamilton, *Crimes of Obedience*, p. 318.

⁴¹ Kelman and Hamilton, *Crimes of Obedience*, p. 318.

rules which take the form of implicit or explicit contracts.

Contemporary authors such as Talcott Parsons, Peter Blau and Richard Sennett speak of a forth type of authority, *bureaucratic* and *professional authority*. Professional authorities obtain their legitimacy from their superior knowledge and competence in providing a service or skill (i.e., doctors), but they are careful to point out that people do not generally view professional authorities as having the right to make legitimate demands, only legitimate *requests*. Subordinates are not completely powerless, they usually pay dearly for the advice and directives of professional authorities (i.e., lawyers). Subordinates will only follow the directives of professional authorities if they believe it is in their own best interest to do so. However, this can be problematic, since the client usually does not have the means or knowledge to evaluate independently the merits of professional advice without going to another professional for a second opinion. Professionals can often wield considerable power in relationships as revered and prestigious members of the knowledge elite.

4. The Dynamics of Conforming to Illegitimate Authority

It is easy to understand how people can be obedient to corrupt authority, i.e., in situations of military dictatorships. Obedience here takes the form of forced compliance, where the individual conforms to avoid punishment, brutal torture, or even death. How, though, are we to understand the seemingly *voluntary* submission to authorities *not viewed as legitimate*? Weber really made no provision within his typology of authority for such a situation, believing that people would not - unless forced to do so - give their allegiance to authorities they perceive was illegitimate.

Marx held a similar view. He predicted that capitalism would bring a widening gap between the owners and workers, and as the disparity worsened, the workers would more easily recognize the inequality and injustice of the system, and rise up against their oppressive masters. This would happen, he argued, once enough people identified the authority upon which the masters based their influential power to be *illegitimate*.

It can be argued that most citizens do not view members of the current political and economic elites as *legitimate* authorities, notwithstanding a recognition of the legitimacy of some of the social means whereby these individuals came to power (i.e., democratic elections). Is Marx's prediction coming true in contemporary capitalist society? Are people rising up against their illegitimate rulers and masters? There is certainly increasing dissatisfaction and protest in many forms, but nothing approaching the revolution Marx predicted. Why is this the case?

In his intriguing social psychological study *Authority*, Richard Sennett argues that the logic underlying optimistic theories predicting rebellion against illegitimately-perceived authorities (such as that of Marx) failed to take into account just how seriously affected people are by the influence and strength of other people, regardless of whether their power is viewed as legitimate or not. He believes that the paradoxical phenomenon of authority in contemporary capitalist society is that we ". . . feel attracted to strong figures we do not believe to be legitimate."⁴² Sennett believes that there is a psychological fallout from being subject to authority, regardless of whether that authority is justified morally:

*The rebound in modern society has been that people feel ashamed about being weak. They use the tools of negation to ward off these feelings of shame, and to defend themselves against the impact of strong people who seem malign. The subjects defend themselves by declaring the illegitimacy of the masters.*⁴³

The curious effect of defending one's sense of worth or identity by pointing to the illegitimacy of some authority is that the continued presence of that authority may become necessary for the social psychological maintenance of identity. The negative rebound of illegitimately-perceived authority on individuals is particularly powerful in contemporary society, with each and every person feeling personally responsible to *make something out of him or herself*. This modern identity burden was discussed briefly in the previous chapter, and will be examined below from the perspective of social conformity.

Sennett's theoretical analysis provides an essential corrective to those superstructural cultural theories which speak excessively of the impersonal and

⁴² Sennett, *Authority*, p. 26.

⁴³ Sennett, *Authority*, p. 46.

technological dimensions of modern bureaucratic society. Consider for example, the following statement from Zijderfeld:

Through an ever enlarging process of differentiation, modern society acquired a rather autonomous and abstract nature confronting the individual with strong but strange forms of control. It demands the attitudes of obedient functionaries from its inhabitants who experience its control as an unfamiliar kind of authority. That means societal control is no longer characterized by a familylike authority but dominated by bureaucratic neutrality and unresponsiveness.⁴⁴

Certainly there is a good deal of truth in this statement. According to Sennett, however, the *bureaucratic neutrality and unresponsiveness* which Zijderfeld and many others describe as characterizing contemporary forms of *societal control* are not nearly as static and unresponsive as they may first appear. There is a network of intense relationships established among workers, as well as between the workers and their superiors. There are similarly strong relationships between the unemployed and economic and political authorities. Even *unresponsiveness* elicits strong feeling-responses which can serve the interests of illegitimate authorities. This powerful and damaging psychological rebound results primarily from the sociological and cultural conditions of modern industrial society which isolate individuals and punish the weak. Such was not the case in pre-industrial society.

