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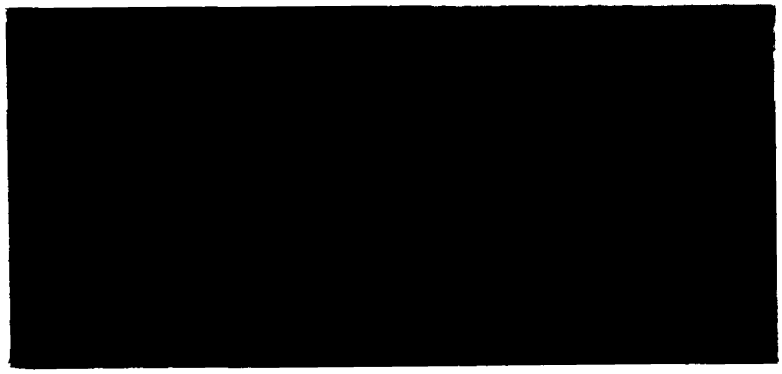

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Suffering and Ethics

People suffer. We suffer from illness, disease, unemployment, dead-end jobs, bad marriages, the loss of loved ones, social relocation, tyranny, police brutality, street violence, existential anxiety, guilt, envy, resentment, depression, stigmatization, rapid social change, sexual harassment, child abuse, poverty, medical malpractice, alienation, political defeat, toothaches, the loss of self-esteem, identity-panic, torture, and fuzzy categories. We organize suffering into categories to help cope with it, but often these categories themselves conceal some forms of suffering, even contribute to them. This latter experience leads some to suspect that suffering is never entirely reducible to any determinate set of categories. To suffer is to bear, endure or undergo, to submit to something injurious, to become dis-organized. Suffering subsists on the underside of agency, mastery, wholeness, joy, and comfort. It is, therefore, ubiquitous.

But there I go.., moving from the agony of suffering to a comforting reflection on it. Appropriating suffering to a reading of the human condition. For severe suffering exceeds every interpretation of it while persistently demanding interpretation. Without suffering, it is unlikely we would have much depth in our philosophies and religions. But with it, life is tough.., and miserable for many.

Does the poly-cultural character of suffering reveal something about the human condition? And how contestable and

culturally specific are the medical, psychological, religious, ethical, therapeutic, sociostructural, economic and political categories through which suffering is acknowledged and administered today? Is "suffering" a porous universal, whose persistence as a cultural term reveals how conceptually discrete injuries, wounds, and agonies are experientially fungible, crossing and confounding the fragile boundaries we construct between them? Or is it a barren generality, seducing theorists into metaphysical explorations far removed from specific injuries in need of medical or moral or religious or political or therapeutic or military attention? Any response to this question draws upon one or more of the theoretical paradigms already noted. A political theorist might focus on power struggles between disparate professionals over the legitimate definition and treatment of suffering. An evangelist might minister instances that fit the Christian model. And a physician might medicate theorists and spiritualists burned out by the projects these faiths commend. Is the bottom line, then, that today people go to the doctor when they really need help? Perhaps. But they might pray after getting the treatment. Or file a malpractice suit. Or join a political movement to redesign the health care system. Sufferers are full of surprises.

Among field contenders for primacy in the domain of suffering, ethical theory has pretty much dropped out of the running. The reason is clear, even if astonishing. Contemporary professional paradigms of ethics, represented fairly well by John

Rawls and Jurgen Habermas, have drifted from the putative object of ethical concern.

Even though professional ethicists have relinquished authority over suffering, morality--as a set of cultural interpretations of goodness, obligation, and evil--continues to play a major role in its delineation and treatment. But morality, as played out in this culture, is divided against itself over the interpretation of suffering. Some modes of suffering, say child abuse, are said (by some) to be caused by immoral behavior by others; others, say alcoholism, to be caused by the immorality of the sufferer herself; others, say racism, to be caused by the cultural hegemony of vindictive moral codes; and others yet, say terminal patients who seek to end their own lives because they roll in agony, to be rendered otiose by traditional moral codes. And we disagree within and between ourselves which instances fall under which categories.

John Caputo, in a fascinating study entitled Against Ethics, seeks to cut through the abstractions of contemporary ethical theory. He elevates suffering itself to the center of moral attention. Drop punitive gods. Forget Rawls. Bypass Nietzsche's coldness toward suffering. Avoid entanglement in the coils of Derrida. Pour salt on Foucault's critique of normalization. Be wary of the spiritualism of Immanuel Levinas. Step outside the conflictual world of political partisanship. Concentrate, instead on suffering of the flesh, and on the obligation of those in the vicinity of suffering to respond to it. Let's make obligation,

Caputo says, palpable, specific, situational, and guttural. Let's rescue it from theology and philosophy. Let's respond to suffering without mediation by a god, a Greek ideal of beauty, a teleological principle, a veil of ignorance, an overlapping consensus, or a (non)metaphysics of <u>differance</u> to govern the response.

Obligation is not commanded on high, nor is it grounded in reason, nor does it filter into life through mystical experience. Caputo, a theologian and philosopher, has gone practical. He still loves the old texts. But obligation, he says, simply happens:

> Obligation means the obligation to the other, to one who has been laid low, to victims and outcasts. Obligation means the obligation to reduce and alleviate suffering.[1]

Moral codes grounded in a law of laws, such as the commands of a god or the dictates of a categorical imperative, are too blunt, crude and closed to respond to suffering equitably. Those grounded in a fictional contract are not much better. Besides, both types purport to ground morality in certitudes that are highly questionable and debatable. People spend so much time debating the certitudes they never get around to suffering. Even moralities built around appreciation of the human as an essentially embodied being tend to slide over suffering. Though they come closer. The thing to do is to move through gods, transcendental commands, principles, contracts, and bodies to the experience of human flesh. "Flesh is soft and vulnerable. It

tears, bleeds, swells, bends, burns, starves, grows old, exhausted, numb, ulcerous.... Flesh smells."[2] Flesh is the soft, perishable medium in which suffering occurs. "What is suffering if not this very vulnerability of the flesh, this unremitting unbecoming. This liability to suffer every breakdown, reversal and consumption?" [3] If you bind suffering to flesh and flesh to obligation, you both cut through systems that try to ground obligation in some solid finality and you render obligation more sensitive to the palpable hunger, sickness, desperation, and helplessness humans often face. Flesh moves you from us to them, without complex argumentation. We are all made of it.

Caputo knows things are not quite that simple. He knows that to reach the flesh it has been necessary to write an entire book entangled in a host of controversial arguments. But, still, he hopes he has built a cantilever upon which a certain amount of moral weight can be placed. He hopes to pull us away from metaphysics and systematic doctrines toward the suffering and obligation that both inspires the constructions of metaphysics and engenders its obfuscation. "Flesh fills metaphysics with anxiety." [4] Flesh, first, challenges the systematicity that governs metaphysics. For flesh is vulnerable. It absorbs burdens, blows, injuries and shocks. It compromises agency. Flesh suffers. But the very vulnerabilities of flesh, second, often prod humans to construct metaphysical systems to elevate them above its softness, smell and bloodiness. (Caputo does not evince old worries about temptations of the flesh). Or it prods them to

embrace systems that show why limits of the flesh are deserved. But you never escape the flesh, and Caputo counsels you to stay close to it when you let obligation happen.

