



A Swipe at the Gordian Knot of Evil

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The challenges of writing and thinking about evil

Few topics arouse as much anxiety, fascination, and controversy as discussions of good and evil. Evil is a particular lightning rod. While the topic of good seems rather approachable, the task of thinking about the complexities of evil stirs such “profound anxiety” (Bollas, 1995 p. 181) that consideration of it easily confounds us, even to the point that we must neglect the topic or dissociate from it (Howell & Itzkowitz, 2018).

When we consider, then, where and how to look at evil, we face a powerful mix of feelings, and this makes finding focus nearly as complicated as the study itself. That said, in this paper we avail ourselves of what enlightenment serial killers’ own words and descriptions offer. This is not an unusual choice. Others, too, (e.g. Bollas, 1995) have chosen this route. The “organized” serial killer in contrast to the “disorganized” one (Michaud, 1999), who can be more readily conceived as mentally ill, seems one who has chosen a deliberate and contrary path for dealing with the sin of evil that “is crouching at the door” (*Revised Standard Version Bible*, 1952, *Genesis* 4:7). The organized killer, rather than being one who has fallen into evil, seems to be one who has foresworn the effort to “master it” (*Genesis* 4:7) in deference to *embodying* it. As serial killer Ted Bundy is reported to have said: “I don’t feel guilty for anything, I feel sorry for people who feel guilt” (Lundren, 2019, unnumbered).

Hence, we acknowledge forthrightly that defining evil can be an expansive and tricky task. However, for this paper we are delimiting ourselves to the evil that is evidenced in the shocking disregard of the humanity of fellow beings which several serial killers demonstrate (and reflect upon) in their own intimately murderous behavior. We invite readers to consider our organizational comments about these killers to be useful for considering one angle (“slice”) in what evil is and what leads to it.

Furthermore, choosing serial killers as the fulcrum for current consideration of evil makes sense, because criminal justice expert, Peter Vronsky, found (2018) that between 1950 and 2000 there was a surge in serial murders¹, and he maintains that another rise is in the offing by 2030. Towards this end Vronsky invites us to look at the evil of serial killers from both the psychological and sociological perspective.

This accords with the overarching ambition of this paper. We attempt to advance the psychological considerations of what makes for manifestation of evil by stepping into the phenomenology of these killers. As our anchor point into their lived experience we

¹ In the United States during the 20th century there were 2604 identified serial killers. Of these 89.5% surfaced during the latter half of the century (Vronsky, 2018).

utilize a developmental perspective that bridges the psychological and the sociological. We propose that a specific existential-relational position we move through during our earliest years, typically known as the paranoid-schizoid position, predominates in these killers' being-ness. As we will describe below, it is a position that can entail a profound disregard for the "otherness" of others and the otherness that we have to our own selves.

Notably, we anticipate that our conclusions will be uncomfortable. We all want causal explanations, but it is not that simple. As Bundy says: "Society wants to believe it can identify evil people ... but it's not practical. There are no stereotypes" (Lundgren, 2019, unnumbered). For instance, we assert that while there are factors we can isolate as important in pushing us towards evil, such as a stymied appreciation of otherness and certain psychological wounds that unsteady us in the world and dynamically propel us toward it, there is also our chanced turn at a "fork in the road" that is calamitous.

We proceed by reviewing some important ideas about the psychology of the evildoer before then weaving in poignant reflections about Bundy that are offered by Ian Brady who is himself a serial killer. Through doing so, we hope the reader will appreciate both the developmental events that can set one on a path towards evil but also the ways that fortune and current social circumstances play in our choices of identity. From the specifics of Bundy, we then again will generalize and elaborate our existential-relational positions and the way our developed capacity for embracing otherness figures prominently into not falling into or choosing evil.

Into the Weeds with the intrapersonal perspective

The psychoanalyst Ronald Fairbairn tells us the following about the turn towards evil:

There are two ... motives ... by which an individual ... may be actuated in substituting hating for loving ... one an immoral, and the other a moral motive...The immoral motive is determined by the consideration that, since the joy of loving seems hopelessly barred to him, he may as well deliver himself over to the joy of hating and obtain what satisfaction he can out of that. He thus makes a pact with the Devil and says, 'Evil be thou my good' (1952, p.26).

Fairbairn specifies in the above that he is talking about a "schizoid" person, but we invite the reader for the moment to hold this important qualification in abeyance. We later will expand on it. Meanwhile, we think psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas enriches Fairbairn's perspective about what happens to us in our childhood that deprives us of feeling like we can achieve the joy of living.

In the chapter of his 1995 book, *Cracking Up*, entitled "The Structure of Evil," Bollas offers a rich proposal about the etiology of such killers. It is a proposal that is lacking only because it, ultimately and mostly implicitly, vilifies the parental care-taking that these killers received as children rather than offering a more holistic developmental perspective which explicitly allows for how the condition for embracing evil was co-created by the caregivers and child within a sociological matrix and the random fortune that life always deals us. Still, there is tremendous value in his ideas, so we will look at them before situating them more relationally within one of four existential-relational positions.

Bollas' structure of evil entails six steps: "presentation of good to the other," "creation of a false potential space," "malignant dependence," "shocking betrayal," "radical infantilization," and "psychic death" (p. 211). Detailed exposition of these steps is beyond the scope of this paper, but we offer this summary:

To Bollas the serial killer is a person who, during childhood, has suffered the trauma of the caregiver who (alluding to Little Red Riding Hood) has failed at being the loving "grandmother" and, instead, emerged as the hungry wolf. In doing so, the serial killer's "true self" (p. 195) is murdered by the wolf, and the killer as child is placed "in an unwilling identification with his own premature mortality" (p. 193). To fill a moral vacuum that emerges as a result of this loss/murder of true self, the killer adopts a passive into active defense; the killer does a "do unto others what has been done to one's self" maneuver. The killer seeks out an innocent stranger into whom they project their lost true self² and then proceeds to place this person through the steps suffered by themselves as a child: dependence on the kindly "grandmother" and then betrayal of the innocent other by the emergence of the rapacious wolf whose malicious and unfathomable, incremental evil imposes on the this other an infantile dependence and then a psychic death. The actual demise of the victim of the killer's drama is an unsatisfying denouement.

