Analytical and Political Neutrality: Change, Privilege, and Responsibility[*]
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Tension between the ideal of analytic neutrality — although conceived and applied in various ways — and the putative danger of political neutrality is intrinsic to psychoanalytic investigations of culture and society. It presents itself with urgency in times of social conflict, especially when such conflict is characterized by or framed in terms of victimization, but it has not been a subject of rigorous debate. That the tension between analytic and political neutrality has not been widely examined might mean that when analysts engage in scholarly work outside of clinical settings (e.g., writing books or papers), we adopt a different set of norms to guide our behavior, norms that do not include whatever attitude of neutrality we may observe in the consulting room.[1] But it might also mean that this tension is a site of resistance, that we are unwilling to look closely at a difficult aspect of our work because we expect it to yield uncomfortable experience. Of course, this resistance may be largely unconscious, leading us to miss or mistake the meanings and consequences of our positions.

Analytic Neutrality
Due to space limitations, in this essay I do not review the long history or many variations of the idea of analytic neutrality. There remains a healthy discourse on the subject, particularly as it pertains to the timing and nature of interpretations, the self-presence or self-absence of the analyst, and the establishment of an appropriate working

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[1] In contrast to therapeutic settings, in scholarly investigations, the objects analyzed do not typically come to the analyst seeking help, do not typically involve themselves in the analytic work, and are not typically offered a relationship that extends through time. (For the purposes of this paper, analytic consultations with organizations and groups fall under the category of 'clinical' and 'therapeutic' work.) What is more, it is unclear whether the 'health' — if we may so speak — of the objects of analysis (social or cultural institutions, facets of popular culture, etc.) is the primary goal of scholarly psychoanalytic projects. In fact, psychoanalysis is often 'weaponized' with the intent of degrading or destroying those very objects. In this paper, I suggest that the abandonment of neutrality in psycho-social work is one way of weaponizing psychoanalysis that may degrade not only the object in question but the entire psychoanalytic enterprise. On the other hand, some scholars may sincerely aspire to facilitate psychic change in the objects they study. In either case, it would seem important to consider the presence of the fantasies of change discussed later in this paper. Were the analysand less 'abstract' — i.e., a person and not a political or cultural object — a conscientious analyst would, hopefully, be capable of analyzing both a destructive and an 'aggressively helpful' attitude in terms of countertransference.

atmosphere (see e.g., Apfelbaum, 2005, Ehrenberg, 1982; Hoffer, 1985; Greenberg, 1986a; 1986b; 2001; Mitchell, 1997; Schwartz, 2013b, Renik, 1999). Within this range of opinion, however, lies a core set of principles that is accepted by a majority of analysts, even those critical of the ideal of neutrality as it is typically understood. In most cases, in the analytic setting, analysts strive to avoid imposing their own beliefs upon analysands or attempting 'to bring about a certain kind of change because [the analyst] believes in it in principle' (Greenberg, 1986a, p. 82). More importantly, in Roy Schafer's language (1983, p. 5), analyst's strive to refrain from taking sides or 'crusad[ing] for or against' any particular element in the analysand's psychic life.[2]

There are several reasons why maintaining a position of neutrality is helpful, if not essential, for productive analytic work. Analytic neutrality facilitates 'free' unconscious communication and permits of more productive uses of the analyst. It fortifies the boundaries (between analyst and analysand, and between reality and fantasy) that help make the analytic setting a safe place to be. But perhaps the greatest virtue of the analytically neutral stance is that it helps to safeguard against *collusion* between analyst and analysand with sources of resistance. Here, 'resistance' (both the analysand's and the analyst's) refers to the need or desire to avoid analysis, thought, and change. Of course, resistance to analysis, thought, and change may be well-disguised — in both clinical and political settings — by communications or activities that emphasize the parties' commitment to achieving understanding and creating change.

In most critiques of neutrality — ranging from those grounded in 'relational' and 'field' perspectives to those informed by postmodern social theory — we find a principled rejection of the analyst's attempt to erase her presence, which is conceived to be a part of her 'irreducible subjectivity' (Renik, 1993; see also Louw and Pitman, 2001; Shill, 2004) and 'an intrinsic part of the transference' (Aron, 1996, p. 50). Caught up with the analyst's presence is the 'privilege' of her position, as well as of any personal attributes she may hold, all of which 'bring politics into the consulting room' (Layton, 2011). On one hand, it is possible to see these assessments of the analytic situation as reasonable, if we take the perspective, for instance, of the social theorist who sees power and micro-power as omnipresent (e.g., Foucault, 1995). Given certain assumptions, one may be tempted to view the effort to cultivate neutrality as an attempt to deny the subjectivity or even the humanity of the analyst, which is to indulge in a kind of positivism whereby the analyst is imagined to be an aloof and 'indifferent' observer.[3]