In the aristocratic order of the feudal age, weakness was not reason enough to feel shame. Weakness was mostly inherited, and was not equated with being dependent on others. Modern industrial society on the other hand - with the ideology of equal opportunity - fosters the illusory belief that each and every individual can be Prime Minister, with enough good will and hard work. To be weaker or less effective than others is often - on account of this sense of personal responsibility for making something of one's life - viewed as personal failure. Even insightful structural and systemic social analysis explaining personal situations is often not sufficient to counteract this strongly felt feeling of being *less-than* or of having *failed*. These feelings of being weak or ignorant are usually kept secret, for part of the liberal burden is the onus on each individual (or family unit) to *make it* financially on one's own. Individuals keep information about

⁴⁴ Zijderfeld, *The Abstract Society*, p. 10.

financial hardship to themselves not out of a sense of bravado or pride (in the classical liberal tradition of *rugged individualism*), but rather, from a false sense of shame.⁴⁵

Authorities exploit negative emotional predispositions and psychological dynamics in an attempt to increase the effectiveness of their power and control over subordinates, thereby reaffirming and strengthening their authority. Individuals become trapped in a submissive role within relationships with negative authority by the constant attention and process of negation which dominates the conscious life of the individual. The social psychological dynamics of these types of relations are based on negative conformity, and are essentially the same as those described in the previous study of symbiotic relationship and political and economic dependency. They represent a form of mental fascination with individuals who hold a superior and more powerful and directing role within society.

4.1 Social Metaphors and the Suppression of Critical Awareness

One of the technical means whereby negative bonds are fostered between the socially powerful and the economically and politically weak is through the use of powerful social metaphors which evoke strong positive emotions that obscure the reality of exploitation and negative dependency. These metaphors help to explain the dynamics of social conformity by illustrating how negative patterns can be established on positively-imagined foundations. Citing Paul Ricouer's research on metaphor, Sennett explains how metaphors fuse dissonant meanings with one another so that each is changed by the other.

*This linguistic action of metaphor has consequences in how people feel and behave toward one another. Most important of these consequences is that the fear of a person in power may be magnified. Formal control over a thousand people is joined to experiences of face-to-face control each person has felt deeply in the family. It is awesome to think of a person affecting many people in an intimate way. It is the work of metaphor which makes that awesome juncture.*⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Canadian farmers, for example, often refuse to talk about personal and financial hardships for fear that they will be judged as 'poor farmers and bad managers' - which is, unfortunately, too often how they are portrayed in the media - despite reams of solid evidence that the farm crisis affecting thousands of farm families is caused by high input costs, high debt servicing, international agricultural trade wars, and too small a portion of the consumer food dollar going to farmers.

⁴⁶ Sennett, *Authority*, p. 79.

Again we see the power of metaphors to simplify and mislead. As Sennett puts it, ". . . these restrictions make it possible for metaphors to brutalize the intelligent understanding people have of the conditions of power which rule their lives."⁴⁷ Describing negative situations with positive metaphors is a method of deception, often mass deception. It can be found at the heart of the persuasive influence which draws people into bonds of social conformity. Members of the economic elite have long employed such metaphors to increase their influence and control of overs.