Addressing the sexually driven aspect that is so often an element in this sequence, Bollas says: "The sexually driven killer ... may at the moment of the murder be on the verge of a horrifying panic, when the killing of his [projected true] self feels close at hand; with his victim he seeks an object into whom he can project the experience (by reversal) and who will also serve as the object of a transformation of the aim, from an anxiety to excitement, and finally through murder to denudation of excitation" (p. 196). However, since the killer's own psychic death is endless, no singular acting out through reversal of the trauma they suffered completely can suffice as a cure. Hence, the killer must serially seek to overcome "his own endless deaths by sacrificing to the malignant gods that overlooked his childhood" (p. 193) one after another of new innocent others.

Bollas caps the above by remarking, "The pathologic narcissism is clear: the killer is never with an *other*; all others being merely walking innocents, corpses of his former self, long before the Fall" (p. 198, italics added). In other words, in such development we never come to appreciate the humanity of the other. It is this lack of appreciation that sets us up for events that can lead us toward the fall. Further, we argue that it is this lack of being with an-*other*, more so than the trauma suffered by the individual, that enables the potential for murder. More about this later.

From the perspective of a serial killer and "chance"

Ian Brady, a convicted serial killer, has provided commentary about Ted Bundy that we think complements Bollas' structure of evil *and* acknowledges the important role of chance. In his commentary, Brady (2015) writes that Bundy was nurtured to resentment because he was treated as a "reject" in his society of Bible belt bigotry which offered him no quarter because of his "illegitimate" birth. As an illegitimate birth, Bundy

²Bundy said: "Murder is not just a crime of lust or violence. It becomes possession. They are part of you...[The victim] becomes a part of you and you [and the victim] are forever one" (Lundgren, 2019, unnumbered).

suffered a disrupted and chaotic childhood. One where other people were seen as objects and not as subjects. Thus, Brady views Bundy as consequently bedeviled by a sense of inferiority for which he mightily fought to compensate.

However, in thinking about why other people with similarly disturbed childhoods do not go down the path of evil that Bundy did, Brady concludes that this foundation for his sense of who he was not sufficient to turn Bundy to an evil path. In thinking about what ultimately directed Bundy, Brady poignantly reflects on the “more” that must happen to any of us for our foundation retrospectively to seem significant. Brady notes how experiences in life incrementally deposit themselves in our soul, only to find a critical mass which congeals in some fateful way in a moment of being which lands at our footstep. For Bundy, Brady thinks it was falling in love with fellow student, Stephanie Brooks. She was a daughter of wealth and of high social standing.

The turn by Brady towards the moments of chance that Bundy encountered offer a needed addition to the narrative provided by Bollas. Brady is attuned to the challenges we all face on our life journey and the chances that we go down the wrong path. There is something existential about the ways that sometimes our choices seem to have their own inertia and build upon each other, where each further step entraps us along the path. We are not offered or cannot see an opportunity to apply a brake but, instead, get caught up in the business of living. Our advancing moments accumulate, and we at some odd moment find ourselves not with the conviction that the only way is forward but, instead, with the horrible realization that there is no way of turning back. We feel for better or worse committed to a path and unable to alter it.

The sad truth about this existential reality is that the *one* we live is chosen as much for us as by us, not through some divinely-inspired perspective or grand puppet master but via the random encounters we have as each of our steps ventures us in one direction or another and as each step unfolds a changing horizon to which we *imagine* we can apply a reverse gear but to which we seldom think it timely to do. Not because we lack courage, but because each singular step, relative to the journey we are on, seems weighty enough to warrant a critical analysis for the purpose of correction. It is in this way that we can find ourselves down a road that reaps for us and/or others terrible *or* magnificent consequences. In the latter case, our narcissism often inclines us emphatically to congratulate ourselves for our perspicacity. We delude ourselves about the singular importance of our existential agency and incline towards seeing ourselves as the embodiment of forethought and disciplined expression of choice (see, e.g., Gladwell, 2008). In the former case, if we haven’t converted “terrible” into the glorified dance with the devil that we note above, we often aver being gobsmacked as we realize that in our chaos we have “loosed” Yeats’ “mere anarchy...upon the world” (and, perhaps, ourselves) and now reckon with the fact that we have contributed somehow to our “ceremony of innocence... [being] drowned” (1954/1920, p. 477).³

³ Once incarcerated Bundy at some point said: “I understand now a lot of stuff about myself that I didn’t understand then. It makes me realize what was going on. The senselessness of it appalls me, although I’m sure not so much as those who were so close to it” (Lundgren, 2019, unnumbered).

Accordingly, we can wonder earnestly what would have been Bundy's course in life if he had finished law school and his engagement with Brooks resolved in marriage. Would he have *not* made "evil his good?" Sadly, we can only speculate. What we *do* know is that Bundy, the illegitimate reject, was denied respite from his past and denied any flight into new standing. Brooks renounced their engagement, and Bundy was again publicly humiliated.