On the other hand, insisting upon the inevitability of the analyst's presence, power, and privilege — and then deciding against the ideal of neutrality in analysis —

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[2] Of course, no responsible account of analytic neutrality recommends that analysts abstain from political activity, nor that they ignore the political realities affecting analysands' lives.
[3] It is perhaps worth remarking that Freud's term, '*Indifferenz*,' upon which a great deal of the discourse about neutrality is based, does not hold the pejorative connotations of the English word, 'indifferent.'

errs on at least two fronts. First, we must consider *whose* 'reality' we are speaking about when we speak about the 'reality' of analyst's power and privilege. I am not suggesting that we get lost in radical relativism, but merely that we would be mistaken to assume that the analyst's power and privilege are necessarily central issues in every analysand's psychic life and at every point in analysis. Instead, it may be that concerns about power and privilege figure more prominently in the psychic landscape of the analyst than in that of the analysand (more on this below). In such cases, we might say that it is not the indelible power or privilege of the analyst that 'brings politics into the consulting room,' but, rather, the analyst's rejection of the possibility of relating in politically (and analytically) neutral ways. For the analyst to abandon neutrality by self-disclosing or by introducing or insisting upon her own presence, power, or privilege may affirm her own reality and experience in the presence of the analysand, but would almost certainly intrude upon the analysand's attempt to freely and safely explore his psychic reality. Thus, the rejection of the possibility of neutral relating may be construed as a rejection of a crucial component of the psychoanalytic method — the effort to eliminate the analyst's influence over the patient of the kind implied in the notion of 'power' (Levine, 2017, personal communication) — and, therefore, even as a rejection of the possibility of psychoanalysis, itself.

Second, it is not necessary to understand analytic neutrality as the analyst's attempt to obfuscate those aspects of her presence, power, or privilege remarked by the analysand. This kind of neutrality would indeed be mystifying in analysis, working against the maintenance of clear boundaries and a safe atmosphere. A number of theorists have offered compelling cases that neutrality is best understood not only as an ideal comportment of the analyst, but as a feature of the analytic relationship, facilitated by the analyst in light of analytic training and practice, but ultimately something to which both analyst and analysand contribute (see e.g., Apfelbaum, 2015; Greenberg, 1986a; 1986b; 2001; Loewald, 1960; Schwartz, 2013a; 2013b). It is worth considering, then, the possibility that the baby of analytic neutrality may be thrown out with the bathwater of positivism. Indeed, the critique of neutrality that understands it as an act of obscuring the analyst's power — an act that would be, of course, an act of power in itself — is involved in the fantasy of change and omnipotence discussed below, in which the agent of change (in this case, the analyst) is imbued with great power: the power to be or not to be in the presence of others, the power to (single-handedly or, perhaps, capriciously) determine relationships and environments, and the power to shape others' internal states.

As we proceed, it will be important to recall that this 'privileging' of the analyst, in discussions of neutrality, ultimately refers to *the 'privilege' of removing the self from the other*, a 'privilege' that undoubtedly holds an ambivalent attraction and is aligned with one of the most important aims of analysis: the achievement of autonomy, self-boundaries, or 'unit status.' That this 'privilege' is enviously attacked suggests that, in critiques of neutrality, at least one of the ends of psychoanalysis is under attack. In keeping with the line of argument presented below, it may be helpful to consider the work of envy, self-doubt, guilt, and resentment here: envy at those who would dare to

hold the 'privilege' of being 'neutral,' doubt about our own ability to achieve this state, guilt at the thought of striving to hold such 'privilege' for ourselves, and the defensive rejection of the ideal of analytic neutrality.

The link I suggest between analytic and political neutrality has to do with the ways the self and others are known and the relationship between these ways of knowing and the possibility of change. I have argued that analytic neutrality is valuable mainly because it safeguards against collusion when analyst and analysand are faced with opportunities to relate to each other (and themselves) as objects already known and, so, to obviate the need to learn or think about themselves and each other as new or different people, or as people capable of change. If it is the analysand who offers such an invitation, and the analyst *either* colludes with it or rebels against it — as opposed to attempting to understand it — the analyst becomes readily locatable among the analysand's already-known internal objects, removing the need to think, act, and relate in the analytic setting in 'new' ways. These 'new' ways of thinking, acting, and relating are precisely the possibilities of internal or psychic *change* offered in psychoanalytic methods.

Attacks on politically neutral stances, as I hope to show, foreclose thinking, relating, and changing in a similar fashion: by insisting that the self and others in question are already known members of (rigid) groups who need not, indeed *must* not, be thought about, understood, or related to in new ways. If political neutrality is repudiated, there can be no bounded space within which to question the beliefs of a group, to explore identifications with the 'enemy,' and, most importantly, to seek that 'reflective autonomy within groups' that permits of self-contact and authentic activity (Bowker and Levine, 2018). Rather, others may only be conspired with or rebelled against, such that, even in the face of great changes in the social and political landscape, one remains in familiar psychic territory.