Can such a recipe be followed? Caputo concedes formally that he reinscribes himself in the world of metaphysics even as he struggles to write himself out of it. For he uses an inherited language.[5] Caputo has read his Derrida. Indeed, he has written books on language. Nonetheless, we can stay close to the experience of suffering, Caputo thinks, if we strive for "metaphysical minimalism."

> Minimalism is a metaphysics without a meta-event, a kind of decapitated metaphysics.... Minimalism lets events happen, lets them be, lets them go, without imposing grand and overarching schemata upon them, without simplifying them. It has decided to come to terms with intractable plurivocity.[6]

Caputo, I should tell you, professes to love many of the prophets he criticizes. He loves Abraham, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Deleuze, and Levinas for starters. Well, I happen to love Caputo. I love his critique of monotheistic and secular moralities alike. I respect his quest to bring suffering back to the center of ethics. I appreciate his sense of the fragility of obligation combined with the insight that attempts to write fragility out by constructing automatic foundations for ethics themselves foster new cruelties. I love much in his sensibility. But, still, Caputo, to make obligation simple, has submerged some

dilemmas it poses to ethics. A few blemishes remain on Caputo's skin.

His "metaphysical minimalism" is a non-starter. It contains some admirable ingredients, but it does not succeed in its objective. Rather, Caputo replaces a familiar set of metaphysical doctrines with an alternative that is just as fundamental. And Caputo does not identify anything within his perspective (within the perspective I share up to a point) that might inspire the spirit of obligation he pursues. You are either moved or unmoved by the stories Caputo tells. Obligation either "happens" or it does not. And Caputo's "minimalism" compels him to reduce his injunctions to the "I" far too often: "I feel"; "I avoid;" "I love;" "I must." Minimalism reduces Caputo to a Christ figure without transcendental portfolio. Either he moves you to read suffering as he does, or nothing happens.

Most significantly, Caputo's metaphysical minimalism impels him to treat devastated groups and helpless individuals as paradigm objects of obligation. Sick, homeless, helpless individuals. Peoples laid low by floods, conquest, famine, holocaust. Caputo issues a charity model of obligation, in which virtuous helpers are pulled by the helplessness of the needy: "the power of obligation varies directly with the powerlessness of the one who calls for help, which is the power of powerlessness."[7]

Such situations often occur, and their moral importance is undeniable. But they may not pose the most difficult cases in

ethics. Some of the most difficult cases arise when people suffer from injuries imposed by institutionalized identities, principles, and cultural understandings, when those who suffer are not entirely helpless but are defined as threatening, contagious or dangerous to the self-assurance of these identities, and when the sufferers honor sources of ethics inconsonant or disturbing to these constituencies. And this suffering, too, invades the flesh. It engenders fatigue; it makes people perish; it drives them over the edge. To simplify obligation in an era of political pessimism, Caputo has quietly emptied ethics of its political dimension.

The most difficult cases require not an ethics of help for the helpless but a political ethos of critical engagement between interdependent, contending constituencies implicated in asymmetrical structures of power. Indeed, some ways of acting upon obligations to the deserving poor or victims of natural disaster provide moral cover for the refusal to cultivate an ethics of engagement with constituencies in more ambiguous, disturbing, competitive positions. The most complex ethical issues arise in those ambiguous contexts where suffering is intense and the injuries suffered by some contribute to the sense of self-confidence, wholeness, transcendence or cultural desert of others. That is, the most pressing, difficult cases of ethics are political in character. They often revolve around what I will call the politics of becoming.

The politics of becoming occurs when a culturally marked

constituency, suffering under the its current social constitution, strives to reconfigure itself by moving the cultural constellation of identity\difference then in place. In such situations either the condition of the subjugated constituency or the response required to open up a new line of flight is not acknowledged by some of the parties involved. And sometimes by none. Under these circumstances it takes a militant, experimental and persistent political movement to open up a line of flight from culturally induced suffering. Such a movement, to succeed, must extend <u>from</u> those who initiate cultural experiments <u>to</u> others who respond sensitively to those experiments even while they disturb their own sense of identity.

I honor, then, the politics of <u>becoming</u>, not the politics of realization of an essence or universal condition already known in its basic structure by reasonable people. Indians, slaves, feminists, Jews, homosexuals, and secularists, among others, have participated in the politics of becoming in the last couple of centuries in Euro-American societies. But many citizens who now acknowledge the fruits of these movements, who repudiate the negative marks inscribed upon such constituencies in the past, also forget how the politics of becoming proceeds when it is in motion. They treat retrospective intepretations of the politics of becoming as if these definitions and standards were actually or "implicitly" available to participants when things were in motion. They act as if the initiating constituency either exposed <u>hypocrisy</u> in the profession of universal rights by dominant

groups or prompted a cultural dialectic that fills out the implicit logic of the universal. They reduce the politics of becoming to a social logic.

Caputo is wary of both the model of hypocrisy and the model of dialectical progress. I am with him here. But his minimalist response to these two metaphysics flattens out the modes of suffering he can recognize. Caputo's perspective does appear "minimal" by comparison to the models of a commanding, (Christian) god and/or a teleological principle. Measured by these two perspectives, it lacks a god and lacks reference to a fundamental purpose of being. Lacking these supports Caputo is pressed to give (apparently) simple examples of suffering and to make obligation just "happen."

The two interdependent traditions Caputo resists only appear to exhaust metaphysics if meta is (mis)translated as "beyond".[8] For then meta-physics would inform you what precedes the physical world. Perhaps a god or an intrinsic purpose. But if you construe metaphysics to be any reading of the fundamental character of things, it becomes clear that every positive cultural interpretation is inhabited by a metaphysical dimension. The call to metaphysical minimalism now becomes either a command to conceal the perspective that moves you or a doomed attempt to live, act, judge, and respond without engaging in positive interpretation. [9]

Caputo takes a step in the direction I endorse when he speaks of an "intractable plurivocity" coursing through things.

But his drive to minimalism stops him from pursuing this thought. Does he lament the loss of a god who could communicate clear commands or draw us closer to the fundamental design of things? His critical reading of Nietzsche suggests this possibility, anyway; for Caputo reduces the thinker who pursued the theme of fundamental plurivocity more fully than anyone preceding him in the West to a visionary of a cold, cruel, world who is indifferent to suffering. Often Caputo simply bypasses the element of joyfulness, abundance and possibility Nietzsche locates in the multiplicity of being; and the Nietzschean generosity he does acknowledge is never pure enough to fit the disinterested model of obligation Caputo demands.

My Nietzsche offers a positive metaphysic that breaks with the familiar options of theism, secularism and metaphysical minimalism. He does so to fend off the "passive nihilism" that so readily accompanies the liquid diet of metaphysical minimalism, to fend off, that is, the cultural enervation that readily accompanies the doomed attempt to live without interpreting life actively. Nietzsche affirms that action is impossible without interpretation, that every particular interpretation invokes a fundamental conception of the world, and that every interpretive perspective remains questionable and contestable. He affirms, that is, life, in its ambiguous conditions of possibility. So Nietzsche interprets actively from within a distinctive reading of the fundaments of things. Here is one formulation of those fundaments, offered by his sidekick

Zarathustra, while preaching about "Old and New Tablets":

> When the water is spanned by planks, when bridges and railings leap over the river, verily those are believed who say, 'Everything is in flux....' But when the winter comes..., then verily, not only the blockheads say, 'Does not everything stand still?'
>
> 'At bottom everything stands still'--that is truly a winter doctrine... O my brothers is everything not in flux now? Have not all railings and bridges fallen into the water? Who could still cling to 'good' and 'evil'?... The thawing wind blows--thus preach in every street my brothers.[10]

Several thoughts mingle in Zarathustra's saying. First, things are mobile at bottom, rather than still or fixed. This experience of the mobility of things has profound, corrosive effects upon winter conceptions of nature, divinity, identity, truth and ethics that have prevailed in the West.