For each of us the events of our lives which go from contributive to determinative are different. Brady (2015) says that "The irrevocable reversal of one's fate, one's being, can hinge upon such inconsequential considerations as a single betrayal, an unanswered prayer or an unthoughtful slight" (p. 203). Crucially, the judgment of "inconsequential" is one made by us who stand outside of the event's orbit. As a player within the orbit the walls can crash down on us, "resulting," as Brady says, "in the sardonic, paradoxical conversion not only to a diametrically opposite theology/philosophy but also to facets of the very one loathed in the first instance" (p. 203). In short, what to others seems unfortunate or even mundane can be catastrophic to us who live the event. Each moment brings us to another, and how we respond to the latest moment hinges mightily on the previous ones even though they don't necessarily register a conscious immediacy. And when this happens a "conversion" to a way of organizing our experience is imperative if we are to avoid what James Grotstein says is "chaotic fragmentation" (1984, p. 217).

Still though, we might see that for Bundy the "joy of loving" was so "barred to him" (Bundy) that he had to "deliver himself over to the joy of hating" (Fairbairn, 1951, p. 26). Even then, why was his "pact with the Devil" to kill so many others? In other words, why did he react to his circumstance by killing others? Why for instance, in reaction to the walls "crashing around us" did Bundy choose to organize himself in this way rather than another?⁴ For example, suicide is a possible path.

In Bundy's case, Brady suggests that the wounds of rejection were not novel but rather a re-wounding of injured skin. Here we think that psychoanalyst, James Grotstein's phrase, "chaotic fragmentation," pertains. The crashing down of his rejections threw kerosene onto Bundy's already compromised protective skin covering and flamed inner chaos. Grotstein asserts that:

"The experience of becoming evil begins...with the experience of chaotic fragmentation. Evil signals the need for a powerful ego ideal or a god of positive (absolute) negation and perfection to cure the chaos, the depressions, the imperfections, and the fragmentations associated with this chaos...[reflecting] the tendency for all living systems to be ultimately reorganized into one scheme or another. Evil is but the shortcut--the shunt--between living systems that eradicates imperfection, delay, and doubt" (p. 217).

As Heath Ledger's Joker, in the movie, *The Dark Knight*, says, "Nobody panics when things go according to plan. Even if the plan is horrifying" (Nolan, 2008).

⁴ Bundy himself puzzles about this: "I don't think anybody doubts whether I've done some bad things. The question is what, of course, and how and, maybe even most importantly, why?" (Lundgren, 2019, unnumbered).

Bundy's chaos was the legacy of his childhood, and it, the chaos, was not incrementally mitigated by his early adult life experiences but exacerbated. Brady (2015) asserts that Bundy's solution to the chaos was found in moral relativism. Here Brady alludes to the "do unto others what has been done to oneself" maneuver that Bollas notes. Having (re)experienced the chaotic fragmentation of his earlier years, Bundy reorganized himself towards the social order that rejected him. He became a rejecting inhabitant who was "coldly examining the alien city from the heights, viewing the despised inhabitants as antagonists" (p. 203) to whom he owed no mercy. This is, as Brady says, a "tortuous route ... of intellectual/atavistic conversion ... [that is taken also] ... at the risk of understatement [by] "many other highly intelligent serial killers" (p. 203). The question of "why me?" that Bundy seems to have been asking prompted him to forsake the humanity of others to even accounts with how unfairly (inhumanely) he felt treated.

And so, Bundy was the fragmented inhabitant of chaos, and his "correction" was to upend his respect for the social order. He became "self-righteous in the certainty that there is no one worthy to cast the first stone and, therefore, no one...exempt from punishment" (p. 203). Reflecting the facility that "the poets" so frequently demonstrate for capturing hard truths, again Ledger's Joker speaks relevantly. Speaking about the "bad joke" quality of the morality of "civilized people," he says: "When the chips are down ... They'll eat each other. See, I'm not the monster; I'm just ahead of the curve" (Nolan, 2008).

While articulating precisely how the *rejecting rejected* becomes then a killer is impossible, we note that the combination of developmental trauma and chance creates a situation where the killer views themselves as fully removed and outside of society. This brings together Bollas and Bundy in the following summary: *The person, so traumatized by their early care that a chaotic organization of their being befalls them, is: (1) consumed by this chaos such that they devolve into insanity; (2) suffering so rawly that they seek relief through suicide; or (3) prompted to accommodate to it with an intransigent organization of how they value themselves relative to others, an organization that recognizes no otherness in others.* It is especially to this organization that speaks past any appreciation of otherness that we shortly will turn, because it picks up two elements that we have asked the reader to hold in abeyance: the idea of schizoid functioning and "why" the turn to killing. First, however, we want to we weave in one last element that pertains to the broader landscape of the evil path.

Some socio-psychological considerations

Psychiatrist, Dorothy Lewis, met numerous times with Ted Bundy at the behest of his legal team. She concluded that Bundy suffered from bipolar disorder and was not psychotic. However, in a recent HBO documentary, *Crazy, Not Insane* (Gibney, 2020), Lewis admirably says she was mistaken and that Bundy suffered from significant childhood trauma. This conclusion, of course, is in accord with Bollas's (and Brady's) view about evil and trauma. However, as we note above, trauma is not enough. It may be of key, foundational importance, but it is *not* ultimately determinative of the choice to do evil. If it were, Vronsky's findings (2018, noted above) would be even more dramatic. The insufficiency of it, then, as explanation requires us to enlarge our scope as we look to account for all factors of relevance.

Towards this end at least two ideas bear consideration. Grotstein tells us that what is traumatic to us is that which we haven't yet "dreamed:" "Trauma is the premature encounter with the impact of objects that we lacked the capacity to create" (2000, p. 211). And sociobiologist, E.O. Wilson says that the most pressing dilemma for humankind is that we function with "paleolithic emotions, medieval institutions, and god-like technology" (2009, minute: 51.35-51:39).