4.2 An Analysis of Two Ideal Types of Illegitimate Authority

The two perceived character ideals of *love* and *power* define the attractive features of illegitimate authority, and correspond to Sennett's distinction between two ideal types of illegitimately-perceived authority; paternalism (love) and autonomy (power). Present in both types is the subtle but powerful influence of positive metaphors attached to illegitimate-perceived authority. This strange combination of attraction and negation is effective only because of the current cultural ethos where power elicits shame:

*What we need to understand about the larger social dimensions of this bond is the strengths which have come to be seen in the dominant figures of authority, the paternalistic and autonomous figures. What kind of shame has their strength elicited among those who are dependent upon them? What acts of negation have tightened the knot between the two sides?*⁴⁸

Sennett discusses two types of positive images attached to illegitimate authorities: *paternalism* and *autonomy*. The *paternal* metaphor of authority appeals to subordinates asking for trust and loyalty, as one would trust a caring father. The attraction with the autonomous authority figures is that such individuals show no concern for others. Despite the remarkable difference in these two types of illegitimate authority, according to Sennett, ". . . both types of authority are malignant, both are based on illegitimate forms of social control, and both trap those who negate them."

⁴⁷ Sennett, *Authority*, p. 80.

⁴⁸ Sennett, *Authority*, p. 48.

Linking the image of a caring father to the position of capitalist owner and boss (or politician) *personalizes* an illusion and creates comforting feelings. As Sennett states using the terminology of Max Black, "The magnification of father provided the 'frame' for the metaphor within which 'boss' becomes the focal word."⁴⁹ The basic human need for parental approval can carry over to boss approval. Although the boss may not be liked, the boss can still elicit respect and admiration when viewed through the emotionally-laden and confusing metaphor of *father*.

At the other extreme from paternalism lies the metaphor of authority as the autonomous, strong and self-sufficient individual. Here illegitimate authority does not pretend to have concern for others. The dominant cultural view tends to regard all forms of dependency as *bad*, or at least undesirable, driving a large proportion of people in contemporary Western society to desire becoming more autonomous and self-sufficient. Whereas paternalism represents a false profession of care, authority based on autonomy involves another kind of metaphorical illusion and extreme point of view, of the self-sufficiency/individualistic kind. This attractive but illusory goal distorts our legitimate need for reciprocity and human love, and can easily become the basis for manipulation in interpersonal relationships, producing stigmatization and feelings of shame: "One person is needed by others more than he or she needs them. They need something which he or she has learned to be rather than something the person owns. . . a doctor or a skilled bureaucrat has trained and developed himself; his very nature is what he possesses, and what other people need."⁵⁰

Daniel Bell's argument that technical expertise and innovation have become the modern forms of capital follows a similar line of thinking. He likens technical expertise to the cash of the 19th Century entrepreneur, whoever has it can be independent. This view creates the illusion that human worth is measured in terms of utilitarian value and one's economic productive capacity. The development of a coherent and autonomous identity can stigmatize other people by communicating strong emotional and non-verbal messages

⁴⁹ Sennett, *Authority*, p. 79.

⁵⁰ Sennett, *Authority*, p. 85.

to other individuals *without autonomy* that they are *less than*, due to their need for others: "Autonomy is about someone who has developed a talent, a personality, a style which is also not normal - but here the better word is 'ordinary.' for what 'ordinary' implies is a state of being which is shapeless, unremarkable, bland - in a word, an amorphous condition of life."⁵¹ People separate themselves from others on the basis of these personally-developed talents. They pursue the ideal of autonomy and remain emotionally aloof from others. Indifference to ordinary people has a definite shaming effect; it makes other people feel they don't count. But people need recognition from others. This is the heart of what Sennett describes as the negative ties that bind subordinates to illegitimately-perceived authorities: subordinates lack autonomy, feel a greater degree of shame, and therefore tend to feel a greater need to be recognized. Illegitimate authorities - on the basis of their autonomous power - control the means of recognition: "This play between recognition and indifference is how the knot tightens. The superior remains in control of the apparatus of recognition; his or her attention is the prize of disruption."⁵² There are different ways in which the knot tightens, all of which bind subordinates to illegitimately-perceived authority. Groups protesting bad government legislation may be ignored for months by political officials, then, when they are granted a meeting with the minister, they feel uplifted. The positive change in the mood of the protesters came from being recognized - and having their attention diverted - not from achieving the desired political and social ends - i.e., the bad legislation remains firmly intact.

4.3 Ties which Bind Subordinates to Illegitimate Authority

Bonds of rejection come into being in three distinct ways: "The first concerns the fear of an authority's strength; it is a bond I shall call 'disobedient dependence'. The second is printing a positive, ideal image of authority from the negative which exists. The

⁵¹ Sennett, *Authority*, p. 92.