Political Neutrality
'Political neutrality' is a concept that is quite difficult to define, and is perhaps better recognized by its opposite: the putative ideal of unyielding political advocacy, expressed most frequently in admonitions of neutral stances. The condemnation of political neutrality is nothing new, although it has become conspicuous again of late. Whether it is called Vichyism, pacification, collaborationism, or 'privilege,' various forms of political neutrality have been understood as tacit support for moral and political evils, such that the very idea of neutrality — the idea that it is possible neither to endorse nor oppose something — has struggled to retain its meaning.

Here I defend something like a person's *right to be neutral*, — although I should like to avoid political and ethical digressions on the meaning of 'right' — or, put another way, a person's right *not* to be political, on something of the same grounds that Winnicott defends the right not to communicate: that the alternative calls up a 'frightening fantasy of being infinitely exploited' (1965, p. 187), for it implies that there

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is no part of the self that remains unavailable to others. Indeed, if we interpret the well-known phrase, 'the personal is the political' in a certain light, we are left with a world in which there can be no privacy, no neutrality, no means to defend oneself against others' demands to join, oppose, or take sides.[4]

We might contrast this perspective with that of the late Elie Wiesel, who remarked in his (1986) Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech: 'We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented… Wherever men or women are persecuted because of their race, religion, or political views, that place must — at that moment — become the center of the universe' (quoted in Reilly, 2016).

There are at least two remarkable things about this passage. The first is the way that an odd idea — that neutrality is never neutral — is presented as an obvious truth, in no need of explanation or evidence. That this argument is presented in this way tells us something about its psychic meaning: that it is not really intended to be a philosophical claim about neutrality, nor an empirical claim about politics or history. Instead, the statement expresses an identification with a group, a group for whom the words spoken require no evidence because they are already known and are, therefore, self-evident. While this group may be abstract, and likely consists of multiple overlapping groups, what the large group shares is an identification with the victims of oppression. The claim, then, that neutrality always helps the oppressor is really a watchword that defines the group organized around identification with the oppressed. This group also conceives of the world as containing only two groups, the oppressors and the oppressed, such that no one is permitted to stand outside or in between.

The second striking aspect of this portion of Wiesel's speech is his exhortation to make every site of oppression or victimization a momentary 'center of the universe.' This notion, that places of violence, trauma, and persecution must become metaphorical centers of the universe, expresses a fantasy about change and victimization that will be elaborated immediately below. For now, we may describe the fantasy as one in which the group's victimization becomes 'central' to everyone else in the world. Here, the 'gravity' of victims' suffering pulls together all that exists, incorporating all into a single moral universe where everything 'revolves' around the victim's experience, beliefs, and fantasies. This change would indeed be 'cosmic': It would 'privilege' the victim and would demarcate the movements of both victims and victimizers, while casting to the outer reaches of space those least involved with victimization.

Change

I would like to call upon a rudimentary distinction between, on one hand, change as an activity in which things — the self, the group, an institution, a policy, etc.

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[4] Winnicott goes further: 'In health,' he argues, 'there is a core to the personality that corresponds to the true self of the split personality; this core never communicates with the world of perceived objects' (1965, p. 187).

— are made new or different from what they were, and, on the other hand, change as a component of group identity and a fantasy of omnipotence. The fantasy suggested by Wiesel's speech is one in which victims stand at the center of a new moral universe, pushing and pulling others along prescribed paths, moving and activating all those around them. If we stay with this metaphor, the activity of the victims implied here is twofold: on one hand, the center *does not move* but remains stationary, while other objects revolve around it; on the other hand, to the extent that this center has mass, it gradually pulls in and, eventually, consumes everything in its gravitational field.

The difference I am trying to highlight here is the difference between being the 'center of the universe' and being a 'center of initiative' (Kohut, 1977, p. 99), which is to say a creative and autonomous agent capable of initiating thought, action, and change in the world and, simultaneously, relating to others as separate subjects, external to the self. Placing victimization, persecution, or trauma at the center of a moral universe encourages persons and groups to become, in Cathy Caruth's words, centers or 'site[s] of [shared] trauma' (1995, p. 11), rather than centers or sites of autonomous being, doing, and relating.