As the algorithms of our god-like social media and technology speed us progressively towards greater elaboration of any conceivable iteration of our paleolithic emotions and desires a pandemic of "dreaming"of possibilities of being-ness...ensues. With this, no idea is either inconceivable or forbidden to insure our "vanity appalled" (Keats, 1962/1932, p. 135). In fact, in analysis of seven of notorious American serial killers, Eggers (2002) notes that the majority were not appalled by the reports of their atrocious acts but, instead, keenly interested in their celebrity status. They reveled in their emergent expression of being-ness.⁵ Of this Bundy was no exception: "When you feel the last bit of breath leaving their body, you're looking into their eyes. A person in that situation is god!" (Lundgren, 2019, unnumbered).

In his last interview prior to his execution (with James Dobson) Bundy nods strongly towards the sociological viewpoint. While our mention of what follows is not an indication that Bundy's self-explanation for his nefarious behavior is the solemn word, we think his comments, added to his many other, support our proposal that evil is a Gordian knot of complex causes. Bundy said: "I hope no one will take the easy way out and try to blame or otherwise accuse my family of contributing to this" (Bahns, 1989, minute 3:03-3:12). And implicitly addressing the "godlike technology" that helps to imagine any iteration of being-ness, whether worthy or *unworthy*, he reflects on how pornography prompted ideas in his head that consumed him: "The most damaging kind of pornography are those that involve violence; it's sexual violence. Because the wedding of those two forces, as I know only too well, brings about behavior that is just too terrible to describe" (Bahns, 1989, 4:36-4:52).

Existential-relational positioning

As we have foreshadowed, we propose that the slice at the Gordian knot, while acknowledging the importance of early development and trauma, suffers from a fuller exposition of the enfolding ramifications of how our early care positions us in relation to others. Towards this end we want to make mention of four existential-relational positions that clinical theorists in various schools of psychoanalysis have articulated over many years. We will offer a brief overview of these four positions and then concentrate on the second position, one typically referred to as the paranoid-schizoid.

⁵ We realize that the reader reasonably can ask whether we are proposing that current times more readily promote evil. This is a question worthy of considerable debate, but we suggest a pertinent matter to weave into that discussion is Vronsky's findings (2018) noted above about the increase of serial killers during the 20th century.

Ahead of doing this overview we want to note some important elements in our understanding of these developmental positions. While sequentially ordinal, they are not emergently holistic. In other words, the achievement of a “next” position does not subsume and then make irrelevant a “former” position for how functioning is structured. In fact, an aspect of healthy functioning and of vibrant exchange with others is the movement we can exercise between the positions without allowing one or another to consume our functioning. On the other hand, psychological trouble befalls us when we get stuck in an earlier one.

We hasten to note that our interpretation of these positions rests on the idea that with the progression through them our notion of “Truth” loosens such that our epistemology becomes less of one which assumes its knowability and more one which appreciates that its essence more fundamentally is found in its pursuit via an embrace of wondering and critical thinking (Webb & Rosenbaum, in press). We also think that as we progress through the positions, even if implicitly, our identity becomes more adaptive and flexible. We progressively understand that we are not an essential one-thing, but, rather, “no-thing” (see Sartre, 1966). In other words, we do best when we think of our essence as akin to the particle physics’ notion of a wave as a potentiality which periodically collapses into a particle (or identity) when measured (Rosenbaum & Webb, 2021). Again, the poets speak aptly. Herman Hesse in his novel, *Steppenwolf*, long ago (1927) notes our conceit in thinking of ourselves as a “unity” rather than as “a chaos of forms, of states and stages, of inheritances and potentialities” (1990, p. 59). This is a position that underlies Michael Thompson’s pithy comment that “[I]t is not the lack of true self, or good self, or a strong ego which characterizes the various forms of psychopathology, but rather the state of alienation that ensues when we imagine ourselves to be selves at all” (1985, p. 182).

We maintain that we are at risk of engaging evil when we get frozen in the second position, the paranoid-schizoid. We turn to evil when our wondering ceases and our identity collapses into a place where the otherness of others and the otherness of ourselves cannot be found.

The positions

In this paper we cannot offer a deep explanation of each position. We have attempted to do this more thoroughly in other writings (e.g. Rosenbaum & Webb, 2022; Webb & Rosenbaum, 2021). The interested reader also can find truly rich development of aspects of these positions in the publications of others, especially notable to us are: Melanie Klein (1975a, b), D. W. Winnicott (1935, 1975/1955), Thomas Ogden (1986, 1989), and James Grotstein (2007). We hasten to add that in our exposition of these positions we claim no strict adherence or attribution to any one theorist. We realize, for instance, that our own take on these positions is a greater blend of the interpersonal and intra-psychic than is typically associated with these positions. We further acknowledge that not all of the above-named theorists march in harmonious tandem.⁶

⁶ British psychoanalyst, John Padel, for instance, relates this story: “I remember a scientific meeting of c.1955 at which Winnicott regretted the common use of the term of ‘The Depressive Position’ rather than, say, ‘the stage of concern,’ but decided that it had come to stay, so he would

The name for the first position, the contiguous, captures the fact that we are born of another's body and that in our earliest days, while now physically separate from that body, we are still so wholly dependent on that caregiver's mentation of our needs for survival that we remain "contiguous" with this other in a psychological sense. However, the word, "other," we use here in a highly qualified sense. As that newborn, we are so enmeshed with the psychology of our caregiver that the differentiation basic to identity discernment is completely absent.

The paranoid-schizoid position, the second in the sequence, marks our gradual awareness of difference between ourselves and our primary caregiver. This awareness emerges via the inevitable disjunction between the press of our needs (for food, warmth, caress) and our caregiver's ability or willingness to discern and respond to them. This discontinuity or "rupture" is the prerequisite to our urge or impulse to make meaning of the difference that we begin to experience between ourselves and others. Naturally this discernment of difference is initially quite basic, and of it we can say that we initially experience the world as populated by only "me" and those who are "not-me." In this position, our awareness, of course, gradually sharpens, and our caregiver becomes an entity different from strangers. Nonetheless, even our caregiver is not a person in the sense of being someone who is more essentially "other" than simply a familiar "not-me."