Second, winter thoughts keep reinstating themselves in ways that treat the cultural ice as if it were frozen all the way down. This drive to find a solid bottom is particularly powerful when suffering is intense or profound. For sufferers often seek relief from the riddle of suffering, and they often find solace when things appear still at the bottom. Suffering readily fosters winter doctrines. But, sometimes, as in the case of Nietzsche, individuals struggle against these pressures to come to terms critically with the existential needs impelling them in this direction. They then struggle to gauge the cruelties and

exclusions that regularly accompany the hegemony of winter doctrines.

Third, Zarathustra's perspective is paradoxical and contestable. He can point to multiple disturbances and surprises that disrupt each new winter doctrine; he can provide pointers to a mobility of things that exceeds the reach of cognition. But he cannot freeze this contestable experience of flux in truth. Truth cannot be a relation of correspondence for Nietzsche. Truth changes its place as well as its meaning in his thought. 'Truth', in one of its valences, is those indispensable cultural productions that freeze things (representations of nature, identities, moral codes, etc) temporarily and incompletely. Truth, as solidification, occurs in a "regime of truth," as Foucault would say. On another register--for Nietzsche plays with 'truth'--the Nietzschean true is the flux out of which solidifications occur in society and nature (for nature is not finished), the surplus and noise that circulate through every solid formation and create possibilities for new becomings. Truth, so rendered, casts off the dimension of final solidity so crucial to the correspondence model while retaining the dimension of fundamentality also invoked by that model. The true becomes unsusceptible to correspondence. By disaggregating two elements the correspondence model binds together Nietzsche recovers an alternative orientation to truth. Along this dimension, Nietzsche is closer to a-theologies of god(s) as absence, excess or 'nothing' than to secular conceptions of truth as

correspondence, coherence, rational consensus or pragmatic success.

Fourth, Nietzsche and Zarathustra tap into this fugitive and cognitively indirect experience of the protean diversity of life, cultivating gratitude for the rich abundance of life. They cultivate gratitude toward the abundance of being that endows life with mobility. They cultivate gratitude both to life and to the excess that provides one of its conditions of possibility. Such a gratitude is "religious" without necessarily being theistic. It finds more intense expression at some times than others. "What is astonishing about the religiosity of the ancient Greeks is the lavish abundance of gratitude that radiates from it. Only a very distinguished type of human being stands in that relation to nature and to life. Later, when the rabble came to rule in Greece, fear choked out religion and prepared the way for Christianity." [11]

Gratitude for the abundance of life, then, carries acceptance of a contestable conception of being into ethics and politics. But this temperament is not located beyond the play of identities, understandings, and principles. Rather, it is inserted into these media, rendering them more responsive to that which exceeds them, more generous and refined in their engagements with difference. Without the infusion of such gratitude, high sounding principles will be applied in stingy, punitive ways. A theistic or secular perspective that exudes it can foster ethical generosity while trimming some cognitive fat

from its theological or secular diet.

This contestable faith in the abundance of being, this impious, nontheistic reverence for life, can render a post-secular ethic both alert to the fragility of ethics and open to the play of difference in cultural life.[12] These two dispositions support one another. Those inspired by an ethos of generosity participate in the politics of becoming without having to ground their ethic in something solid, fixed or frozen. Because we can act ethically without being commanded by a god or transcendental imperative to do so, we can also deploy genealogy, deconstruction, and political disturbance to cultivate responsiveness to movements of difference. Our commitment to these activities does not dissolve ethics: it only does so for those who cannot be ethical without solid foundations. We do not have to pretend that obligation just happens either. Acceptance of obligation grows out of a protean care for the world that precedes it. Indeed, the demand for purity in obligation strips it of implication inside those human identities and interests that might mobilize it as an active force. For to retreat to the view that "obligation happens" is to retain the Christian form of obligation as obedience while stripping off the transcendental command that authorizes it.

A post-secular ethic thus situates itself within the discordant experience of the <u>indispensability and constitutive fragility of ethics.</u> It renounces the assurance of solid grounds to enable it to explore unnecessary and injurious limits to life

supported by the very provision of such assurances. Those who participate in such an ethos cultivate critical generosity to those differences upon which the specification of their own identities depend, in part by responding to those differences outside that are regulated in themselves to enable them to be what they are and in part by recalling that they inhabit a world where the admirable possibilities of being outstrip the time and corporeal capacity of any particular individual or culture to embody them all.

Fifth, the first four themes do not make Nietzsche indifferent toward suffering. They drive him to make a crucial division <u>within</u> suffering. He resists pity for those who demand a winter doctrine that redeems the suffering that comes with life or proves how human beings deserve to be punished. For such doctrines express ressentiment. They express persistent resentment against the flesh, pain, limited capacity to know, vulnerability to disorganization and susceptibility to death that mark the human condition. They thereby resent conditions of possibility for human life itself. This existential resentment infiltrates into stingy moral ideals, conceptions of truth, practices of identity, judgments of normality, and systems of punishment. Every individual and culture struggles with ressentiment, according to Nietzsche. And every generous disposition issues in resentment, anger, or fear on occasion. Indeed, such responses are sometimes appropriate to specific circumstances. But moral dispositions governed by ressentiment

regularize war against the diversity of life in the quest to transcendentalize what they already are or pretend to be. Or so my Nietzsche thinks.

My Nietzsche resists pity for those who demand a transcendental reason for suffering. Secularists, on this reading, too often join too many theists in placing such demands on being. (There is no doctrinal imperative, recall, that either party must do so). This demand finds expression in the conceptions of truth, reason, justice, and nature they insist upon without being able to prove. Pity for existential suffering too often squashes individuality, distinctiveness, nobility and difference under the stars of universality, metaphysical necessity, and civilizational regularity. The problem is that the first sort of pity seldom articulates itself exactly as Nietzsche defines it. It often takes cover under rubrics of love, universal principle, desert, freedom and civilizational necessity. It must be sniffed out before it can be combatted.

Moreover, some forms of suffering provide conditions of possibility for admirable achievements. The refinement and maintenance of a mode of individuality, for example, requires considerable work by the self on the self. And its very particularity carries losses with it. "How is freedom measured, in individuals as in nations? By the resistance which has to be overcome, by the effort it costs to stay aloft." [13] Every way of being involves considerable work to maintain itself--to stay aloft--and too many individuals and groups both resent this

condition of life and take revenge against others who seem not to require the same combination of regulations and restraints to be what they are. The key is to work to stop the suffering tied to staying aloft from fueling resentment against external expressions of differences regulated in you which allow you to be what you are.

That being said, it must be emphasized that (my) Nietzsche is not against pity or compassion per se, despite what Caputo and several other commentators suggest. He resists compassion for selective modes of suffering to express it actively for others. As he puts the point: it is "compassion, in other words, against compassion," one type of compassion against another. [14] Nietzsche pits compassion for that suffocated by the normalizing politics of "good and evil" against compassion for existential suffering. The latter compassion must be redirected, and the demand to which it responds must be overcome, if an ethic of generosity in relations of identity\difference is to be cultivated. Nietzsche might have striven to develop more respectful distance from the mode of suffering he finds most offensive and dangerous. But he, like everyone else in this respect, is compelled to be selective with respect to suffering. His open selectivity challenges concealed principles of selection in other moral perspectives. Is it because his selectivity pits him against powerful currents flowing through sacred and secular moralities in western societies that representatives of these traditions so often read him to be against compassion and benevolence per se?