Due to limitations of space, it is impossible here to give a complete accounting of the process by which the valorization of suffering and trauma impedes real change (see Bowker, 2016). What may be said is that here we find a *fantasized* hypertrophy and monopolization of subjectivity, such that the victimized person or group envisions itself to be the only vital, active agent in the world. This grandiose fantasy appears as a reaction formation against experiences or convictions of utter powerlessness. The concomitant denial of separateness, reality, and agency to others leaves the person or group in sole possession of the power to make change, and yet, as Wiesel's astronomical metaphor reminds us, the central object does not move or change but only induces movement and change in others. In other words, in this fantasy, change in the *external* world is understood to be the result of an *internal* process, as an emanation of the mere existence of the victimized person or group, whose status as victim has been largely if not wholly determined by others and whose main task is that of holding onto its status and its 'central' place in the universe.

While this fantasy of change offers a kind of hope, it is, in many respects, a deeply conservative fantasy, if we may so speak, for its primary objective is to secure the identification with the victim, rather than to act in ways that make meaningful differences for the self or others. Dedication to this fantasy serves not only to defend against the conviction that the self or group is powerless, but to distract from other threats to the identity of the person or group. As most readers will know, there are many individuals, families, and organizations who are 'addicted' to change of a certain kind: disruptive, chaotic, and superficial change (see e.g., Kagan and Schlosberg, 1989). Crisis, urgency, and turbulence serve, paradoxically, to stabilize such persons or groups: They remain, somehow, in 'the center of the storm.' In such cases, 'change' both defines the identity of the person or group *and* distracts from awareness of threatening

realities, the most threatening of which is the need for meaningful, substantive, internal change.

Such a situation, then — opposed, as it is, to much of the psychoanalytic enterprise — may be described not merely as 'change for change's sake,' but, more precisely, as change for the sake of *not* changing. As David Levine (1999, p. 231) suggests in his extraordinary essay, we may understand a good deal of organizational change in terms of a manic state: 'manic' in that it relies on a 'fantasized identification between a primitive self and its ideal,' and 'manic' in the more causal sense of urgent, frenzied, and compulsively-driven activity that defends against contact with what is real in the self, the organization, and the world.

Consider, on this score, Albert Camus' surprising insistence that 'he who has understood reality does not rebel against it, but rejoices in it; in other words, he becomes a conformist' (1956, p. 156). To be engaged in Camus' fantasy of change — to be a 'rebel,' which is Camus' more romantic term for today's 'change-agent' — requires a *misunderstanding* of reality that precludes real change. That is, when we refuse to understand reality, we refuse to understand the psychic meaning of 'reality' as a place where others and events exist independently of ourselves. In such a world, there are no boundaries, and therefore, no possibility of relating, communicating, or thinking; only joining or opposing, conspiring or rebelling. Countless contemporary political and social theorists have adopted this stance, in part because it has become fashionable to reject separate subjectivity and relatedness in favor of a desubjectified, mutual woundedness and enmeshment (Bowker, 2014).

If, earlier, we noted how the 'baby' of neutrality may have been thrown out with the 'bathwater' of positivism, here we see how the possibilities of both understanding and relating across difference (and, therefore, the possibility of affecting real change) may be thrown out with the widespread rejection of the ideals of modern subjectivity. In Judith Butler's words, we must be 'undone by each other' (2004, p. 23), 'foreign' to ourselves, 'wounded,' impressionable' and 'given over to' others in ways that make the idea of separate being and relating absurd (2004, p. 46). Since we are imagined to be incapable of understanding and relating in a 'neutral' way, we are urged to avoid understanding and relating altogether. Instead, we are asked to remain in a psychic state of perpetual grief, outrage, and 'metaphysical revolt' (Camus, 1956, p. 54), whose real aim seems not to create change in the self or the world but, rather, to impede change by preventing any thoughts from arising that might disrupt the fantasy that we are inseparable from the victims of violence and oppression.[5]

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[5] Botting and Wilson (1997, p. 27) astutely describe Georges Bataille's similar orientation to desubjectification and change as 'a strange ethics of horror, an insubordinate politics of total and permanent revolution' that has no real or useful — Bataille would term it 'appropriated' — aim.

When the fantasy described above is operative, the language used to describe change — its nature, its necessity, its goal — is vague and grandiose, characterized by an urgency and a vigilance that borders on compulsiveness, and features reactive elements more prominently than active ones (i.e., a preoccupation with monitoring and *re*acting to stimuli that confirm the beliefs and assumptions of the group). In some cases, the changes demanded are so extreme that they may be understood to be impossible by design. In this case, we can see how the conservative element in the fantasy directly opposes any truly 'progressive' activity it purports to undertake: Making impossible demands or insisting upon impossible changes stymies efforts to create real change and, most likely, entrenches resistance and opposition to change. But, of course, failure to achieve change and success in provoking resistance, as discussed above, may well be the unconscious goals embedded in this sort of activity.[6]