The meaning we make of the rupture that need-frustration introduces is complicated, and its evolution is the lens through which we experience ourselves and those around us. And, as we hope is apparent to the reader, it is this evolution in our phenomenology that we attempt to make discrete or locatable in words with the naming of existential-relational positions.

In the paranoid-schizoid position we make meaning of the difference born of frustration by appointing a sense of "good" or "bad" to me and the "not-me" you that the caregiver is. Good and bad is associated in increasingly complicated ways with me and not-me-you as we seek to make sense of what we and not-me-you do and how we respond to each other to ensure the procurement of food, warmth, and touch. Gradually, of course, the scope of "not-me" expands out to others we encounter, and we layer onto them expectations based on our fundamental experience with our not-me primary caregiver(s).

This meaning-maker is elemental in the sense that it functions essentially within the binary of things being either good or bad. As such the name "paranoid" makes sense because what is good is what serves "me" and what is bad is that and those who fall short of this. (In common parlance we say: "with me or against me.") This second position is also aptly labeled "schizoid" in that those who fall short of providing me the good that I need and want are not an "other" with an inner psychology, needs, and limitations that we can imagine as independent or different from our own. In the schizoid world "me" is the center. Hence, these deficient others are simply, as we say above, those who are "not-me."

accept and use it himself; but he couldn't accept the 'paranoid-schizoid position' as an account of the baby's earliest weeks of life. When Klein got up, she said she'd waited 20 years for Dr Winnicott to accept her term 'depressive position' and she could wait another 20 to hear him accept the 'paranoid-schizoid position'" (1989, p. 2).

As we broach above, this paranoid-schizoid experience of the world, does not simply go away and thereby become rendered irrelevant as we progress developmentally. Derivatives of this binary world rest always within the range of everyone's functioning. For example, it emerges when in gossiping we reduce the subject of our tales to a mere object. More consequentially, such phenomenological positioning is also central to the tribalism inherent to racism and sexism (Webb & Rosenbaum, 2021). Thus, those, for example, who are not of our race are simply "honkies" or "niggers" and those who are not of our gender/sex are either "cunts" or "dicks." And, closer to the focus of this paper on evil, especially as demonstrated by serial killers, it is the frame for our experience of the world when also we train ourselves to kill as a soldier: the other that is our enemy we make simply an evil "not-me" who is a kraut, a nip, a raghead, a redskin, or some other "despised...antagonist" (Brady, 2015, p. 203). In all these forms of paranoia there is the schizoid positioning which makes our world the only good world, and those who are not of it others who have no "otherness" worthy of embracing recognition. We suggest we think again here of Bollas' comment that the serial killer "is never with an other" (1995, p. 198).

Momentarily, we will return to the idea of soldier-killers and serial killers, but we first want to give at least passing characterization of the last two existential positions so that a fuller perspective of placement within the paranoid-schizoid can be appreciated.

The depressive position has been called, we think correctly by Winnicott (1963), the position where the capacity for "concern" emerges. Both terms, however, attempt to locate us in words that capture our emergence out of a binary world into one where we begin to reckon with the hurt and even destruction that we have caused by delimiting others to our binary world. We are "depressed" in recognizing that this binary functioning has "loosed...anarchy," a view where the only Truth (with a capital "T") is the one that we or our tribe herald because of our consumption within "me-ness" (or "us-ness"). It has not yet dawned on us that the greater Truth is that those who are "not-me" are really others who have different experiences in the world and thus different truths that are worthy of acknowledgement if not respect.

The path to this recognition is too complicated to elaborate and so only in a passing nod to it we will say that it hinges fundamentally on our not-me caregivers' capacity to survive our anger/rage at their faltering efforts to meet our needs and desires. Our caregivers' survival of rage prompts the revelation that we are not, as our me-centered world would lead us to believe, the "all" that we experience or imagine. We are not the only relevant game in town nor, therefore, not endowed with the capacity or right to destroy anything which breathes outside of its orbit. "Not-me's" are, we begin to realize, others with an "other-ness" that we can discern.

The depressive or position of concern is the beginning of this discernment. The transcendent position is the greater elaboration of and capstone to it. As it dawns on us that others can survive our destructive rage towards them and that they, thus, have a different truth than us, we also must not fall prey to preserving "the only game in town" idea by simply making our emergent awareness of their game the new magic key to Truth. Within the matrix of what we call the depressive and transcendent positions we,

therefore, not only develop concern for otherness but eventually see in the broad sweep of otherness that no one has the monopoly on holding Truth.

If our caregivers, towards whom we now can feel concern, not only can survive our rage but show us that it is foolhardy to make a simple exchange of where the “game” is, then we truly begin to “transcend” a parochial view wherein our truth is Truth. Instead, if we and our caregivers can hold that we are all persons of clay feet (Storr, 1996) or persons denied comprehensive grasp of Truth then we can develop not only an appreciation of the otherness of others but one for the otherness we always have to ourselves. Truth, in other word, becomes something which transcends proprietary claims. It is something that must always be pursued even it is always just out of grasping containment. As Jacques Lacan says, “The truth...is that which runs after truth” (1978, p. 188).

Who is the serial killer who is evil consumed?

We described Bollas’ structure of evil, and we now offer ours in a listing which we hope is sensible to the reader. In the scope of our thinking we include: (1) an appreciation of the psychodynamic balance and blend we become as our basic nature greets our contemporary social circumstance where nothing is un-dreamed or un-imagined as a possibility. We, explicitly acknowledge (2) the relative importance of choice, (3) the incremental momentum of life which hinders choice when it collides with a chance moment, (4) our nature of seeking a coherent world view rather than chaotic fragmentation, and (5) the idea of passive into active functioning (which Bollas emphasizes). Lastly, and most central to our slice at the Gordian knot, is that we include (6) the idea that the immoral choice that Fairbairn refers to when a pact with the devil is made is not delimited to *other* people who are diagnosed as “schizoid” but, rather, to any and all of us who are frozen in (or allow ourselves to be confined by) the existential-relational position called the paranoid-schizoid, a position which makes others beings-without-otherness and, therefore, beings towards whom we need not concern ourselves.