There are plenty of ways I dissent from (my) Nietzsche: His cultural aristocraticism, which prizes becoming and plurality among a "noble" (though often unmonied) few while condemning "the herd" to a cultural dogmatism it is said to be predisposed toward; his (sometimes appealing) fantasy to reside on the margin of society beyond the reach of organized politics; his tendency (following from the first two themes) to neglect the politics of becoming in favor of cultivating individual distinctiveness; his profound ambivalence toward the basis and effects of gender duality; his periodic delight in petty cruelty against carriers of ressentiment (though I feel some ambivalence here); etc. I do not, then, endorse numerous themes represented today under the name 'Nietzsche', but I do subscribe to the five stated above. Call them if you wish, my "democratization of Nietzsche". I doubt whether I could enunciate them without drawing considerable sustenance from the work of Nietzsche. [15] And I suspect that some who reduce their Nietzsche to some ugly mixture of coldness, indifference and cruelty do so to suppress these themes themselves from ethical discourse, sinking them in filth so as to return ethical authority to the narrow, formal, stingy options with which they began.

The Politics of Becoming

By the politics of becoming I mean that paradoxical politics by which new cultural identities are formed out of old energies, injuries, and differences. The politics of becoming emerges out of the energies, suffering and lines of flight available to

culturally defined differences in a particular historical constellation. To the extent it succeeds in placing a new identity on the cultural field the politics of becoming changes the shape and contour of established identities as well. The politics of becoming thus sows disturbance and distress in the souls of those disrupted by its movement. In a (modern?) world where people are marked and known through their identities, difference and becoming are ubiquitous. If each positive identity is organized through the differences it demarcates, if difference circulates through it as well as around it, if movement by some of these differences compromises its quest to present itself as natural, transcendent, complete or self-sufficient, then the politics of becoming imperils the stability of being through which dominant constituencies are coddled and comforted.[16] The question of ethics emerges within this complex set of relations. If becoming is as fundamental to life as being, the question becomes: which sort of suffering is most worthy of responsiveness in which contexts, that which the politics of becoming imposes on the stability of being or that which established identities impose upon the movement of differences to protect their stability? In contemporary American culture the operational answer often precedes the question. Here, frozen codes of morality and normality weigh in heavily on the side of being, stasis, and stability without acknowledging how the moral scales are tipped. And this is probably true more generally as well. To attend to the politics of becoming is to shift the cultural

balance between being and becoming without attempting the impossible, self-defeating goal of dissolving solid formations altogether.

The politics of becoming is paradoxical. A new cultural identity emerges out of old injuries and differences. But because there is not an eternal model it copies as it moves toward new definition, and because it meets resistance from identities counting upon its neediness or marginality to secure themselves, the end result of the politics of becoming is seldom clear at its inception. Indeed, becoming proceeds from inchoate injuries and hopes that may not be crisply defined until a new identity has been forged through which to measure those injuries retrospectively.

If and as a stigmatized identity attains a more positive standing, it may exaggerate to say that it has arrived at what it truly is at bottom or in essence. No positive identity can be judged final in a world where things are mobile at bottom. Of course, it is also hard not to pretend such a final state has been approximated. The presumptions of (at least) European languages press in this direction. So do persistent human interests in regularity of expectation and stability of judgment. But a successful movement of becoming stirs up this cultural field of identities, standards, and procedures; it thereby alters to some degree the measure by which its previous suffering and the responsibility of others to it are culturally defined. Moreover, the new movement, if it is not squashed, sets up new

intrasubjective and intersubjective differences. It might thereby enable some new positive possibilities by engendering new modes of intrasubjective and intersubjective suffering not yet crystallized as injuries. Perhaps it is wise to assume that admirable modes of being tend to crowd each other out in a world not predesigned to house all together. Perhaps, too, suffering of the flesh is somewhat less variable within and across cultures than the formation of positive identities. These two premonitions inform those who seek to come to terms ethically with the constitutive tension between the powers of being and the energies of becoming.

The politics of becoming is purposive without being teleological. It engages actors who, as they pursue a line of flight, do not remain sufficiently fixed across time to be marked as consistent and masterful agents. Those who initiate the politics of becoming make a difference without knowing quite what they are doing. In this respect they amplify underappreciated dimensions within human agency in general.

The politics of becoming requires specific conditions of possibility. It flourishes in a culture that incorporates most of its members into the good life it enables, that is already <u>pluralistic</u> to a considerable degree, and that has cultivated an ethos of critical responsiveness to new drives to <u>pluralization</u>. Here many constituencies appreciate a little more actively the uncertain element of contingency in their own constitution, and this discernment informs their responses to movements by alter-

identities to reconstitute the terms of their cultural identification. The responding constituencies recognize that to create space for the politics of becoming they must render themselves available to modification in one way or another. They convert cultural disturbance of what they are into energy to respond reflectively to new lines of flight. If they are pluralists, they appraise each new drive to identity first according to the likelihood it will support a culture of pluralism in the future.

An ethos of responsiveness to becoming is never entirely reducible to obedience to a pre-existing moral code. Some elements in the existing code itself must be modified if space is to be created for something new to emerge. In a pluralizing culture two interdependent dimensions of ethics are perpetually poised in tension: the obligation to abide by the existing moral code and cultivation of an ethos of critical responsiveness to the movement of difference. Without a code, the regularity of judgment deserved and expected by existing constituencies would be lost. But a congealed code also poses dumb, arbitrary barriers to the politics of becoming. This is what Nietzsche means by the "immorality of morality." While a moral code is indispensable to social regulation, judgment, and coordination, it is also too crude, blunt, and blind an authority to carry out these functions sensitively and automatically. An ethos of critical responsiveness, when active, navigates between these interdependent and discordant dimensions of ethical life.

In American life historical examples of the politics of becoming can be found in anti-slave movements, feminism, gay/lesbian rights movements, the introduction of secularism, the effort to place "Judeo" in front of the "Christian tradition", the right to die, and so on. But few participants in such movements interpret themselves entirely through the politics of becoming. Many claim to pursue an essence that has been culturally occluded or to fill out a universal set of rights that contain hypocritical exclusions. Yet, some difficulties speak against these essentialist self-interpretations: they often create implacable conflicts between contenders for the title of the natural, true or intrinsic identity; they underplay the work required to cultivate generosity in social relations by pretending the end they pursue is already implicit in the culture; they discourage winners of one round from coming to terms actively with the contingency of their own identity, thereby setting the stage for a new round of resistances to the politics of becoming by newly dogmatized identities; and they discourage cultivation of gratitude toward the rich ambiguity of life, a gratitude that sustains responsiveness to the politics of becoming.

There is always a new round in the politics of becoming. For, in a world where things are mobile at bottom, Being, as stable essence, never arrives. Let us set these general formulations in the context of a couple of contemporary examples, examples still poised in the uncertain space between obscure

suffering and the possible consolidation of something new.