Admittedly, the fantasies and realities of change are not so easily distinguishable when faced with the challenges of daily life. Real changes do rely, in part, on fantasies of change and even fantasies of change may sometimes affect real change in the world. Nevertheless, distinguishing them is helpful if we are to consider, as we shall momentarily, the degree of fantasy operative in condemnations of political neutrality and, conversely, how some politically *non*-neutral stances may be, themselves, underwritten by fantasies of change, omnipotence, and victimization. Let us continue with a contemporary example

'Silence is Violence!'
The popular slogan, 'Silence is violence!', is used to 'call out' those who appear to hold neutral stances or who appear inadequately active in contesting injustice. On closer inspection, most would find the assertion that 'silence' is identical to 'violence' to be problematic on logical and ethical grounds, but to raise doubts about this assertion is less likely to generate dialogue about the idea and more likely to appear as a declaration of antipathy toward the person or group urging this message. Indeed, the speakers of this message strive to erase both the possibility of dialogue *and* the possibility of silence, by claiming that those who disagree are collaborators and that those who remain silent are not really silent but are, in fact, speaking (or acting) on behalf of the violent. These twin erasures make it virtually impossible not only to be silent, but to step outside the drama of violence with which the speakers of this message are presumably concerned.

If we recall Wiesel's 'universal' metaphor discussed above, we see how messages such as this one function to establish a sort of psychic 'center of gravity' around the victims of violence and those who identify with them. This group wishes the world to be experienced as a world of victims and victimizers. Even (or especially) if

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[6] To read the list of demands at www.thedemands.org, compiled by protestors and students from across the United States is to be confronted with quite a few demands that are absolute ('Stop all abuse.'), unrealistic ('Free tuition for black and indigenous students…'), and, perhaps, impossible ('…end systemic and structural racism…').

the group does not succeed in preventing violence or in bringing justice to victimizers, the group's vision of itself and of the world is affirmed if it succeeds in drawing all into its fantasy, where those who speak (the correct words) are good, and where others, including the silent, are bad. In this split (schizoid) moral universe, there is no room for understanding, as there can be no neutral observers, no thinkers, no analysts. Here, again, we see how a fantasy of change and victimization denies externality to others and effectively draws all into the group's 'gravitational field,' such that its moral universe becomes everyone's reality. We also see how the conservative impulse behind this fantasy plays itself out tragically, since violence and victimization *must persist* if the group is to retain its identity as both victim and change-agent (see Bowker and Levine, 2018).

Now we may understand why those dedicated to this vision of change are most threatened *not* by opponents, who play a crucial role in the drama, but by those who attempt to withdraw, stand aside, reflect upon, or understand the conflict from a 'neutral' perspective: The neutral is the embodiment of the forbidden understanding that Camus and others eschew for the sake of perpetual activity without meaningful change. Those who would be neutral stand outside, retaining the ability to question, doubt, or disrupt the moral universe established and affirmed in the group's fantasies and activities (even in its conflicts with opposition groups), its challenges, and its defeats. This form of neutrality holds value in analysis, as it permits both analyst and analysand to think about, rather than to engage directly with, re-enact, affirm, or reject material brought into a session. In politics, however, this form of neutrality has been likened to navel-gazing and even to opposition to social progress, the underlying assumption being that immediate action and reaction, and not thought, are what create meaningful change.

Privilege
Perhaps no term expresses the hatred and envy of the position of neutrality today as effectively as the term, 'privilege.' The accusation of privilege is a complex one, and involves us in a new language, but expresses a dilemma not unlike what has been described above. Perhaps it is best to begin with a personal message (attributed to Kristen Tea, 2017) that became a popular meme about neutrality and privilege, shared widely on a variety of social media platforms:

> I want my friends to understand that 'staying out of politics' or 'being sick of politics' is privilege in action. Your privilege allows you to live a non-political existence. Your wealth, your race, your abilities, or your gender allows you to live a life in which you likely will not be a target of bigotry, attacks, deportation, or genocide. You don't want to get political, you don't want to fight because your life and safety are not at stake…

Here, the accusation of 'privilege' seems intended to make the reader feel guilt for being different from (victimized) others — which is to say, for not belonging to the group identified with the victim who represents the 'good object' — as well as for being

a survivor (or a likely survivor-to-be) and for possessing those identity markers that ostensibly protect one from attack. Of course, the message, itself, is an attack, one that is not identical to but is nevertheless evocative of what the author seems to be experiencing, either personally or vicariously. Thus, it is tempting to speculate that its intent is to induce in the reader feelings of guilt and fear as a means of drawing the reader back into 'politics,' back into the drama with which the author is involved.