⁵² Sennett, *Authority*, p. 104.

third is built on a fantasy about the disappearance of authority."⁵³ In each case we have a conscious explanation or interpretation of the situation by the subordinate which serves as the basis for thoughts and actions. Sennett gives an example of disobedient dependence where a teenage daughter rebels against her parents in choosing a particular course of action. The irony is that the choices made in the rebellion do not reflect what the young woman actually wants, and would personally benefit from, but rather serve to negate the will of her parents which no longer has formal control over her:

What they [her parents] would like, she negates; she has chosen two men whom she knows they will disapprove of. What they would like is, however, the controlling factor. She is more surely bonded to them than a young person who can make erotic decisions without worrying compulsively about what his or her parents would say. The very act of disobeying, with all its confrontations, anxieties, and conflicts, knits people together.⁵⁴

This negative bonding is based on a compulsive focusing of attention aimed at trying to figure what the illegitimate authority likes or wants, so the person can then proceed to negate those likes and wants. Such compulsive disobedience reflects the same alter-dependent fascination with the will and wishes of another which was discussed earlier; it has little to do with genuine independence or autonomy.

With *idealized substitution*, constant reference is made to an *illegitimate* authority figure as a comparative reference point in the idealization of *legitimate* authority. Here the illegitimate authority is used as a negative model. This too can be a form of dependency. The experience of dependency enables the individual to sustain a sense of what is *preferable* on the basis of an analysis of what is *disdained*. There is also the self-same dynamics of conformity which operate in the workplace as a cohesive force in identity formation:

The fear which operates in idealized substitution is a fear of being cut loose, of having no moorings, no point of reference to say why one is working, serving, or dependent. If the master is bad, weak, then an image appears of what is good. To print this positive, it is often necessary to exaggerate the defects of the actual superior, to give the superior a kind of 'negative potency.'⁵⁵

⁵³ Sennett, *Authority*, p. 28.

⁵⁴ Sennett, *Authority*, p. 33.

⁵⁵ Sennett, *Authority*, p. 38.

There is a prevalent trend emerging on a global basis wherein individual human beings are becoming told that they are increasingly dispensable. Surviving demands that individuals are willing to accept the lowest offer in a race-to-the-bottom game of competitive poverty. This is a global variation on the theme *conquer and divide* which obscures for people the extent of their individual and collective power. People are far from dispensable; indeed, economic and political elites are completely dependent on the labour and cooperation of people to operate the dominant system. Those who have political power in interpersonal relationships - or within economic and political relations - present themselves as not needing the very people upon whom they are dependent. This is one of the most powerful and crippling illusions disguising blatant social injustice and oppression in the world today.

A third way in which a bond between masters and servants can be built beneath the surface of rejections is through the fantasy of disappearance. "The authority figure is feared, but even more the subject fears he [she] will go away. The result of this process is that language of contingency in which everything wrong is the fault of the presence of an authority, and it matters desperately that the authority be present."⁵⁶ Regardless of the particular character of the negation of authority, as Sennett points out, none of these three responses effect transformation, so the relationship remains unequal and the authority remains illegitimate: "The negation of authority does not transcend the ethos of capitalism: 'possession' is the ruling term. The vision of a better social order, or a more truly responsive and nurturing authority, of 'better' authority, is not germinated by this resistance."⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Sennett, *Authority*, p. 40.

⁵⁷ Sennett, *Authority*, p. 73.

Summary

The social psychological dynamics which keep individuals under the spell and control of others supplants critical awareness. By identifying and rejecting *illegitimate* authorities, on the basis of an alternative social vision and concept of *legitimate* authority, critical awareness and responsible life praxis overcome negative conformity.

There are many factors which influence moral choices. Strong influences can be found in the situational determinants exerting pressure to conform to, or to obey, what people do not naturally need or desire. Conformity can take decisive forms, depending on whether people regard themselves as morally responsible to act, and numerous factors can influence the extent that people are willing to take responsibility for their actions.

Awareness of the psychological depth of personal and social oppression is difficult to attain, and when attained, difficult to remain attentive to. It can be frightening and threatening to reflect on the full reality of situations of domination and abuse. It can be equally as difficult to pass up the lure of political and social forces inviting individuals to belong by conforming and being a part of a *team*. Surrendering moral judgement by conforming to what others want us to think and do represents the antithesis to dynamic moral awareness.