Jan Clausen is a beneficiary of and participant in gay and lesbian movements in America. Because of them it became more feasible to establish sensual relations with women without self-hate and without encountering quite as much social stigmatization as heretofore. She knows these collective achievements are partial and precarious. But through them she has developed a critique of "essentialist thinking" and come to terms more actively with the constructed, conflicted, and sometimes mobile character of sexual identity. While "socially powerful groups have a stake in promoting the illusion of unconflicted identity because maintenance of their power depends on keeping in place a constellation of apparently fixed, 'natural', immutable social relationships," Clausen joins others in engaging the "resistance to identity which lies at the very heart of psychic life." [17] The community she belonged to until recently believes, for example, that both "heterosexuality" and "homosexuality" are complex organizations of sensual energy rather than cultural fixtures to be graded according to a natural scale of normality and abnormality.

Clausen, though, recently found that this collective knowledge did her little good when her affections shifted from a woman to a man. She faced charges of betrayal and responses of rejection strangely reminiscent of those she had encountered in disturbing the code of heterosexual normality. These responses were understandable, given the beleaguered condition of gay and

lesbian communities. Still, they may point to powerful tendencies in most cultural groupings to naturalize what they are; they may suggest how the naturalization of identity functions simultaneously to protect collective bonds, to provide security for certain individuals, and to create hardships for those whose contingent condensation of life and desire does not fit into defined cultural slots.

Clausen's "interesting condition" shows how the politics of becoming at one historical junction regularly solidifies into a mode of being at another. For Clausen, alert to a fluidity of desire that may settle for a time and then start moving again, needs a new social movement to modify one she still identifies with to a considerable degree. Clausen's interesting condition enables her to amplify a common, though rather subterranean, experience of ambiguity and resistance within identity. It encourages her, therefore, to become more responsive to alternative sensualities struggling to form themselves within the social matrix. Out of such a series of intersections between old and new participants in the politics of becoming she can hope for a new cultural coalition to bestow greater ethical attention upon becoming itself. As she puts it, experience "in a particular community of women convinces me that all human connections are risky, fragmentary, and non-ideal;" but participation in coalitions between disparate social constituencies connected by multiple knots of affinity and sympathy also convinces Clausen of the possibility of people combining together "from incredibly

different places" from time to time to vindicate the politics of becoming.[18]

Mrs. Lin, a daughter of Chinese intellectuals who died while being abused during the Cultural Revolution in China, is in a more abject situation. Her "symptoms" include headaches, difficulty sleeping, poor appetite, low energy, anxiety, and fantasies of death. They lead to the diagnosis of neurasthenia by Chinese psychiatrists, while they might issue in the diagnosis of depression in the United States.

> For a North American psychiatrist, Mrs. Lin meets the..criteria for a major depressive disorder. The Chinese psychiatrists..did not deny she was depressed, but they regarded the depression as a manifestation of neurasthenia.. Neurasthenia--a syndrome of exhaustion, weakness, and diffuse bodily complaints, believed to be caused by inadequate physical energy in the central nervous system--is an official diagnosis in China; but it is not a diagnosis in the American Psychiatric Association's latest nosology.[19]

Arthur Kleinman, a medical anthropologist with degrees in medicine and psychiatry as well, doubts that either diagnosis fits the case perfectly.[20] While the first focuses on bodily symptoms and the second on psychological states, neither pays much attention to the complex intersections between social stress, corporeal experience, and professional diagnoses of the symptoms that issue from this combination. And Kleinman's extensive interviews with Mrs. Lin convince him that her

situation cannot be "diagnosed" until the stresses, punishments and dislocations imposed upon her as a cultural dissident are drawn into the diagnosis. If they are included, the prescribed responses to Mrs. Lin's condition will include changes in the system of social stress and surveillance in which her suffering occurs. Psychiatry will become more explicitly engaged in the political context in which it is always already set.

In the United States, too, there is considerable resistance to a cultural broadening of psychiatric perspective. It would require psychiatrists to explore complex relations between social stress and bodily experience, to study how corporealization of cultural experience occurs, to explore general limits to the human body's tolerance of stress, disruption, fixed routine and so on, and to reflect upon the connections between contemporary practices of medical diagnosis and the professional identities psychiatrists themselves seek to maintain. It would implicate psychiatrists in wider political debates from which the medicalization of suffering and illness may now insulate them. Mrs. Lin, and her equivalents in the States, need a political movement to reconfigure the psychiatric approach to mental disorder. Such a politics of becoming would profit from recent movements in the States that sharpened awareness of complex interconnections between social stress, human suffering, medical diagnosis and medical treatment in the domains of race, gender and sexuality.

Any such movement would be filled with uncertainty and risk,

of course. Even Arthur Kleinman shies away from it. His last chapter is not entitled "Social Movements and the Psychiatric Sensibility," but "What Relationship Should Psychiatry Have to Social Science?" The latter is doubtless an important topic. But it stretches the experience of psychiatry while remaining within the bounds of academic interdisciplinarity. Kleinman, I suspect, would be responsive to a new political movement to connect psychiatry, social stress, and corporeal experience, a movement that opened up new investigations in psychiatry by altering the cultural pressures in which it occurs. His subject position, however, makes it difficult to initiate such a politics of becoming.

Justice and the Politics of Becoming

The element of paradox in the politics of becoming is that before success a new movement is typically judged by the terms through which it is currently depreciated and after success a new identity emerges that exceeds the energies and identifications that called it into being. We are morally primed to expect a new identity to precede our recognition of it; but, given the paradox of becoming, the way in which this moral expectation closes off lines of flight from suffering often turns out retrospectively to be immoral. An ethos of critical responsiveness negotiates these discordant imperatives: it ushers new identities through the barriers normality and morality pose to becoming. Participants in such an ethos appreciate how something admirable might become out of obscurity or difference. Critical responsiveness is

anticipatory, critical and self-revisionary in character.

Critical responsiveness is anticipatory, in that it responds to pressures to become even before they have condensed into a firm, definite identity. It also subjects the politics of becoming to critical appraisal, alert to the possibility a new movement might congeal into a fundamentalism that forecloses the future becoming or might force certain constituencies into an abject position. Finally, and most crucially, critical respondents engage in practices of self-revision as they respond to the politics of becoming. For example, when heterosexuals endorse diverse sensualities they also acknowledge that heterosexuality is neither firmly grounded in the universality of nature nor the automatic outcome of normal sensual development. And for whites to challenge established assumptions of racial difference is to come to terms with how "whiteness" has been culturally constructed by aligning diverse skin shades and tones with a set of social privileges, a gender graded code of parenthood, and middle class expectations.[21] Critical responsiveness to the claims of difference calls forth a partial and comparative denaturalization of the respondents themelves; it also opens up possible lines of mobility in what you already are. These effects are possible because every effective movement of difference moves the identities through which it has been differentiated. It is thus not surprising that the time in which politics on behalf of the pluralization of identities intensifies is also the time in which counter drives to the

fundamentalization of disturbed identities also becomes tempting.

Consider, then, the ambiguous relation the practice of justice bears to the politics of becoming. The politics of becoming repositions selected modes of suffering so that they move from an obscure subsistence or marked identity below the register of justice to a visible, unmarked place on it. In a modern world of justice as fairness between persons, this means that modes of being consciously or unconsciously shuffled below normal personhood become modified and translated into the dense operational rubric of personhood itself. A mode of suffering is thereby moved from below the reach of justice to a place within its purview, and now the language of injury, discrimination, injustice, and oppression can apply more cleanly to it. It is after a movement crosses this critical threshold that a mode of suffering becomes unjust.