Put another way, this statement highlights the envious desire in the accusation of 'privilege,' since privilege here implies *the capacity to be neutral*, which is equated with a state of not being in danger, or, more simply, of *being safe*. The individual who can be neutral is 'privileged' not merely because of the identity markers on her body (see Simonsen, 2002), but because, at a deeper level, this privilege refers to a psychic resilience and freedom in the face of powerful others and groups, even families, who might otherwise impinge upon or attack the self. If we agree with Susan Bordo (1987, p. 105) that 'psychoanalytic theory urges us to examine that which we actively repudiate for the shadow of a loss we mourn,' then we may see in the condemnation of 'privilege' a wished-for return of the privilege of neutrality. The 'privileged' and neutral person is capable of protecting herself, a capacity which, of course, has been either facilitated or hampered in large part by her family. She is nevertheless privileged if she is able to establish boundaries that permit her to exercise choice in engaging with or disengaging from others, from conflicts, and from the dramas that surround her. Let us consider this a bit more deeply.

The meanings attached to 'privilege' in psycho-social literatures, popular culture, and mass media are quite varied. They range from more or less factual accounts of the social and economic advantages certain groups have been afforded to something deeper and more complex. These deeper and more complex meanings possess a moral quality, in which the privileged party is burdened with guilt for undeserved advantages received (or potentially received). The individual who holds privilege is deemed guilty (by association) because the logic of the discourse of privilege dictates that having benefited from privilege is morally equivalent to having created and supported the inequitable social or political economy that privileges certain groups over others.

So, there is a 'stuckness' implicit in our discourse of privilege, since an individual need not have contributed to the system of which he is a beneficiary in order to be burdened with the guilt of 'privilege' and its attendant responsibilities. Foremost among the responsibilities of the privileged seems to be the act of confessing one's privilege — if not publicly, at least to oneself. In this confession, the confessor acknowledges that he is 'stuck,' in an important sense, in his group identity, that he can never be, say, non-white, and that he must always bear the burden of the identity marker of whiteness with which he was born. He internalizes the bad acts of his group and, in so doing, takes on responsibility for them, making him bad. Thus, confessions of privilege may be said to facilitate the transformation of the guilt of privilege into shame.

Here we discover an important objective of accusations of privilege, which is to instill in the privileged person or group a psychic dilemma that is similar to that of the underprivileged person or group: to be 'stuck' with a group identity that one did not choose, to have internalized, to some degree, the 'badness' associated with that group, and to be painfully conflicted about loving and hating that group. The feeling of being stuck in a group identity that is more significant than an identity developed in a process of self-formation, the internalization of the attributes of this group, and the conflict between love and hate for the part of the self identified with this group all generate considerable shame. This shame is defended against in myriad ways, perhaps most commonly by insisting that one is entirely 'proud' of one's group identity and that it is only other people (i.e., the victimizers and oppressors) who use social and cultural privilege, among other weapons, to cause the self and the group to experience shame. This insistence, in turn, precludes the possibility of adopting a neutral stance toward those outside of one's group and toward conflict related to the group.

To say as much is not to deny the very real presence of discrimination and victimization in the world, nor to deny that these forces generate tremendous shame. Rather, it is merely to be aware that, while discrimination and victimization are real, shame may arise from many sources, including families, which may induce the shame of 'stuckness' by forcing upon children group identities, by asking them to mask their feelings with false senses of pride, and by imposing roles, beliefs, and fantasies upon family members in attempts to manage internal and external threats. Indeed, families are the most powerful agents of group-identity-socialization, often unwittingly placing children in a dilemma where they are stuck with a group identity that is disparaged not only in the broader society but (unconsciously) within the family, no matter how often the child is told to be 'proud' of 'who she is.' Such thinly-veiled defenses against shame also have the effect of suggesting to the child that her individual identity matters less than her identity as a member of the family or group, or, put another way, that 'who she is' is determined primarily by her status as a member of her family or group.

For the sake of clarity, we must attempt to distinguish the reality of unjust treatment of certain groups, at a societal level, from the experience of being stuck with one's group identity, at a psychic level. Both operate simultaneously, but the relationship between the two is not obvious. That is, an individual who feels stuck in his group identity may complain that, to the extent that his identity as, for example, a gay man informs his sense of self, disparagements of his group cause him to suffer a degraded sense of self. But he may also complain about something rather different: that he is facing difficulty developing an individual identity distinct from the group identity shared by gay men, an individual identity that does not have to accord with the dominant assumptions, beliefs, and fantasies of his identity group.[7]

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[7] Of course, there is not one, singular identity group of 'gay men,' or of persons of color, or of women, or of victims, etc. There are multiple, intersecting, and overlapping groups. I have only used this language for simplicity's sake in the given example. At the same time, it may often be

Disparagements of this person's group identity, of course, will make both problems more difficult for him, since he may feel drawn in to the fight against discrimination and to groups that offer powerful identity-support for members. Or, if he is not drawn in, he may feel guilty for being insufficiently active in fighting victimization on behalf of the group of gay men, feelings that may be mistaken for or confused with guilt encountered in his work of understanding and embracing his own sexuality.