In fact, with this entrenchment we fall into experiencing them as beings that we can treat in an instrumental way or worse: in an evil way. With encasement in the paranoid-schizoid position, others easily can become hollow vessels of being-ness and, thereby, killable with little or no sense of self-recrimination. Their pain and suffering are irrelevant except as it suits our needs.⁷

The case of Lee Warns

We conclude with a discussion about Aileen (“Lee”) Wuornos, one of the few known female, serial killers about which there is a relatively well-documented base of information. Through our discussion of her, we attempt to illustrate the six elements above that we see as central to the evil that serial killers like Bundy and Brady acknowledge. The information we share about Wuornos comes primarily from a

⁷⁷ In this regard, it is interesting to consider one of the key conclusions of Hannah Arendt after her careful study of Adolph Hitler’s evil henchman, Adolph Eichmann. “The longer one listened to him [Eichmann], the more obvious it became that his inability to speak was closely connected with an inability to think, namely, to think from the standpoint of somebody else” (1964, p. 27).

documentary by Nick Broomfield (Broomfield & Churchill, 2003) and an “autobiography” (Wuornos with Berry-Dee, 2006).⁸ We also choose Wuornos, because in choosing a female we end this paper with a highlighting nod towards the others “slices” at evil that are yet needed to be made: Is the manifestation of evil by male and female killers somewhat different?

Vronsky (2007) offers data suggesting female serial killers are fewer in number than males (16% of those apprehended in the USA since 1820) and exhibit a different forensic “signature.” He asserts that females kill for the same reasons as males (for power and control) but, unless partnered with a male killer, tend not to assault sexually or mutilate physically their victims and incline towards the murder of their male intimates or family members. Wuornos fits this characterization by Vronsky except that she, like most male serial killers, chose strangers--seven of them. Nonetheless, we think there is clearly more to be fathomed about the sex-gender issue, and our own thoughts as authors are still forming. At this point, since cultural factors tend to gather increasing importance in gender expression as children add years to their experience in society, we wonder if we, as males and females, encounter the contiguous, paranoid-schizoid, and depressive position developmental challenges, relatively speaking, in the *same* way in our early development but later in life choose “solution” *within* these positions in somewhat *different* ways.

Fickled Fate

The role of chance that we all face in life shines glaringly on Wuornos in two key ways. First, it is evident in circumstances that brought her into life and the abusive situation that she had to cope with as a child. The factor of what we are “born into” we all have little trouble as seeing as relevant to shaping who we are. Secondly, however, is the “chance moment” that we speak of above and the decision that we then make one way or the other that, at least, retrospectively, proves key in the path we take, evil or not. The forensic investigator, Christopher Berry-Dee to whom Wuornos told her story frames the issue this way: “[T]here are lots of kids out there who suffer abuse. They don’t all turn into serial killers, do they?” (Wuornos, 2006, p. 225).

Her family circumstances

Wuornos had a brother two years older than her, and her mother, Diane, gave birth to her at age 16. Wuornos never met her father. He was incarcerated at the time of her birth, convicted of raping a 7-year-old girl. To add to all this misfortune Wuornos’ mother abandoned her and her brother, Keith, to the care of her own parents when she was about 4 years of age. Wuornos knew nothing consciously about either her real mother and father until her grandfather, Lauri, in a moment of pique told her about her mother when she was age 11 and about her father when she was age 14. Notably, her father had just hanged himself in prison (Wuornos, 2006, p. 231).

⁸ However, as Christopher Berry-Dee, the person to whom Wuornos told her published story, says: “She, like scores of other murderers, has cried wolf and lied so many times, we would not recognize the truth if it stared us straight in the face. Indeed, even Lee...would no longer know the truth if she were alive today” (Wuornos, 2006, p. 233).

The bitter hurt of being deserted by her mother stayed with Wuornos throughout her life. For instance, she only saw her mother at the family funerals, the ones for her grandparents and her brother, and in response to interviewer, Nick Broomfield, telling her the day before her execution that her mother, Diane, asked for her forgiveness, Wuornos angrily said (Broomfield & Churchill, 2003, 1:21:14-1:21:58): “Let me tell you something. She plopped me out of her belly, left me...So tell that damn whore I could give a fuck if she ever had me...She can go to hell.”

The occasion for Wuornos’ biological mother asking for this grace was an interview Broomfield had with Diane a couple days before Aileen’s court mandated execution (October 9, 2002, Broomfield & Churchill, 2003, 1:09:58-1:13:21). Diane said a number of things which indicate both of her disconnection from her daughter and the negative view she maintained of her. Diane apparently starts out the conversation with Broomfield saying, “I want to tell you something about her [Aileen’s] birth” (1:10:15).

She emphasizes that Aileen’s was a “frank, breech birth” where the baby comes out “bottom” (rear end) first: something so unusual, dangerous, and painful that the doctor called in others to witness it. In the context of relating this, Diane wonders if Aileen, although mentally competent, suffered a brain injury that contributed to her problems. Secondly, Diane seems to learn from Broomfield that Aileen, after being kicked out of her grandparents’ home (see below), lived in the woods behind her neighborhood, often having to sleep in the snow. Of this Diane says, “I know nothing of that...Did an agency find her and take care of her?” To Broomfield saying that after living outside in the elements for a good while, Aileen ended up hitchhiking around, and Diane adds, “which she likes.” Lastly, Diane asks Broomfield when the execution is, and when he tells her “soon,” she offers no comment that hints of compassion. In words that seem to be ones reflecting concern more about her own situational distress than Aileen’s fate, she says, “I think I’ll rest better” [when she’s gone].