It is ultimately the social and political arena of associations and organizations where the moral dynamic of one's life finds expression in concrete engagement. It is in such engagements that individuals define self-understanding and find personal meaning in their lives. Understanding the impediments to moral awareness and self-determination inherent in the negative social psychological dynamics of social conformity makes authentic social organization possible.

Conclusion

A commitment to alleviate unnecessary human suffering and oppression through liberating change - simultaneously moral change (psychological and spiritual) and political change (sociological and cultural) - calls members of society to attain awareness of what the social situation requires them to *know* and *do* to advance a personal and collective liberation process. Once the *impediments* to growth are identified - when we can explain the originating causes of unnecessary human suffering - we are then able to identify what needs to be changed in our personal and social lives, and to take action to effect change.

This study offers support for the belief that the search for human moral fulfilment always has both *moral* and *political* elements woven into a single life praxis. Embarking on such a journey means responding to a summons to act to improve our lives and serve others. The search for human fulfilment also involves becoming aware of what needs to be *encouraged and promoted* within ourselves and within society. Numerous social psychological factors constitute impediments to this process. An ethics of awareness seeks to identify and overcome these barriers to growth; it also seeks a social consensus on the practical requirements for a just and sustainable economic and political life. The objective of this study was accomplished: a range of concepts, ideas, anecdotes and insights were taken from a range of social scientists to clarify structural patterns that impede the development of moral awareness. A multi-disciplinary method was used to *integrate* insights into a single dynamic understanding of ethics. It is important to discover and use these insights and analytical tools to detect and neutralize negative patterns which may be operating in personal and social life.

In the first chapter, a theory of knowledge was developed from the dynamic psychology of William James, Michael Polanyi and Bernard Lonergan. A focus on the function of *attention* as the regulator of the flow of human consciousness is not a common approach taken in contemporary ethics, however it is an extremely revealing one. Using the psychological concept of *attention* throughout the study kept the focus on how human

consciousness can either *attain*, or *not attain*, transformative awareness. Human attention - which is inclined naturally toward moral awareness and understanding - can be distracted, manipulated, or otherwise prevented from attaining revealing insights and correct information about self and society; information which is needed to make moral evaluations and to plan rational and moral change. Whatever captures the attention decides what happens in human consciousness. When people are denied, or deny themselves, access to information and insights leading to transformative awareness, moral and spiritual life becomes frustrated. People in such situations are not inclined to act to improve self or society. The key to healthy moral development lies in being able to satisfy the basic needs common to all human beings, the main ingredients of which (along with basic economic requirements) are a *meaningful master life story* and *trustworthy relationships* in which self-disclosure and common projects unite people in community.

Chapter two explored the ambiguous nature of moral awareness under the theme of self-deception - a process of limiting awareness. We can give tacit consent to processes which exclude aspects of personal and social reality from consciousness. Situations may call a person to desensitize or turn attention away from certain things for morally-legitimate reasons. The dynamics of self-deception require that we understand and overcome root fears, insecurities and emotional pain before facing the full truth in a way that does not cause unnecessary suffering, harm or psychological aberrations. Being able to *spell out* threatening truths that evoke emotional pain and mental anxiety (and being able to *sustain* an awareness of those truths) is often simply not possible until we have first been accepted, affirmed and loved by others. In the experience of affirmation and love, we find strength to envision a positive future, and to commit to a life of moral and spiritual improvement.

Common elements found in several distinct moral approaches to self-deception reveal that we need to *learn* to be conscious - or, to learn to control and direct consciousness morally. Self-deception, in the first instance, is people engaging in various activities to evade painful truths. To face the truths that are being avoided using strategies

of self-deception is to reclaim or forge an identity. Our self-understanding is in fact a master life story. In self-deception, we participate in the misperformance of consciousness by not avowing aspects of who we believe we have been, who we believe we are, and who we believe we can become. To gain the moral courage and motivation to act in accordance with one's beliefs and values it is necessary to have a meaningful master life story and trustworthy human relationships within which mutual self-disclosure can take place.