Thus, the coarse practice of justice regularly poses barriers to the politics of becoming before providing support for it. Failure by some liberal theorists to acknowledge the fundamental ambiguity in the center of justice disables them from registering the importance of an ethos of responsiveness to justice itself. This does not mean that the politics of being (justice, common standards, shared understandings, etc) is irrelevant to ethico-political action. It does mean that the "we's" who act together are more pluralized than some traditions recognize and are susceptible to periodic movement through the politics of becoming.

Take John Rawls. Rawls promises to adjudicate between just and unjust claims. He encounters several difficulties in fulfilling this promise, including the inability to decide whether his exclusions of animals, nature, and mentally retarded humans from the scales of justice exposes limits to his theory or the relative unimportance of these issues to the public life of a just society. I will concentrate here, though, on two ways in which the Rawlsian rendering of "persons" engaged in "fair cooperation" poses ill considered barriers to the politics of becoming.

Rawls now concurs that justice as fairness cannot be derived from the calculations of rational agents. The outcome of rational calculation depends upon the premises adopted. Self-interest, for instance, does not serve as a sufficient basis for justice. "What rational agents lack is the particular form of moral sensibility that underlies the desire to engage in fair cooperation as such."[22] What else is needed, then? Well, agents of justice are "reasonable" people. They are willing to accept reciprocal limits. The word "reasonable" may suggest that this sensibility is a sibling of rationality, while it is actually a kissing cousin of traditional theories of virtue.[23] For by what procedure or mode of argument is reasonableness attained? On what logic is it grounded? Rawls says the disposition comes from a fortunate cultural tradition that already embodies it. It is nested, that is, within cultural practices never entirely reducible to a logic or rationality.

Note that Rawlsians are now unable to find the sufficient basis for justice they habitually accuse post-Nietzscheans of lacking. Reasonableness finds its grounds in itself if and when it is already widely shared. But what does a Rawlsian moralist appeal to when such a tradition is deeply conflictual, or weak, or active in some domains and absent in others? What do Rawlsians appeal to, that is, when the appeal is most needed? Rawls has nothing compelling to say in such cases. This is because, in a way reminiscent of Caputo, Richard Rorty and Jurgen Habermas, he rules "comprehensive doctrines" out of public discourse to protect the impartiality of justice. But the Rawlsian imperative to silence at such junctures has become a dangerous eccentricity. Since every other contemporary constituency articulates soem of its most fundamental presumptions in its public presentations, the eccentric liberalism of John Rawls marginalizes liberals on the most hotly contested issues of the day. Sure, they still claim that unreasonable people explicitly refuse what their conduct in other domains "implicitly" presumes. But, given the slack, uncertainty and slipperiness within the operational terms of public discourse, there is always room to slip out of such a putative logic of social implication when people are motivated to do so.[24] The moral power of the logic of cultural implication itself grows out of the sensibility it purports to sustain. Rawls himself occasionally recognizes this point, though he does not apply it to this domain. The reasonableness Rawlsian justice requires rests upon movable conventions disconnected from any

"comprehensive doctrine" of the human condition.

Post-Nietzschean gratitude for life and its ambiguous conditions of possibility, while not widely thematized today, does speak at exactly the juncture where Rawlsians lapse into silence. Moreover, it challenges all the way down the presumptions of the theistic and secular fundamentalisms Rawls himself resists.[25] For this fundamental perspective anticipates noise, surplus and inchoate energy coursing over and through every winter doctrine. It draws an ethos of generosity from the cloudy atmosphere in which established conventions and identities are set rather than resting it on a fictive ground or binding it entirely to the existing shape of those conventions themselves. It therefore has resources to draw upon in fighting cultural forces disposed to the moral negation, punishment or marginalization of differences that disrupt their sense of naturalness or self-assurance. Nor is it pressed to hide ugly forces within contemporary life behind a veil of ignorance to protect the fiction that existing conventions sufficiently sustain the cultural background (the "reasonableness") justice requires. And, of course, the very presumption of irreducible surplus alerts post-Nietzscheans to the insufficiency of justice to itself and, therefore, to the need to cultivate critical responsiveness to the politics of becoming.

The second, most direct way in which Rawls forecloses the politics of becoming follows from his conception of the person. The loss of traditional grounds for "the good" means, Rawls says,

that justice must be insulated as much as possible from irresolveable debates over the good. So Rawls seeks a fixed conception of persons appropriate to justice as an internal practice, dependent only on the (supposedly modest) externality of cultural reasonableness. Sure, Rawlsians say a thin conception of the person allows concrete persons to develop rich, individual selves. But the very formality of this permission obscures how dense cultural differentiations and hierarchical rankings of types of self (identities) precede and shape the practice of justice. It deflects ethical attention from thick cultural determinations of what is already inside, marginal to, and excluded from personhood before justice as fairness appears on the scene. A veil of ignorance thus screens the ethical importance of becoming from the practice of justice.

This way of putting the point exaggerates slightly. Rawls now emphasizes how the fortunate becoming of liberalism out of a historically specific "modus vivendi" forms an indispensable background to justice as fairness. And this thought about the ethicization of a modus vivendi contains valuable possibilities. But this is the last historical moment in the politics of becoming his categories allow him to acknowledge. Rawls wants to freeze the liberal conception of the person today while everything else in and around it undergoes change. The result is to surround justice with a stingier sensibility than Rawls intends. Persons just are, for Rawls, at least after the modus vivendi of liberalism.

> No constructivist view, including Scanlon's, says that the facts that are relevant in practical reasoning and judgment are constructed, any more than they say that the conceptions of person and society are constructed." [26]

Then he states the implications of this theme for the injustice of slavery:

> In claiming that slavery is unjust the relevant fact about it is not when it arose historically, or even whether it is economically efficient, but that it allows some persons to own others as their property. That is a fact about slavery, already there, so to speak, and independent of the principles of justice. The idea of constructing facts seems incoherent.[27]

Rawls levels persons to make social facts simple, and he pursues these two agendas to secure an unequivocal conception of justice. But the most relevant moral fact about slavery, to slaveholders and defenders, was that slaves did not count as full persons. They could accept the Rawlsian formula of fairness to persons while contesting its application to slaves. Rawls would say that they were simply wrong in this respect: his judgment fits the facts while slaveholders misrepresented them. There is something to this point. But in treating this retrospective judgment as if it were a timeless and sufficient paradigm, Rawls again buries two crucial dimensions in the politics of becoming: 1) the contemporary importance of dense, institutionally embedded discriminations between conditions that cross the threshold of

personhood and numerous culturally defined afflictions, inferiorities, liabilities, disorders and defects that fall, to one degree or another, below this threshold and 2) the contempoary importance of political performances and enactments in breaking up, moving or challenging dense codes of cultural presumption that always surround and inhabit us. Thus: Slaves were said to be inhabited by natural inferiorities that pushed them below the threshold of full persons; John Brown, the abolitionist, was widely declared to be a monomaniac, a type, I believe, no longer recognized in the official nosology of psychiatry; women were said to be equipped for the immediate ethics of family life but not for the abstract deliberations essential to public life; atheists were (and still are) said (e.g. by Tocqueville and the America he registered) to be too materialistic, narcissistic and selfish to hold public office, though they were persons enough to participate in employment, commerce and military liability; "homosexuals" were (are) said to deserve justice as persons and to be marked by an objective disorder and/or sin shuffling their sensualities below the reach of justice; "post-modernists" (who now occupy the subject position once reserved for atheists) are said to be cool, amoral, and anti-humanist, lacking the pre-requisites to be taken seriously as moral agents; doctors who assist terminally ill patients die were (and often are) defined as murderers because of the generic Christian injunction against taking one's own life; and Rawls himself now treats the mentally retarded as something

less than full persons because they cannot participate fully in the practice of "fair cooperation" upon which his scheme of justice rests.