We may conclude this section, then, by saying that attributions or accusations (or confessions) of privilege actually collude with the forces that oppress and victimize underprivileged groups for two main reasons: First, they insist that one's group identity is indelible and that it outweighs one's individual identity in importance, thus denying individuals the 'privilege' of escaping their groups and the dramas with which they are engaged. Second, they facilitate the obfuscation and projection of guilt and shame onto others by attaching guilt and shame to the desire to be neutral. Rather than seeking ways for individuals to operate with relative autonomy within, between, or beyond their group identities, discourses of privilege tend to reinforce the idea that identity-based groups are essential components of our psychological and political landscape, that we must always take sides and fight, and that victimization will never (and perhaps *must* never) end. Here, again, we find a powerful ambivalence about change. In the following and final section of the paper, dedicated to the clash between bounded and unbounded responsibility, this ambivalence is also remarkable

Responsibility

In a well-known conversation between Margaret Mead and James Baldwin (1971), the two enter into a discussion about the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church bombing, a racially-motivated attack in Birmingham, Alabama that killed four girls. As they discuss their degrees of responsibility for this event, Mead asks, 'Did you bomb those little girls in Birmingham?,' to which Baldwin replies, 'I'm responsible for it. I didn't stop it.'

> Mead: Why are you responsible? Didn't you try to stop it? Hadn't you been working?
> Baldwin: It doesn't make any difference what one's tried.
> Mead: Of course it makes a difference what one's tried.
> Baldwin: No, not really.
> Mead: This is the fundamental difference. You are talking like a member of the Russian Orthodox Church: 'We are all guilty. Because some man suffers, we are all murderers.'

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the case that, from the perspective of the individual, there is pressure to belong to a single (perhaps local) group whose attributes, attitudes, and beliefs are, or appear to be, most suitable.

Baldwin: No, no, no. We are all responsible.
Mead: Look, you are not responsible.
Baldwin: That blood is also on my hands.
Mead: Why?
Baldwin: Because I didn't stop it.
Mead: Is the blood of somebody who is dying in Burma today on your hands?
Baldwin: Yes, yes.
Mead: Because you didn't stop that? That's what I mean by the Russian Orthodox position, that all of us are guilty of all that has been done or thought.
Baldwin: Yes.
Mead: And I will not accept it. I will not… I will not accept responsibility for what other people do because I happen to belong to that nation or that race or that religion. I do not believe in guilt by association.

As the dialogue continues, it becomes apparent that Baldwin's stance of near-absolute moral responsibility is derived largely from his own experience of being victimized racially; in a sense, of being deemed 'guilty by association' with a derogated racial group in America. When Mead suggests that responsibility ought to be restricted to things one has done oneself and 'not for things that other people did,' Baldwin defends his sense of responsibility by referring to the fact that 'the police in this country [the United States] make no distinction between a Black Panther or a black lawyer or my brother or me. The cops aren't going to ask me my name before they pull the trigger. I'm part of this society and I'm in exactly the same situation as anybody else — any other black person — in it. If I don't know that, then I'm fairly self-deluded.'

So, Baldwin's sense of responsibility is borrowed from the logic used against him by his oppressors and is closely tied to his own sense of victimization as a member of an oppressed group. We might even find here a kind of identification with the aggressor, whereby Baldwin says to himself: 'If I am to be held responsible not for my own actions but for the actions of others, then I will hold *myself* responsible not just for my own actions but for the actions of others.' The disempowering and de-subjectifying impacts of racism are thus defended against and translated into a moral stance (a 'moral defense,' as I shall argue below) of near-total, unrealistic — and grandiose — responsibility.

In this dialogue, we see two contradictory worldviews: one in which an individual feels responsible not just for himself but for the entire world. In the other, an individual accepts that there are limits to her responsibility, that there are others with different and independent subjectivities who are not controllable and for whose actions she cannot be responsible. For the latter, this setting of limits on control and responsibility means that there are things that she cannot do, but also that there are things she *can* do. On the other hand, unlimited responsibility involves one in a sort of paralyzing paradox where the individual is responsible for everything, and must do or must have done everything, but is simultaneously incapable of doing anything that is properly his own.