The bad draw of a having a teenage mother who abandoned her and her brother was just the start of a complicated and troubled life circumstance for Wuornos. Her maternal grandparents formally adopted her about a year after her mother left, and Aileen came to call her grandparents her stepparents. However, Wuornos’ placement in their home was a cast into a wolf’s den. The grandparents were both alcoholics, and when chaos didn’t reign, abuse overflowed. By age 9 Wuornos was involved in offering sexual favors in exchange for cigarettes, drugs, and food (e.g., Broomfield & Churchill, 2003, 33:30-34:28). There is some evidence that she also engaged in sexual activities with her brother (Wuornos, 2006, p. x), although in one part of Broomfield’s documentary Wuornos suggests this is false (36:09-36:15). Apparently, also, the grandfather had a vicious temper and used to beat Aileen. A neighborhood girlfriend of Aileen’s, Sydney Shovan, told of witnessing this in action when one day she and Aileen skipped school: “He [the grandfather] was a bastard...The minute she walked in [to her home] he had her over a chair...And he beat the hell out of her with a black belt...He walloped on her a good five minutes. (36:28-37:14). In Aileen’s words: “My stepfather [grandfather] would beat me often after school or if I came home later. He’d make me cut down a willow branch and he’d use that. I soon learned that the thicker the branch, the less it hurt. Sometimes he used to beat me with a belt, then he made me clean it” (Wuornos, 2006, p. 3). Aileen also related that her “stepfather” would either have her strip down and

lean over the kitchen chair to be beat or lie naked face down and spread eagle on her bed (Wuornos, 2006).

To top off this life of violence and chaos, Wuornos got pregnant, perhaps via a “local pedophile” (Broomfield & Churchill, 2003, 45:41-45:43), at the same age as her biological mother (age 14), and gave birth to a boy who was given up immediately for adoption. About this same time, her mother (grandmother) died of liver failure, and at age 15 her father (grandfather) threw her out of the house. We should note here that after being thrown out Wuornos lived for three years in the Michigan woods at the end of her street. She sustained herself via sexual transactions, which provided her food, clothes, and occasional shelter. She then moved to Florida to find warmth. In the documentary she says she still has blue toes and hands that are frostbite-looking because of the toll the cold winters exacted (1:03:04-1:03:24). One boy, Jerry Moss, with whom she had regular sex and with whom she wanted a romantic relationship, said that around others he threw rocks at her, and essentially treated her “like she was nobody, like she was dirt” (34:31-34:52).

Of her family, however, Wuornos does something which is reminiscent of Bundy’s effort to absolve his family. In a way which we think shows her rapacious need to organize her chaotic experience and resolve the instability of her paranoid-schizoid position where who is “good” and who is “bad” is tortuously debated, Wuornos has this conversation when her execution fate is nearly set (Broomfield & Churchill, 2003, 1:01:16-1:02:28):

Wuornos: OK. The truth about the family is this. My dad was so straight and so clean. He wouldn’t even wear a...take his shirt off to mow the lawn. He did not believe in cussing...in long hair and mini skirts and stuff. He was really straight, really decent. And so was my mom. My mom hated swearing in the house...So if I came from a real clean and decent family.

Broomfield: But why then did you get thrown out after the birth [of your son]?

Wuornos: See, after my mom died....my dad got pissed. He’s like, OK, this is the last straw. You know? I think you are the cause of mom’s death because she had physical problems [liver disease], because of all the stress and the pain and the suffering and everything. And what I’m going through as a wild kid is pissing him off. I mean, he thinks that I killed her as well, induced her death. He doesn’t want me home anymore.

However, in a prior statement, one more indicative of her usual story and one more reasonably corroborated by the history otherwise known, she said: “I was betrayed all my fucking life...My parents betrayed me, my grandparents betrayed me. Men betrayed me and the fucking cops betrayed me. Friends betrayed me. I’ve had enough shit in my life” (Wuornos, 2006, p. x).

The chance moment

Aileen’s first victim was Richard Mallory, someone she especially made pains to describe as wanting to hurt her and whom she killed in self-defense. To emphasize the

threat, he was to her safety, she says that during her life, especially as a (highway) hooker, she had sex with hundreds of men and that although some were jerks, she never had to shoot anyone. Of Mallory, however, though her story about him evolves over time, Wuornos reports that he “beat her and forced a blunt object into her anus” (Wuornos, 2006, p. 57), and that she had to shoot him to protect herself from being killed.

Berry-Dee writes of Aileen’s encounter with Mallory: “Fate keeps a close hand. There is a point along the road where things are set in motion: one life ends, the other irrevocably changed. In this instance, a few minutes either way and the paths of victim and killer would not have crossed” (Wuornos, 2006, p. 54). Indeed, the intersection of Wuornos’ and Mallory’s life was especially fraught. The always-betrayed Wuornos met Mallory (on December 1, 1989), a man who was an actively brutal, sexual deviant and who between 1958 and 1968 served in the Maryland State Mental Institution for an attempted robbery with intent to rape. Dr. Harold M. Boselaw, who did a court-ordered evaluation of Mallory at that time, said of him: “Because of his emotional disturbance and poor sexual impulses, he could present a danger to his environment in the future” (Wuornos, 2006, p. 67).

After Mallory, during the next two years, Wuornos proceeded to murder at least another six men, all in “self-defense.”

The incremental momentum of life that hinders choice

On this matter even more than others we must acknowledge our speculation. Nevertheless, we suggest that readers conjure images from Wuornos’ childhood while they imagine Wuornos with Mallory; she naked; he not.