Rawls is superb at acknowledging the justice of newly defined claims and constituencies once the politics of becoming has carried their voices within range of his hearing. And within a period of thirty years or so Rawlsians have acknowledged the claims of Indians, women and gays after a series of social movements began to reshape the complex cultural identifications in which they are set. But Rawls pretends (and his categories presume) that he is now in the same position with respect to a large variety of unpoliticized injuries today that he is with respect to constituencies whose cultural identification and institutional standing have been changed through the politics of becoming. And he also acts as if his own identity (as "a person") can remain untouched and unchanged as he responds to new movements of difference.

The point is not to criticize previous "oversights" of Rawlsians, as if we have a god's eye view above the fray that they lack. Such a model of moral criticism would merely reiterate Rawlsian insensitivity to the politics of becoming. The point, rather, is to press Rawlsians (and others they stand in for) to cultivate a bi-valent ethical sensibility responsive both to the indispensability of justice and the radical insufficiency of justice to itself. For it is extremely probable that all of us today are unattuned to some modes of suffering and exclusion that

will have become ethically important tomorrow after a political movement carries them across the threshold of cultural attentiveness and redefinition. This is so because each effective movement of difference toward a new, legitimate identity breaks a constituent in its previous composition that located it beyond the operational reach of justice by rendering it immoral, inferior, hysterical, unnatural, abnormal, irresponsible, monomaniacal, narcissistic, or sick.

Often enough, of course, such a movement does not succeed; and sometimes it should not. Many conclude that they have good reason to refuse some of its claims, even after the movement opens up previously concealed issues. But this constitutive uncertainty at the center of becoming does not defeat the central point.[28] It, rather, reminds us how ethical uncertainty haunts the politics of being and becoming and how important it is to cultivate an ethos of critical responsiveness never entirely reducible to a fixed moral code. For often enough, obscure pains, objective disorders, low levels of energy, perverse sexualities, basic inferiorities, uncivilized habits, hysterical symptoms, inherent abnormalities, and unreliable moral dispositions become reconfigured through a politics of becoming and critical responsiveness that first exceeds the official reach of justice and then places new dimensions of life on its register. And these effects show justice to be an essentially ambiguous practice, insufficient unto itself. No general concept of the person can resolve that constitutive ambiguity into a

sufficient code or set of criteria: it will either (like the Rawlsian model) be too formal to reach deeply enough into the density of culturally constituted identities or (like the communitarian model) too specific to respond to diverse possibilities of being that may turn out to be acceptable or admirable after the politics of becoming brings them into being. It is better to respond to this constitutive ambiguity by cultivating critical responsiveness to the politics of becoming, acknowledging that the practice of justice depends upon an ethical reserve it is incapable of subjecting to definitive regulation.

Rawls is pulled by the demand that things be still at bottom. He wants--after the historical becoming of liberalism--persons and the generic facts about them to remain stationary so that liberal justice can be (nearly) sufficient onto itself. One should offer a moment of tribute to those who cling to such a winter doctrine during difficult times... They do honor one important dimension of ethical life in the face of forces which press relentlessly against it. But it is even more important to emphasize how things don't stay still. Any doctrine of liberalism that pretends they do poses barriers to modes of becoming to which it might otherwise be responsive. This drive to stillness is the crucial, secular, Rawlsian sensibility to contest by those who think the politics of becoming never ends. Because Rawls hides his comprehensive doctrine inside a closet in the private realm, the contestation has to proceed through symptomatic

readings of the effects the underlying doctrine has on publicly articulated conceptions.

Dialectical Progress and the Politics of Becoming

But isn't it time for a post-secularist, too, to become reasonable? Doesn't the trajectory of change in the shape of western universals reveal a historical dialectic filling the universal out progressively? Doesn't it show, retrospectively, how historically tolerable suffering imposed upon slaves, women, Indians, atheists and homosexuals was actually unjust, and hence, how an enriched cultural universal draws us ever closer to the universal? If we can't be Rawlsians, can we not at least become neo-Hegelians?

We can. It is indeed very difficult not to from time to time--whenever we honor the politics of becoming retrospectively. Rawls, for instance, is a neo-Hegelian with respect to the historical becoming of liberalism. And there is an ethical compulsion to treat the latest filling out of persons as the highest standard of personhood. It is just that this viable ethical compulsion soon bumps into a discordant ethical imperative: to pursue practices of genealogy, deconstruction, political disturbance and the politics of becoming through which contemporary self-satisfied unities are rendered more problematical and more responsive to new movements of difference. Attunement to the politics of becoming, then, engenders a bi-valent ethical sensibility in which critical tension is maintained between these two interdependent and dissonant ethical

imperatives.

I resist, then, the winter satisfaction of dialectical progress without being able either to forgo its imperatives and comforts at some moments or to disprove it definitively.[29] Perhaps every new constellation of cultural identities, even as it relieves palpable modes of suffering, introduces new artifacts of identity and difference onto the social register. Perhaps these historically contingent forms carry a series of surprises with them, including modes of suffering exceeding the capacities of this cultural constellation to recognize and respond to it. The publication of these obscure injuries will be entangled in a new round in the politics of becoming. What if a) the energy and suffering of embodied human beings provides a starting point from which becoming and critical responsiveness proceed and b) no intrinsic pattern of identity\difference on the other side of suffering consolidates being as such? Would it not then be wise to maintain ethical tension between being and becoming, even to sanctify becoming so as to counter powerful tendencies normally in place to tilt moral energies in the other direction? [30]

When a dialectical rendering of the politics of becoming suggests that the most recent identities are the most true, natural or advanced, it discourages proponents from cultivating now that partial, comparative sense of contingency in their own identities out of which responsiveness to new claims of difference might proceed. A dialectician must be poised in front of a final act always about to commence or a dialectical reading

of things cannot be vindicated. For how could a dialectical reading of things be sustained unless the standard that redeems it is now discernible in vague outline just over the horizon? Contemporary dialecticians, therefore, always proceed as if they were on the cutting edge of the last historical moment. Most have learned just enough from the record of Hegel, Marx and Fukuyama to refrain from shouting this presumption out, but not enough to fight against obscure injuries it legitimizes today.

If a politician of the dialectic thinks that things have been developing up to this penultimate moment on the edge of stasis, the politician of becoming thinks it is critical at this same moment to initiate the politics of becoming in some domain and/or to cultivate critical responsiveness to some forces pressing against existing stabilizations. Moreover, the politician of becoming thinks a generous ethos emerges when a number of constituencies engage actively and comparatively those differences in themselves and others the regulation of which enables them to be what they are. This end, then, forms a regulative ideal for the politician of becoming, a complex, final act never entirely susceptible to completion because some of its components are never entirely synchronized with the others at any particular time. It places two politicians of difference fairly close to one another, along one dimension for a moment. If these two types were to converge upon an ambidextrious characterization of the regulative ideal, other differences between them would fade, though they would still debate which vocabulary best

expressed that convergence and what balance between being and becoming must be sought at any particular moment. Such debates remain crucial to the ethics of engagement, as long as the tension between being and becoming persists, enough people care about the constitutive tension between suffering and the play of cultural possibility, and public discourse remains relatively open.