Here, I intend the words 'do' and 'doing' to be taken in the weightiest possible sense, to refer especially to that 'doing that expresses being' to which Winnicott alludes in his well-known essay on creativity (1986, pp. 39-42), and therefore to the kinds of activities that arise out of an authentic sense of self, one that possesses autonomy and one that is capable of acting creatively. The vision of the world that emerges from Baldwin's comments is one of responsibility without autonomy and creativity, since both autonomy and creativity require the capacity to free oneself from groups and engagements in which the role and responsibilities of the self are pre-determined, i.e., where the individual inhabits a moral universe from which there is no escape, as when the individual finds that he can only be and act as a group member, a victim, a victimizer, a privileged person, etc.[8]

It is worth recalling that the conversation between Mead and Baldwin begins with a discussion of a terrorist act, an act which relied heavily on the notion of 'guilt by association.' That is, the four children killed were not the real targets of the hatred that motivated the attack. They were merely symbols of a broader attack on the civil rights movement, its leaders, and the ideal of racial equality. Just as 'guilt by association' figures prominently in acts and ideologies of terrorism, there is a kind of psychological terrorism involved in Baldwin's position of absolute responsibility, for Baldwin's is an almost Existential position, reminiscent of Sartre's famous exaggeration that 'in a certain sense I choose being born' (1956, p. 556). Of course, Sartre does not mean that an infant literally chooses to be born, but he does claim that a person must take on moral responsibility even for those unchosen aspects of his or her existence (year and place of birth, parents, race or sex, etc.) *as if* these had been chosen.

The position represented here by Baldwin and Sartre has an emotional meaning which is similar to, although not identical to, the meaning of Ronald Fairbairn's moral defense — which he also named 'the defense of guilt' — in which one takes on responsibility for bad objects in the environment. For Fairbairn, the motivation driving the moral defense is to rid the world of badness, making it survivable through hope: If it is not the parent who is bad but, rather, the child, then at least the child may hope to correct (and, later, expunge) his flaws. It is better, Fairbairn writes famously, 'to be a sinner in a world ruled by God than to be innocent in a world ruled by the devil' (1952, p. 67).

Relying on a (misunderstood) quotation of Jules Romains, Sartre argues that 'in war there are no innocent victims' (1956, p. 530), because one always retains the option to commit suicide, or to desert, or to have anticipated the war early enough to prepare. So, for Sartre, there are 'no accidents,' there is no innocence, and there is nothing that happens in the world that does not morally *belong* to each person in the world: '[T]he

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[8] For a contrasting perspective on Baldwin's understanding of integration and political responsibility see McIvor (2017, pp. 218-219).

war is *mine* because by the sole fact that it arises in a situation which I cause to be and that I can discover it there only by engaging myself for or against it, I can no longer distinguish at present the choice which I make of myself from the choice which I make of the war' (p. 530, *emphasis in original*).

The inability to distinguish the choices one makes from external events is an inability to distinguish self from other and fantasy from reality. It suggests both a 'stuckness' to the self's position and a surprising lack of self-boundaries, such that others' thoughts and actions come to be my own, as if I had caused them. To be both stuck and unbounded in this way is terrifying, if not *terrorizing*. To suggest, for instance, that 'a community event which suddenly bursts forth and involves me in it does *not* come from the outside' (1956, p. 529, *emphasis added*), is to force the individual to bear responsibility for all, while negating in the outside world any separate, active elements. This negation of externality means that, if external objects and others are to be changed, their good and bad elements must first be internalized or 'incorporated into the individual's subjective world' (Levine, 1999, p. 232), such that they lie within the individual's (fantasized) sphere of control.

If an analysand were to present material like this in a session, one might think about fantasies of omnipotence or narcissistic grandiosity, to be sure, but perhaps what would be more important would be the hidden wish expressed that someone else carry the burden of responsibility that the analysand seems to feel, a burden that may, in turn, reflect a more deeply hidden sense of powerless and futility. In this hypothetical situation, it would seem to be worthwhile to consider the relationship between responsibility and privilege carefully, since the emotional communication in the statement, 'I am responsible for everything that happens' is: 'I have no choice; I have no freedom; I have no separate self.' Within this seemingly grandiose and omnipotent fantasy, then, there lies a wish and a hidden request for help in procuring more humble 'powers' and 'privileges' for the self. The 'powers' and 'privileges' I am speaking about here, of course, are those of choice and freedom, of doing things that reflect the self's (limited) presence, and, therefore, of feeling capable of changing the self and acting as a self in the world.

If the 'privilege' scorned today is a possibility — or a 'right,' as I called it above — lost and perhaps inadequately mourned, it is a possibility an analysand may explore in the bounded space facilitated by neutrality in analysis. It is, most simply, the possibility of not being be responsible for all, which includes not being responsible for the analyst. This possibility also includes the possibility of not acting or reacting as others might compel us. As such, this possibility is indeed enviable, as it suggests the opportunity to free ourselves from rigid defenses and rigid groups, as well as the pride and shame attached to these. The privilege with which we are concerned, then, sets limits to responsibility for the sake of an important possibility: The possibility of being neither the 'center of the universe' nor merely an object orbiting another, but, instead, a center of initiative, and, therefore, potentially, a center of abeyance.

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