From her childhood, keep in mind her often stripped, naked state lying spread eagle face down on her bed while her clothed stepfather beat her “ass.” Keep in mind the rock throwing neighborhood boy, Jerry Moss. He is emblematic of so many of the other boys’ she gave them sexual favors; boys who threw cigarettes at her and derogatorily referred to her as the “Cigarette Pig” or “Cigarette Bandit” (Wuornos, 2006, p. 7).

Now consider the picture of Mallory who “merely unzipped his trousers” (Wuornos, p. 58) and rolled drunkenly on top of her with ambiguity about whether he was willing even to acknowledge her by paying her for her services. Imagine Aileen being enraged by this and then them both beginning “to hurl abuse at each other” (Wuornos, p. 58). Then at some point whether in fact or in her imagined experience of Mallory, Wuornos is assaulted by him with him in some way trying “to screw me in the ass” (Wuornos, 2006, p. 181).

The passive suffering now expressed as an active choice to cause suffering

Referring to Mallory, Wuornos says, “It was just another trick...It was cool and royal before it went sour” (Wuornos, 2006, p. 57). Berry-Dee says, “We will never know the exact truth of that of the sordid scenario, but something happened...which sparked a monstrous fury in Lee” (Wuornos, 2006, p. 58). When she got the opportunity, she shot him three times.

David Spears, the next murder victim, was left by Wuornos lying on his back with his legs apart, his arms outstretched with his palms facing skywards, an image eerily reminiscent of her posture for being beat on her bed.

The desperately sought coherence to counter chaotic fragmentation

“I’m a good person inside, but when I get drunk...when somebody hassles me...don’t fuck with me” (Wuornos, 2006, p. 150). Wuornos goes on to say that as a little girl she wanted to be a nun and, when she got older, a missionary. “[T]hen I had some back problems. Then I fell in love with somebody” (Wuornos, 2006, p. 150). In so many words, we would suggest that her chaotic life consumed her. Still, however, she maintained that her killings were for the good of all: “If I didn’t kill those guys, I would have been raped a total of 20 times maybe. Or killed. You never know but I got them first. I figured that at least I was doing some good killing these guys. Because, if I didn’t kill them, they would have hurt someone else” (Wuornos, 2006, p. 197). Wuornos maintained this rather vociferously, although increasingly quietly, as her many years on death row took a toll on her sanity, making her increasingly paranoid that a public claim of self-defense would delay her execution further and make her have to bear an intolerable life behind bars.

Six months before her execution, this conversation ensued (Broomfield & Churchill, 2003, 1:06:17- 1:07:38):

Wuornos: I would never be able to handle a life sentence...They do crazy things to people while they’re incarcerated...so I’m going for the death. I have to cause they’re too evil...So I got to go down...that’s why I can’t say nothing about self-defense...

Broomfield: Was it self-defense?

Wuornos: Yes, but I can’t tell anybody. Never...

Broomfield: So was Mallory self-defense?

Wuornos: Yeah. So were some others.

Amidst a haze of paranoia about sonic beams pressuring her head, poisoned food being given to her, and a claim that the cops set her up to do the killing in order to clean off the streets, Wuornos in her last interview the day before her execution says about her death and “whatever after” (1:20:25-1:20:33): “I know it’s going to be good, because I didn’t do anything as wrong as they said. I did the right thing, and I saved a lot of people’s butts from getting hurt and raped and killed too.”

The paranoid-schizoid “solution”

Dr. Elizabeth McMahon evaluated Wuornos for 22 hours and diagnosed her as a borderline personality who is living constantly in world with a feeling that danger is threatening and therefore a prevailing desperation to get her physical needs met. Other defense psychologists said of her that her world is a “chilling place, a malevolent place, and angry, out-to-get-her place, a threatening place full of terrors” (Wuornos, 2006, p. 234). Berry-Dee says of her that “[S]he distanced people by seeing them as angels or demons,” and his final sentence in her book is: “Most of us have a conscience. Aileen Wuornos had a black void” (Wuornos, 2006, p. 235). Indeed, the reader can glean from her “autobiography” that her only true remorse is that she felt she failed adequately to

take care of her lesbian lover, Tyria Moore, to whom she handed over most of the money she earned during her murderous spree. Wuornos' own words are: "I wish I hadn't done it. Not that I'm feeling sorry for myself...I'm saying I wish I never had the gun, I wish I never, ever hooked and I wish I never would have met those guys...[T]heir families must realize that no matter how much they loved the people that died...they were bad people because they were going to hurt me...I don't even know their names. I can't even remember their names" (Wuornos, 2006, p. 169-171).

Two concluding quotes

Of evil Aileen Wuornos tells us this: "[T]his world is nothing but evil and all of us are full of evil one way or another" (Broomfield & Churchill, 2006, 22:18-22:20). A somewhat similar but more forgiving sentiment is found in Gregory Maguire's novel, *Wicked*. He writes that evil is "Like a patch of cold air on a warm still night. A perfectly agreeable soul might march through it and become infected, and then go and kill a neighbor" (1995, p. 80).

We maintain that "yes" evil crouches at the door of us all (Genesis 4:7) and that, therefore, we all face its encounter, within others and within ourselves. We further maintain in this article that our response is not fully and completely in our hands. Cultural context creates unimaginable possibilities to us for nefarious behavior, and the accumulation of our life experience makes for some which are luck-of-the-draw ones which incline us unknowingly or unconsciously towards a narrowed horizon of what we conceive as acceptable behavior. And yet we are, as Sartre (1966), opines, "no-thing" and within that nothingness we, in another sense, can be any-thing. We, in other words, have choice. It may not be as wide and easily assumed as we might dream it, but it growingly exists, especially as we strive to embrace the "otherness" of others and otherness we have to our own selves.

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