Chapter three turned to the dynamics of social ignorance to see how the mind is formed, informed and deformed by social structures and social information. Social ignorance and ideology are not accidental, but opportunistic and functional, serving particular interests of both subordinate and dominant members of society. These interests need to be identified and explained. Overcoming ignorance through access to revealing social information can empower people to change. However, ideological and structural social circumstances present barriers to transformative awareness by producing ignorance to guarantee social coherence and the continuance of unjust social situations. Our awareness of the limitation of human attention, and the attendant consequences for moral consciousness, is itself restricted, causing a particular kind of social ignorance.

Becoming aware of our ignorance is the first step to overcoming social ignorance. It frees us to explore the source of other areas of social ignorance that impede personal and social development. Understanding the dynamics of social ignorance as manifested in human consciousness requires that we consider the possible sources of social ignorance: we can deceive ourselves about society or we can be misinformed or deceived by others, or we can be kept from seeing the truth through structural patterns which restrict human attention from obtaining insightful social information. Abstract theories, such as the dominant ideology thesis, are intriguing, but concrete analysis of the reception and perpetuation of false or distorted ideas is required to understand how social ideology can block the development of dynamic moral awareness and transformation.

The impact of the structural fragmentation of society on human consciousness can

itself lead to ignorance by causing people to regard *abstract* knowledge as *concrete* knowledge. This experience of fragmented society in consciousness emerges from lived experience. Cultural and religious pluralism, and the globalization of economic activity, lead to the loss of a unified social world view. These social trends and forces change human consciousness, fragmenting a sense of *identity* and *social place* in individuals, and disintegrating the bonds of moral human community. Fragmentation and competition isolate people from one another, giving them only an abstract consciousness of society, a mish-mash of disconnected information about social relationships which lacks unified meaning and a sense of collective purpose. Human *autonomy* is severed from political community under fragmented society - people no longer feel part of a common social project.

When cultural, economic and political conditions are such that facing certain truths results in emotional pain and anxiety for many people, it is necessary to undertake a broader analysis of the dynamics of social ignorance to identify the social and ideological sources of personal suffering. Gaining insight into the connections between social reality and personal consciousness requires what C.W. Mills called a *sociological imagination* - the capacity to shift from the political to the psychological. By not understanding the connections between consciousness and society, many psychologies have wrongly interpreted *psychological experience* as the source of human suffering rather than symptoms of structural and institutional realities that damage people: i.e., psychological *expressions* of social *malaise*.

Patterns of personal suffering today are primarily the result of social factors, such as economic exploitation on an international scale, and the rise of privately-owned Transnational Corporations as the dominant force dictating the direction of future change for the entire world. Social circumstances and trends now seem to be working against humanity. People are being encouraged to compete with each other, not to cooperate in collective projects. These destabilizing social forces make the task of building community a challenging one. Social contradictions that have been disguised and hidden from awareness are now revealing themselves through deteriorating social change. With the

increasingly broad scope of social consciousness (global) the danger is that social change at the local level will be preempted by abstract consciousness - a state whereby people are disempowered by the inability to make sense of, or find meaning in, fragmented social information while cut off from the dynamic social processes which are deciding the very changes that affect their lives. Masses of people throughout the world are becoming poorer while wealth and economic power becomes more concentrated in the international economic elite.

Chapter four examined how ideology always operates as a category of human consciousness. This realization calls for a careful examination of the processes by which information is received and transmitted to discover the function ideology serves for people. Social information is always limited and biased, and those limitations are decided by how values are either *implicitly* or *explicitly* employed in both the collection and use of that information. This is true for science as it is for all modes of social inquiry. Sociological research methods must, therefore, always take cognizance of the way in which social inquiry is influenced and affected by values. Another key determinant affecting the type and quality of information available to the social investigator is *social location*. Our place in society, *where* we stand, and *who* we stand with, affects consciousness. Choosing to identify with those who experience unnecessary suffering and social injustices can generate dynamic moral awareness by exposing the social sources of personal problems.

Education in fragmented capitalist society imposes structural constraints on consciousness which tend to form the mind to view reality as a static rather than dynamic reality. Students are not encouraged to question authority, nor are they taught to see themselves as transformers of society. They view the world as something *out there*, knowledge of society is to be received as *deposits* made in passive and receptive minds. Educational systems are accommodating market forces by shifting the emphasis to *training* people to adapt themselves to the technical and technological requirements of business. This poses a serious threat to democratic institutions and the development of dynamic

moral awareness.