1. John Caputo, Against Ethics (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), p 145.

2. Ibid., 158.

3.Ibid., p.203.

4.Ibid., 200.

5. "We cannot just avoid or simply step outside metaphysics, which would mean to step outside the logic and ontologic or our grammar and our intellectual habits." Ibid., 221

6. Ibid., 222.

7. Ibid., p. 4.

8. The prefix meta "is joined chiefly to verbs and verbal derivatives; the principal notions which it expresses are: sharing; action in common; pursuit or quest; and, especially, change of place, order, condition, or Nature..." OED

9. The issues are still more complicated, of course. It is very difficult, some say impossible, to write and speak a European language without invoking implicitly a fundamental order or logic which governs everything. Caputo acknowledges this. He has read his Derrida. But I concur with Nietzsche, Michel Foucault, and Gilles Deleuze that we do possess some resources within these languages to press a positive alternative forward that is not completely captured by the old doctrines. This is a debate I will not pursue here.

10. Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, trans. by Walter Kaufmann, (New York: Penguin Books, 1978), pp. 200-201.

11. Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, trans. by Marianne Cowan, (South Bend: Gateway Editions, 1955), p. 58.

12. Is "gratitude" the right word here? If so, it has to be reworked so that it is not governed by the idea that you are always grateful to some agent(s). But every word Nietzsche tries in this domain has to be reworked to play the role he asks it to play. Wonder, (nontheistic) reverence, awe, affirmation are other possibilities, equally in need of reworking. Is it Nietzsche's fault that the language of the Christian/secular West is often inadequate to his thought? Reworking familiar terms is part of the ethical project.

13. Nietzsche, Twilight of the Idols, trans. by R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 92. I am grateful to comments by Jill Frank, Mort Schoolman, and George Shulman on this point.

14. Beyond Good and Evil, pp. 151-152

15. Some themes in the relation of ethics to the politics of becoming cannot be pursued here. For example, "gratitude" is certainly not a sufficient basis of ethics on my reading; it is, rather, an element that must flow through established codes, contracts, identities, interests and habits of responsiveness if they are to be generous, if care for difference is to find operational expression in them. This essay is a companion to another that sets forth other elements in this perspective. See "Beyond Good and Evil: The Ethical Sensibility of Michel Foucault," Political Theory (August, 1993).

16. I discuss the politics of identity\difference relations in Identity\Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

17. Jan Clausen, "My Interesting Condition," Outlook: National Lesbian And Gay Quarterly (Winter, 1990), p. 19.

18. Ibid., 20, 21.

19. Arthur Kleinman, Rethinking Psychiatry: From cultural Category to Personal Experience (New York: The Free Press, 1991), p. 7.

20. The following statement by I. Rosenfield, quoted by Kleinman, makes contact with the Nietzschean conception of nature as unfinished. "There are good biological reasons to question the idea of fixed universal categories. In a broad sense they run counter to the principles of Darwinian theory of evolution. Darwin stressed that populations are collections of unique individuals. In the biological world there is no typical plant....Qualities we associate with human beings and other animals are abstractions invented by us that miss the nature of biological variation." Kleinman, p. 19.

21. For example, a child of a "colored" mother was automatically defined as black, regardless of skin tone, during the period of slavery in America. This protected the sexual rights of white fathers over slave mothers and exempted them from embarrassment or responsibility for the consequences. This, in turn, supported a double imperative against white women having sex with black men, an injunction still operative to a significant degree; for

that combination would visibly compromise the "purity" of the white race. Sons and daughters of mixed parenthood today still bear effects from these two legacies. They are presumed "black", unless a whole set of other social factors override this presumption. "Whiteness" is the absence of that which makes you "black."

22. John Rawls, Political Liberalism (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 51, my emphasis.

23. For a very thoughtful effort to locate Rawls in the tradition of "virtue theories", see Bonnie Honig, Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

24. "All this presupposes the fundamental ideas of justice as fairness are present in the public culture, or at least implicit in the history of its main institutions and the traditions of their interpretation." Political Liberalism, p. 78. Here is a set of Rawlsians considerations that could be brought to bear against this implicit/explicit logic, but are not: "a)the evidence..bearing on the case is conflicting and complex.... b) Even when we agree fully about the kinds of considerations we may disagree about their weight.... c)To some extent all our concepts...are vague and subject to hard cases.... d) To some extent..the way we assess evidence..is shaped by our total experience, our whole course of life up to now.... e) Often there are different kinds of normative considerations..on both sides of an issue.... f) Finally.., any system of social institutions is

limited in the values it can admit so that some selections must be made from the full range of moral and political values that might be realized. (pp.56-57). Rawls seems to think these factors enter into general reflections of reasonable persons about fundamental doctrines, but not necessarily or so actively into the practice of justice they can share while holding a variety of reasonable doctrines. That is what makes the first quote above congruent with the second.

25. I discuss "fundamentalism in America" from this perspective in chapter III of The Ethos of Pluralization (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995). That book, more generally, explores the constitutive tension between pluralism and pluralization in ways that converge with the argument in this essay.

26. Rawls, Political Liberalism, p. 118. Wow, that Scanlon must be a wild guy.

27. Rawls, Political Liberalism, p. 122.

28. It actually reinforces the central point. For if you could devise a sufficient code in advance to adjudicate between acceptable and unacceptable movements of difference, critical responsiveness would not be required as an ethical counter and supplement to justice. An additional point. In this essay I focus on the relation of "critical responsiveness" to the politics of becoming. I do so because this dimension has been underplayed by both theorists of sufficient justice and defenders of the politics of becoming. But of course agents of initiation

are extremely crucial to the politics of becoming. You might be on one side of that line in some instances, for example, a woman involved in feminist initiatives, and on the other side on others, for example a white, Christian, heterosexual woman responding to the politics of becoming by blacks, gays/lesbians, and atheists. Often, you will be on both sides to different degrees on the same issue. And so on. The politics of becoming probably has a better chance in a culture where most "subject positions" are multiple, and where most people find themselves on the initiating side in some domains and the responsive side in others. But these are elaborations.

29. I briefly criticize Seyla Benhabib's dialectical interpretation of the politics of becoming in The Ethos of Pluralization, ch 6. It now seems to me that I de-emphasized too much there my own amb-ivalent implication in the model of progression she develops. I like this rendering a little better than that one.

30. A Heideggerian would resist this antinomy between being and becoming on the grounds that difference inhabits being as such and that the "oblivion of being" in western history is bound up with the demand to make Being into a solid ground. Heidegger criticizes the Nietzschean separation between being and becoming, finding it to be connected to Nietzsche's continual implication in the metaphysical tradition. There is something to Heidegger's point, but I concur with Nietzsche in finding it economical to adopt old uses of being while juxtaposing them to modes of

becoming which, of course, are part of being in the more profound sense. Heidegger's way of waiting for the release of being is too unpolitical in my judgement. An excellent rendering of the oblivion of being is found in his Identity and Difference, trans. by Joan Stambaugh (New York: harper and Row, 1969). I concur that the oblivion of being (difference) is never recuperated directly, but only experienced indirectly through the effects of its movement. That theme informs my rendering of the politics of becoming.