Authentic education for liberation teaches people to *construct* their own knowledge of self and society by actively investigating reality and testing social knowledge claims. Such a process dignifies the human capacity to understand and transform both self and society. Dynamic teaching methods and practices are needed to counteract current educational and cultural trends which diminish the capacity for critical self-reflection and creative self-directed action.

Chapter five moved to a consideration of impediments to dynamic moral awareness under the rubrics of dependency. Not all forms of dependency are negative. People need to be in relationship with others. We are interdependent. We need to *love others* just as we need to be *loved by others*. The structure of negative dependency represents a distortion of the moral ideal of an equal sharing of power. This distortion manifests itself in various types of relationships people experience, both individually and collectively, in their daily lives.

In the study of addictions, symbiotic relationships, and political and economic dependency, attention was drawn to the danger of regarding *models* and *concepts* as *explanations for dynamic activity*. Theoretical models - such as the *disease concept* - can interrupt the process of obtaining insight into the underlying causes of addiction. Addiction was characterized as maladaptive behaviour - a misguided search for love and power. At the heart of the daily routines and experiences of addictions are central activities which operate as coping mechanisms offering pseudo-protection from emotional pain and mental anxiety. The genesis of many addictions lies with the absence of loving relationships (especially in childhood), as well as the concrete factors which cause suffering and stress in contemporary society. Central activities characterized by addictive patterns of negative dependency on things can be changed through insight into the underlying causes for unfulfilled legitimate needs, the identification of the reasons for emotional pain and anxiety, and by pursuing a meaningful master life story in the context of loving relationships with others.

In symbiotic relationships two people share in patterns of denial and awareness deadening to their mutual detriment, for reasons similar to those of people addicted to things: to protect themselves from negative emotions and anxieties over identity. A corruption of consciousness happens with both people involved in a symbiotic relationship. The structure of consciousness for the *subordinate* person is one of being *alter-dependent*, with the focus of attention on satisfying, or complying with, the will of the *dominant*, yet *dependent*, other party in the relationship. The same essential understanding of dependency applies to a social psychological analysis of the impact of economic and political dependency. The subjugated people are made to feel inferior, and are robbed of the material and cultural means to escape the negative economic and political relationship established and maintained by outside powers. Critical awareness of what is enslaving or oppressing people is the first step in a liberation process.

The key to understanding all types of dependency is to recognize the character of the basic distortion in powersharing in the relationship. Overcoming negative dependency also requires an awareness of the social psychological impediments to freedom operating in the consciousness of dominated and oppressed people, then action to rise above *the fear of being unsuccessful* in a struggle for freedom.

Chapter six examined the dynamics of negative conformity. The language of social conformity considers the workings of individual consciousness and action from the perspective of people's *participation in society*. The way in which people participate in relationships with others, and engage in social institutions, has much to do with the ways and means they believe they have available to them to fulfil basic human needs. These influences and factors can lead people to deaden awareness and to abdicate moral responsibility. Clinical studies measuring conformity suggest that, under certain conditions, people tend to gauge their views, and base their decisions, on the *expected* reaction of other people - especially people viewed as *legitimate authorities*. This situation in contemporary fragmented society can easily result in atrocious crimes against humanity and the continuation of social injustices: these conditions pose a significant

threat to human freedom and social security.

Moral human community demands that people, as individuals, are the subjects of their own lives as they cooperate with others to build a better world. We are called to be responsible for our thinking and acting. The frustration of legitimate human needs produces impediments to the development of dynamic moral awareness for many people. To resist the powerful forces encouraging us to engage in - or to remain stuck in - patterns of negative dependency and negative conformity is to seek life-giving means to fulfil basic human needs, chief of which are trustworthy relationships and a meaningful master life story.

The moral challenge to live an improved life will feel like a burden to those who think that they can achieve transformation and growth on their own. The dynamics of human morality are the dynamics of human spirituality and community. Beyond the negative dynamics of *dependency* lie the positive dynamics of mutual love and trust. Beyond the dynamics of *negative* social conformity lie the *positive* dynamics of caring for one another in the security of loving interpersonal relationships and moral communities.

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